

Catholic Church

When was it founded and by whom?

Catholics consider Jesus' disciple Peter (died ca. ad 66) the first pope; Gregory the Great (pope, ad 540-604) was a key figure in the pope's office. At that time, the pope came to be viewed as ruling over the whole church.

How many adherents in 2000?

About 1 billion worldwide; 62 million, USA.

How is Scripture viewed?

The Scriptures teach without error the truth needed for our salvation. Scripture must be interpreted within the Tradition of the Church. The canon includes 46 books for the Old Testament including deuterocanonical books (the Apocrypha) and 27 books for the New Testament.

Who is God?

The one Creator and Lord of all, existing eternally as the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Who is Jesus?

The eternal Son incarnate, fully God and fully man, conceived and born of the virgin Mary, died on the Cross for our sins, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, and will come again in glory to judge us all.

How are we saved?

Christ died as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins; God by his grace infuses a supernatural gift of faith in Christ in those who are baptized, which is maintained by doing works of love and receiving Penance and the Eucharist.

What happens after death?

The souls of the faithful go to heaven either immediately or, if imperfectly purified in this life, after purgatory. The souls of the wicked at death are immediately consigned to eternal punishment in hell.

What is the church?

The church is the Mystical Body of Christ, established by Christ with the bishop of Rome (the pope), who may at times pronounce dogma (doctrine required of all members) infallibly, as its earthly head. It is united (one) in a sacred (holy) worldwide (catholic) community through the succession of bishops whose ordination goes back to the apostles (apostolic); Christians not in communion with the Catholic Church are called "separated brethren."

What about the sacraments?

Baptism removes original sin (usually in infants). In the Eucharist, the substances (but not the properties) of bread and wine are changed into Jesus' body and blood (transubstantiation).

What are other beliefs and practices of note?

Mary was conceived by her mother immaculately (free of original sin), remained a virgin perpetually, and was assumed bodily into heaven. She is the Mother of the Church and is considered an object of devotion and veneration (a show of honor that stops short of worship).

What are the major divisions or trends today?

About one-fourth of Catholics are doctrinally conservative. Many priests and members tend to accept liberal, pluralist beliefs contrary to church teaching.

Methodist Churches

1738: Conversion of John and Charles Wesley, already devout Anglican ministers, sparks Great Awakening.
1784: USA Methodists form separate church body.

Some 20-40 million worldwide; 12 million or more, USA.

Historic view: Scripture is inspired and infallible, the sole, final rule of faith.
United Methodist Church: Scripture is "the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine," but (for most) not infallible. The standard Protestant canon is accepted.

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The eternal Son incarnate, fully God and fully man, conceived and born of the virgin Mary, died on the Cross for our sins, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, and will come again in glory to judge us all.

We are saved by grace alone when God regenerates and forgives us through faith in Christ, who died for our sins. Good works are the necessary result of true faith, but do not obtain forgiveness or salvation.

The souls of believers upon dying go immediately to be with Christ; and, at Christ's return, their bodies are raised to immortal, eternal life. The wicked will suffer eternal punishment in hell.

The church is the body of Christ, represented by visible church institutions. Bishops oversee regions and appoint pastors. In the United Methodist Church, clergy and laity meet together in a national "General Conference" every four years. All pastors are itinerant, meaning they move from one church to the next as directed by the bishop (on average once every four years).

Baptism is a sign of regeneration and of the new covenant and is for adults and children. Jesus is really present, and his body and blood are spiritually present, to believers in the Lord's Supper.

"Entire sanctification" is a work of the Spirit subsequent to regeneration by which fully consecrated believers are purified of all sin and fit for service—a state maintained by faith and obedience. Methodists are Arminian, i.e., they disagree with all five points of Calvinism.

United Methodist Church (8.5 million) and the African Methodist Episcopal church bodies (about 4 million) are mainline churches. The Free Methodists are a small conservative body.

Baptist Churches

1612: John Smythe and other English Puritans form the first Baptist church. 1639: The first Baptist church in America established in Providence, Rhode Island.

100 million worldwide (including families); 25-30 million, USA.

Scripture is inspired and without error, the sole, final, totally trustworthy rule of faith. The standard Protestant canon is accepted. (Mainline churches vary in the extent to which they continue to view Scripture as without error.)

The one Creator and Lord of all, existing eternally as the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The eternal Son incarnate, fully God and fully human, conceived and born of the virgin Mary, died on the Cross for our sins, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven, and will come again in glory to judge us all.

We are saved by grace alone when God imputes to us his gift of righteousness through faith alone (sola fide) in Christ, who died for our sins. Good works are the inevitable result of true faith, but in no way the basis of our right standing before God.

The souls of believers upon dying go immediately to be with Christ; and, at Christ's return, their bodies are raised to immortal, eternal life. The wicked will suffer eternal punishment in hell.

The church (universal) is the body of Christ, which consists of the redeemed throughout history. The term "church" usually refers to local congregations, each of which is autonomous, whose members are to be baptized believers and whose officers are pastors and deacons. Churches may form associations or conventions for cooperative purposes, especially missions and education.

Baptism is immersion of believers only as a symbol of their faith in Christ. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic memorial of Christ's death and anticipation of his return.

Most Baptist bodies emphasize evangelism and missions. Church and state are to be separate. Baptists include both Calvinists (dominant in the Southern Baptist Convention) and Arminians (dominant in mainline bodies and the Free-Will Baptist bodies).

Southern Baptist (15 million), a conservative body, are the largest Protestant denomination in the USA. American Baptists (1.5 million) and the National Baptists (5-8 million) are mainline churches.