

# The Christian Church

## Key Concepts:

- **Church** is the worldwide community of Christians, whereas **church** refers to buildings where Christians worship together.
- **Denominations** are different Churches within Christianity. They share lots of similarities (e.g. the authority of the Bible, the belief in the Trinity etc...) but also have some differences.
- **Symbols** have always been used in Christianity. The cross is the most common symbol. They represent Christian beliefs (e.g. the lamb represents Jesus was the sacrifice).
- **Transubstantiation** is the Roman Catholic belief that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, whereas **Consubstantiation** is the Protestant belief that the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ.
- **Worship** is the act of showing worthiness, adoration and praise to God. Different Christians worship in different ways, some publicly others privately. **Liturgical** worship follows a set pattern, like a Roman Catholic or Church of England Sunday service. **Non-liturgical** worship doesn't follow set times or patterns, and can include glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and meditation.



## Christian Symbols

**Cross:** a hopeful symbol about Jesus' resurrection and the belief in life everlasting.

**Crucifix:** A cross with Jesus on symbolising Jesus' death as a sacrifice for us humans.

**Chi-Rho:** Two letters in Greek that make up the word 'Christ', combined to make a cross.

**Alpha & Omega:** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, referring to God saying 'I am the alpha and omega'.

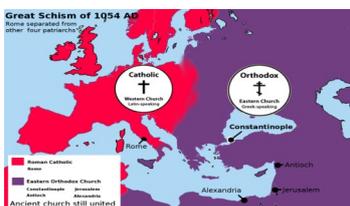
**Ichthys:** Christians used during the Roman empire to escape persecution.



## Christian Denominations

### The Great Schism of 1054

Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman empire into two parts in 285ce: the Eastern and Western parts. These developed into two separate and distinct cultures, but still Christian. The Eastern Church disagreed with the Papal authority (where the Pope had complete authority from God). They also disagreed with using Latin in services, preferring their own language of Greek. The Catholic West added words to the Nicæan Creed, and believed in transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ), both of which the Orthodox East disagreed with. The Roman empire had become too large and widespread to have total control, making a split easier. This created the **Eastern Orthodox** Church and the **Roman Catholic** Church.



### 16th Century Reformation

During the European Renaissance, people began to access new ideas and recall old ideas from the classical era before Christianity. Since then, Christians in Europe were living in the Dark Ages. Martin Luther, a German monk, was one of these reformers who criticised the Catholic Church. He wrote the 95 theses, a list of things he questioned about the Church. They included papal authority, use of papal finance, the concept of indulgences (where people paid the church in exchange for God's forgiveness). He was excommunicated from the Church, but with the help of the printing press his ideas were spread and became popular especially in central and northern Europe. Changes in the Protestant Churches included simpler church design, worship in the vernacular (language of the country), Bible being written in local languages etc... Some Protestant Churches have continued to make changes such as allowing women to lead worship and conduct same-sex marriages.

### The Church Today

The Christian Church today is the largest religion on planet earth,, having over 2billion adherents. There are hundreds of Christian denominations, and Christianity is a very diverse religion. Some Christians are very traditional, others are very modern. These differences are found both within and between denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination worldwide, but the Church of England is the largest denomination in Britain. In the UK today however, church attendance has declined in some churches. This could be due to a more multicultural society (other religions such as Islam and Sikhism), the rise in secularism whereby more people identify as atheist and agnostic. It could be due to the church not seeming to modernise and lacks appeal to the younger generations. Some Churches (e.g. Pentecostalism and some free churches) have increased attendance however. Some of these churches put on youth clubs or Christian rock concerts.

## Church Design

Church buildings come in all shapes and sizes. Some are modern, others are traditional. Some are in the shape of a cross symbolizing Jesus' resurrection. Many are built facing the rising sun, symbolizing focusing on the 'light of Christ'. The following are some features of architecture or furnishings found in church buildings:

- ◆ **Spires** focus our attention onto the heavens.
- ◆ **Graveyards** are considered consecrated (sacred) ground, and gravestones show where a burial was made.
- ◆ **Lych-Gate** were where coffins used to be left to await the arrival of a minister to conduct a funeral.

- ◆ **Alter** is the focal point of worship where the priest/vicar conducts the service.
- ◆ **Pulpit** is a raised box/platform where the minister says a sermon (a speech/reflection about a bible passage).
- ◆ **Lectern** is where the Bible is read. It could be made from brass and in the shape of an eagle.
- ◆ **Reredos** is the painted or sculpted screen behind the alter (often found in Anglican and Roman Catholic churches)
- ◆ **Iconostasis** is the painted or sculptured screen in front of the alter, filled with icons to conceal the most sacred parts of the service (found in Orthodox churches).

