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REL 1300

4 November 2015

People generalize Christianity as one basic religion without differences in practices. However, there are many branches within Christianity that differ in heads of the church, how church is conducted, and the importance of saints.

Christianity consists of a lot more than what most people perceive of it. Not only is Christianity the world's largest religion, but also includes more than 25,000 different denominational groups. The three branches of Christianity are Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. Each of these branches have numerous denominations within them. For instance, Protestantism includes Lutherans, Baptist, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals. Ongoing conflicts about beliefs and practices caused the creation of these denominations. In 1504, the first division of Christianity into branches occurred with the creation of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. They separated due to the difference in belief of whether or not the Pope was the head of the church or not. They began to divide after the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 CE. This was an ongoing conflict that finally ended during the "Great Schism," when Pope Leo IX excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius. In response, the patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated Pope Leo IX. Protestantism arose in the 16th century, during the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther was considered to be the father of the Protestant Reformation and the first Protestant after he posted a list of “95 Theses” against indulgences on the door of the church at Wittenberg.

Each denomination has their distinct beliefs, practices, and structure. All of the different denominations are still considered Christian if they “profess the faith commitment that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, both human and divine; that he died on a cross for the sins of all; and that he was resurrected two days later, demonstrating the power of God over death” (“A Concise Introduction to World Religions” 153). All Christians believe that all humans are sinful and in need of grace, and that only Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to have a relationship with God through his death and resurrection. They also believe that the Bible tells us who God is, how we can have a relationship with him, and how we can extend God’s love to other people. The branches of Christianity differ in heads of the church, how church is conducted, the importance of saints, and many other minor differences.

Roman Catholics believe in a hierarchy with the Pope (Bishop of Rome) at the top. The Pope is the “Vicar of Christ” (Christ on Earth) and acts in his place to lead the Church in determining what is right and proper for all Catholics. He exercises authority over the 3,250 Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and speaks on issues pertaining to faith and morals. Roman Catholic tradition of the Pope is based on the apostle Peter being ordained the first “pope” when Jesus declared, “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (King James Bible Matthew 16:18). Cardinals, who have the right to elect a new pope on the death of the current incumbent, follow the Pope. They also oversee the

Roman Curia, which are the administrative and judicial offices of the Vatican. Under them are the Archbishops, who run one or more dioceses in a given territory. Then come the Bishops that are viewed as the successors of Christ's apostles. According to the Second Vatican Council, "whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ." Lastly, Priests serves in individual community churches. Their primary task is to administer the sacraments, especially Mass and penance.

In Roman Catholicism, saints are "those whose lives become transparent to the light of God in the world today" ("The World's Religions" 350). To become a saint, it is required that at least two verifiable miracles have occurred as a result of the intercession of that person. Saints can be men or women who have lived holy lives with respect to God's will. They become saints the moment they enter heaven. The process of becoming a saint is called canonization, and doesn't start until at least five years after their death. The Pope decides who is publicly recognized as a saint and gets a feast day. A feast day is a special day of the year that is placed to remember important people or event. Roman Catholics use statues to represent their saints, they also pray indirectly to saints for help. In prayer to saints, people are praying for the saints to pray for them.

The Eastern Orthodox Church doesn't have one supreme head of church equivalent to the Pope in Roman Catholicism. Eastern Orthodox Churches are organized into several regional autonomous churches. Each church is made up of Bishops. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is the highest-ranking Bishop in the church. The Patriarch of Constantinople has no authority over any church besides his own. All other Bishops hold equal authority. Unlike Roman Catholicism, which holds the Pope as head

of all religious authority, Eastern Orthodoxy uses the scriptures as interpreted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church as head of all religious authority.

In both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, showing respect for the saints plays a central role in their spiritual lives. Eastern Orthodoxy practice that saints are a group of holy people, who are honored. They honor the saint to express their love and appreciation to God. Saints help people's prayers to be heard; they play the role of the middleman between God and Man. Also, they serve as models for living a holy life. Eastern Orthodoxy believes that God is the only true saint. Saints are people who live holy lives through imitating Jesus. Potential saints avoid sin and always look to God and the Holy Spirit for guidance throughout everyday life. Unlike Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church doesn't require miracles for sainthood. Eastern Orthodoxy doesn't have a formal canonization process because they believe that God creates saints, not the church.

Protestants do not believe in the hierarchical structure that Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches consist of, but they do have orders of clergy for the good of order in the church. They don't believe that any individual other than God could speak on everyone's behalf and says what is right and wrong within the religion. Individual Protestants and different Protestant denominations have differing views on the Pope. Some people hold him as a spiritual leader in high regards, while others have a negative view of the Pope. Protestants believe that Jesus alone heads the church. To them God speaks to people through only the Bible. Instead of having to look up to the Pope for instruction, Protestants go directly to the Word of God. To Protestants the Bible is ultimate; therefore Sola Scriptura is important to Protestant tradition. Sola Scriptura is

the “scripture alone states that the Bible is the only source of authority for the church and that the priest’s word are insignificant”(“The Soul of Christianity” 358).

Protestants on the other hand, believe that all Christians are saints and they are called to imitate Christ. They follow the New Testament meaning of the word “saints,” which refers to all Christians. Protestants acknowledge saints, but they don’t venerate saints through prayer, nor do they keep statues or icons of saints in their home or churches. Protestants do not believe that saints are needed to be the middleman for Man and God because only Christ can be the mediator. Protestants condemn Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox veneration to saints because it almost resembles idolatry, which is worshipping of someone or something other than God. Roman Catholics back up their practice of venerating saints by saying they worship God alone, and saints are only honored as people who have a special blessing from God.

Lastly, each denomination of Christianity has different ways they conduct church and practice their traditions during church. Beginning with Roman Catholicism, all clergy have to be male. All clergy including the Pope, Archbishops, Cardinals, Bishops, Priest, and Deacons must be celibate. During the Roman Catholic Church service, (or “mass”) “the literal body of Christ is sacrificed over and over again, day after day” (Taylor 9). The consecration of the Eucharist becomes effective through the Priest, who acts in the person of Christ. The Eucharist goes through transubstantiation, where the gifts of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. Only members of the church may receive the bread, which is “unleavened.” Eastern Orthodox Priests and Bishops must be male. Deaconesses are allowed, but they aren’t ordained. Priests and deacons can marry before they are ordained, but not after. Bishops must remain celibate,

like in Roman Catholicism. The Eucharist, or 'Divine Liturgy,' makes Christ's sacrifice present and forgiveness of sins is obtained. During the Eucharist, the entire church calls down the Holy Spirit and then the gifts change into the body and blood of Christ.

Members of the Church receive both bread and wine. Eastern Orthodoxy doesn't kneel on Sunday during Church and they don't have "Stations of The Cross." The "bread" used as the Eucharist is "leavened." In Protestant Churches, it is normal for male and female clergy to be married. Protestants don't believe in the sacrificial part of the Eucharist. To them, it is a symbol of grace. The bread and wine are used as symbols and they don't change into the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine are offered to all Christian who feel like they should participate.

Conclusively, although there are so many major differences in practices and tradition in the many denominations of Christianity, they all have the same core beliefs. The beliefs they have in common are the belief in one God and Jesus was, both divine and human, born to perform miracles on Earth and die on the cross for our sins. They also all celebrate Baptism and Communion. These core beliefs along with others connect all the denominations to Christianity.

Word Count: 1696

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