

CHRISTIANITY

Christian Accounts of Jesus

- Based on certain of Christian accounts such as the New Testament gospels, some features of the life of Jesus could be postulated. Nag Hamadi Codex ?
- A short public teaching career of a 1st century AD (CE) Palestinian Jew appeared to have alluded to reworking of prevalent Jewish notions regarding the significance, means and consequence of living in accordance with Gods' will.
- Jesus appears to have attracted both the attention of supporters (some construing him as a messiah, or "Christ," to throw off Roman rule and reestablish Jewish political autonomy) as well as opponents (including Jewish and Roman authorities suspicious of his religious and political agenda)

- Jesus having received capital punishment on charges of sedition, his supporters subsequently experienced him as resurrected from the dead in a manner seen to confirm Jesus' teachings during his lifetime.
- There are, however, conflicting perceptions of the meaning of his teachings and the events of Jesus' life and death divided Jews.
- The New Testament gospels are considered by many to be first person accounts (John's gospel) or records of the teaching of apostles (Matthew, Mark, Luke) on the life of Jesus.

Baptism of Jesus



Saul/Paul

- Saul of Tarsus was a Jewish Pharisee and formidable opponent to those Jews who followed Jesus' teachings but he underwent a significant religious transformation.
- Saul, also called Paul, reversed his earlier position and became an influential teacher and leader (apostle) of Jesus to both Jews and non-Jews.
- Paul arguably introduced new ways to interpret Jesus' nature and message.
- His interest in outreach to non-Jews was predicated on an understanding of Jesus that put him at odds with Jews who also held a belief in Jesus as Messiah but regarded it as having special relevance for Jews alone.
- His understandings of Jesus' life and teachings as salvific for all eventually won out. His epistles were foundational for building the Christian church.

The Conversion of St. Paul



Roman Persecution

- Because early Christian communities were regarded as both seditious and secretive, Christians were easy targets for by non-Christians and objects of suspicion by Roman authorities.
- Roman authorities, blaming Christians for problems in the empire, pursued a policy of persecution; Christians who were killed as a consequence were designated "martyrs".

- A reversal of fortune came in the early fourth century AD (CE) when the Roman emperor Constantine, having had a religious visionary experience that suggested that support of the Christian god, would secure him military victories, ended persecution of Christians.
- This laid the foundation for the full enfranchisement of Christians in the empire as well as the status of Christianity as the Roman Empire's state religion.

Ecumenical Councils

- Roman imperial support for Christian communities required an empire-wide standardization of essential Christian practices and teachings.
- Empire-wide councils were convened of leaders from far-flung Christian communities.
- At these councils, differences in understandings were raised, debated, and decided.
- Those controversies debated included;
 - the nature of Jesus
 - the relationship between his divinity and humanity
 - the relationship of Jesus to God

New Theological controversies

- As the church continued to define itself and its beliefs, new issues regarding what would constitute correct teachings arose
- Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, arguing for the importance of relying on God's grace - rather than one's own efforts - in attaining salvation. introduced the notion of original sin was introduced into Christian.
- Other theologians and philosophers, such as John Chrysostom and Pelagius, argued against Augustine's suggestion of original sin, declaring a more optimistic evaluation of human nature.

- Pelageism was defeated and Augustine's views won out against Augustine's suggestion of original sin, who held a more optimistic evaluation of human nature; Augustine's views won out.
- Some Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Chrysostom held Jews in strong contempt.

Monasticism

- Greek – Monachos - Derived from the Greek word – Monos, meaning "alone".
- After the conversion of Constantine, Christians who would have otherwise proved their earnestness through martyrdom & persecution, instead devoted themselves to prayer and fasting as hermits or part of aesthetic communities, a life-style called monasticism.
- Monasticism is a way of religious living that is being embraced as a vocation from God out of a desire to attain eternal life in His presence.
- The Monastery of St. Anthony, built circa 356 AD, is seen as the oldest Christian Monastery in the world.
- Many practice poverty, celibacy, self-mortification, strict work & prayer code, etc.