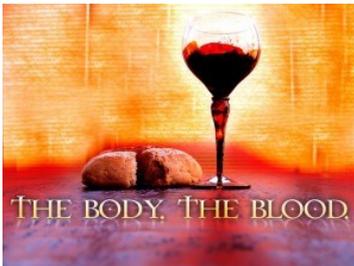
- ◆ **Font** is a bowl on a stand filled with holy water to baptize an infant.
- ◆ **Baptistry** is a small pool fitted to the floor of a church for believer's baptism. Found in some Protestant churches such as the Baptist Church.
- ◆ **Tabernacle** is a small decorated box where the consecrated bread and wine is kept when not in use, in a Roman Catholic Church.
- ◆ **Sanctuary Lamp** is a red lamp that is kept burning in a Roman Catholic church to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ **Confessional Boxes** are found in Roman Catholic churches, and are where Christians go to a priest to ask forgiveness from God.



## Evangelism and the Christian Mission

**Evangelism** is the idea that Christians should attempt to convert others to the faith. The **Christian Mission** is the act of going out into the world and spreading the teaching of Christ.

**Ecumenism** is the belief that Christians should work together as one worldwide Church. Some churches put on carol services, Christingles, youth clubs and charity events that are for all Christians no matter what denomination. They believe in working together, and **inter-faith dialogue** (talking between religions) can help this. Other Christians disagree and are exclusivist, believing their denomination is the one true form of Christianity.



### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever.  
*Amen*



### Arguments in favour...

- ⇒ Jesus said 'I am the way, the truth and the life, those who live and believe in me shall never die.'
- ⇒ It is an act of love to want to save others by converting them to Christ's ways.
- ⇒ People still have a choice, it doesn't take away freewill.
- ⇒ Jesus told us to 'Go, proclaim the good news to the poor.' (Good News = Gospels)

### Arguments against...

- ⇒ Patronising to others, kind of like 'we know better than you'.
- ⇒ Some people dislike evangelists, gives a negative image of Christianity—does more harm than good.
- ⇒ Pluralism is the belief that there are many ways to God (Quakers believe this)
- ⇒ It is not about faith, but about action that God is interested in (Salvation Army pay more attention to action than faith).

## The Eucharist and Sunday Worship

**Eucharist** is the celebration of Jesus' Last Supper. Orthodox Christians call it the 'Breaking of Bread', Catholics call it 'Mass' and many forms of Protestantism call it 'Holy Communion'.

Roman Catholics believe the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. This is called **transubstantiation**. Other Christians, including the Church of England believe the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ. This is called **consubstantiation**.

The Eucharist usually happens on a **Sunday**. This was traditionally set aside as the Christian sabbath, to differentiate between the Jewish sabbath on a Saturday. Sunday was probably chosen as this is the day Jesus resurrected from the dead. A small number of denominations still practice the sabbath on a Saturday as that is what it says in the Old Testament. Other Christians point out that every day of the week should be considered a holy day, as nothing God created can be considered unholy.

## Prayer and Pilgrimage

**Prayer** is communicating with God. This can be done privately or publicly. A public prayer is the Lord's Prayer.. Christians might say this aloud in church services. Christians might also say the Nicene Creed aloud in church.

**Pilgrimage** is a special journey to place of religious importance. Examples include Iona and Lourdes. Many Christians also visit the Holy Land in Israel to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

## The Role of the Church in the local, national and international community

The Church (as a community of Christians) has many roles, including:

- \* **Local Community** (bringing the community together, counselling for individuals [e.g. Relate helps couples experiencing marital problems], putting on events to raise money for charities, local food banks, acting as street pastors, youth clubs, mother and toddler groups, offering education programs such as the alpha course).
- \* **National Community** (the Queen is the head of the Church of England, and works with the Archbishop of Canterbury in running the Church, the Church puts pressure on the government on areas they feel are crucial, the government supports Christian establishments such as faith schools and the sanctity of marriage).
- \* **International Community** (voluntary aid agencies such as Christian Aid and CAFOD help overseas people living in poverty by providing emergency and long term aid, raising awareness and education, groups like Liberation Theologians push the agenda that Christianity is there to help the disadvantages, the Roman Catholic Church follow the authority of the Pope and he visits countries worldwide and gives regular statements to the Catholic Church, read during Sunday services).