Splits among Christians

- Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christian authorities differed on various understanding of leadership and pietistic practices.
- In 1054 a formal division occurred among the Western Christians in Europe centered around Roman authority (the Pope) and Byzantine Christians to the east, in the Byzantine Empire - who became Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians.
- Variation in teachings, art, and religious life were prompted by such division.
- They are currently enjoying an open dialogue between the Pope & Patriarch.

A Greek Orthodox Service on Good Friday



Crusades

- In the 11th century AD (CE), there was increased religious fervor for pilgrimage to the Holy Lands.
- There was a great deal of political, economic, and religious response to Muslim control of the Holy Land and in particular Jerusalem.
- Pope Urban II encouraged expeditions of Western Christians to solidify control of these areas for pilgrimage.
- Eight or more crusades were led between 1095 - 1270 AD (CE)
- Violent bloody battles between Christians and Muslim resulted in deep seated enmity between the two groups.
- Wanton killing by marauding crusaders led to persecution of both Jews and the Byzantine Christians.
- Giving rise to the Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaliers, et al.

Further Splits

- Christians in Northern Europe protested against ecclesiastical abuses of teaching and practice that were in evidence, particularly the selling of indulgences.
- Labeled Protestants by Catholic hierarchy, they sought reform for the church but were quickly alienated.
- Protestant leaders began the process of reinterpreting scripture and traditions against Catholic teaching and organized communities of supporters. Differences in teachings and religious practices appeared resulting in a variety of groups with specific beliefs.

- Leaders of these new forms of teaching and practice included:
 - Martin Luther - Lutherism
 - John Calvin - Calvinism
 - King Henry VIII of England - Anglicanism
 - George Fox – Society of Friends/Quakers
- Protestants of widely varying doctrine and practice joined Catholics and Eastern Orthodox in establishing trading posts and colonies in Asia, Africa and the Americas in the sixteenth century

Martin Luther



John Calvin



King Henry VIII



George Fox



Enlightenment

- By the beginning of the 17th century, a new emphasis on the value of reason prompted debate among many Protestants and led to continued clarification of Christian teaching to further develop new understandings of God and miracles.
- An increase in the belief of the factuality of science, instead of the faith needed for religion.

Further Protestant Innovation

- In the U.S., following independence from Britain, a substantial number of new forms worship emerged among a proliferating number of new Protestant groups.
- African-American churches
- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Evangelicals
- Advocates of liberation theology
- Other forms of Christianity appeared with nontraditional understanding of the nature, life and teachings of Jesus.
- Christian Scientists
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- The Unification Church

Roman Catholic Revision

- Under pressure to respond to the modern movements of rationalism and materialism, the bishops revised Roman Catholic teachings two Vatican Councils held in 1869-70 and 1963-65
- Confirmations of beliefs and new understandings that were established at the Councils included:
 - God as personal, natural, and supernatural
 - Papal infallibility in matters of doctrine and prominent role of bishops
 - Local vernacular languages for scripture and in rituals
 - Openness to all baptized Christians and reconciliation with the Eastern Church
 - Jews previously or today are no more responsible for the death of Christ than Christians are.

Worldview: Christianity

- Jesus regarded as central in importance, although variations exist regarding how to his teachings, and the meaning of his death and possible resurrection.
- The world regarded as created good but ruined through sin.
- Human beings also either alternately regarded as fundamentally good and capable, with the help of God, of transformation –or
- Fundamentally flawed from the residue of original sin and in need of grace and salvation in order to attain a better condition, in life and / or after death.

- Baptism and communion are common rituals for most Christians; some Christians enact a wide range of other ritual practices.
- Forms of authority and accountability regarding teaching, ritual, religious life and ethics vary widely among Christians.

The Last Supper

