

Prelim RT: Christianity Origins

Religious Tradition Study 1 - Christianity

This is one of 5 options available for study of Religious Traditions in the Preliminary Course. Studies of Religion I candidates must study 2 of the 5 Religious Traditions. Studies of Religion II candidates must study 3 of the 5 Religious Traditions.

22 indicative hours of study are allocated to each of the Religious Tradition Studies.

Christianity: Origins

The focus of this study is the origins of Christianity.

Syllabus reference pages 20-21.

Origins of Christianity

Students learn about:

- The historical and cultural context in which Christianity began
- Jesus Christ
- The development of early Christian communities
 - Christianity
 - Anglicanism
 - Catholicism
 - Orthodoxy
 - Pentecostalism
 - Protestantism

Students learn to:

- Outline the historical and cultural context in which Christianity began
- Examine the principal events of Jesus' life
- Explain why Jesus is the model for Christian life
- Describe the early development of Christian communities after the death of Jesus
- Outline the unique features of:
 - Anglicanism
 - Catholicism
 - Orthodoxy
 - Pentecostalism
 - Protestantism

Syllabus Requirement 1

Students learn about:

- The historical and cultural context in which Christianity began

Students learn to:

- Outline the historical and cultural context in which Christianity began

Content Description

Judaism in the 1st century

It is important to begin by examining Judaism in the first century since it was in the first century CE that Christianity branched off from its parent religion Judaism. The power and organisation of Judaism was largely centred in Jerusalem. The authority of Judaism was divided amongst a number of groups who sought to control the direction of the religion. This lack of unity was, in part, the result of centuries of political domination by the Greeks and then the Romans in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem. Traces of this sectarian rivalry can be detected in the Gospels. The most influential group during the time of Jesus were the **Sadducees** who had majority representation on the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council). Two other prominent groups were the **Zealots**, a group of political activists seeking to overthrow the Romans through military methods, and the **Pharisees** who were devout lay people seeking a more pure expression of Judaism. The influence of the latter sect grew after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. It was this powerful and prominent influence of the Pharisees which is reflected in the Gospels.

Messianic expectation

For centuries Jews expected God to intervene in their history by sending the Messiah to Earth. This belief, a central tenet of Judaism, is referred to as the **Messianic expectation**. This expectation was particularly heightened during the time of Jesus partly because Jews suffered economic deprivation and great hardships under Roman rule. Consequently, Jews of the first century eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah who would free them from oppression. However, speculation on the exact nature of the Messiah varied. Many believed that the Messiah would be a political figure in the tradition of King David who would overthrow the Roman rulers and liberate the oppressed Jews. Jesus was born a Jew in this context and lived in Palestine at the beginning of the first century. He sought to renew the Jewish religion in the spirit of the prophets of Israel but did not intend to lead a breakaway from Judaism. It is in witnessing these efforts that his followers come to believe that he was the Messiah.

Syllabus Requirement 2

Students learn about:

- Jesus Christ

Students learn to:

- Examine the principal events of Jesus' life

Content Description

Jesus did not intend to found a new religion

Jesus is typically known as the founder of Christianity. Yet, Jesus was born a Jew, lived as a Jew and died a Jew. Jesus sought to renew Judaism in the spirit of the prophets by opposing the legalism of Judaism during his time and calling people to return to the demands of the covenant. There is no evidence to suggest that he intended to found a new religion. Given that he sought only to renew Judaism from within it is not surprising that he left very few instructions except to preach, baptise, heal the sick, feed the poor and forgive.

Reign of God

The main focus of Jesus' preaching was the **reign (kingdom) of God**, which is understood as God's vision or dream for humankind. The reign of God envisages a world where God's values (love, peace, cooperation, tolerance and justice) are realised. Essentially, Jesus sought to show how this could be done. By announcing this reign of God Jesus was inaugurating it and inviting others to join in its development. The reign of God will reach completion at the end of time when God's dream for humankind becomes a reality. Until then it is the responsibility of the followers of Jesus to live in accordance with these values and to lead others to them.

Principal events in the life of Jesus

Much of what we know about Jesus is derived from the Gospels. Even though the Gospels were not written to provide a historical explanation of the life of Jesus the Gospels do provide an **historical framework** through which we can examine the principal events in the life of Jesus. Traditionally Jesus is believed to have been born of a virgin in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. Modern scholarship suggests that the infancy narratives were written to make **theological statements** about Jesus' heritage. These statements emphasise the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Historically Jesus is known to have travelled from Nazareth to Galilee, where he was baptised by John the Baptist. He then preached around the region of Galilee and attracted disciples some of whom were women. Jesus began this ministry when he was about thirty years old little is known of his life before this time. Jesus taught in parables mostly concerning the **reign of God**. In essence this message challenged the temporal and the material and consequently Jesus attracted a significant following from those who were socially disadvantaged. Frequently, the Gospels

depict Jesus as a **healer or a miracle worker** as a way of highlighting the power of God in action. Jesus' preaching brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities.

Pharisees

The clash between Jesus and the Pharisees however, reflects the situation at the time the Gospels were written rather than the situation at the time of Jesus. At the time of the writing of the gospels conflict existed between the Christians and the Pharisees because the Pharisees regarded the Christian sect as heretical. Thus when we read of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees we are reading something that is more a reflection of the **times of the gospel writer** rather than the situation that prevailed a generation earlier during the life and ministry of Jesus.

Death and resurrection

Jesus' ministry took him to Jerusalem, where he stayed for the Passover. He was arrested and sentenced to **death by crucifixion**. He was placed in a tomb on the eve of the Passover and appeared to his disciples after being **raised on the third day**.

Gospels written so that people would believe

Even though the Gospels provide a historical framework by which we can analyse the principal events in the life of Jesus it is important to remember that the Gospels were not written with the intent of providing an accurate historical explanation of the life of Jesus.

Modern Biblical hermeneutics

The **synoptic problem**, which describes the attempts to understand the relationship between the synoptic gospels, highlights the point that the gospels were written for different target audiences. Thus it is futile to attempt to form a composite picture of the historical Jesus by ironing out the contradictions in the Gospel. In the same way, the achievements of modern **biblical scholarship** show us that each Gospel should be appreciated on its own as it reflects the needs of a particular **target audience**. Consequently, we need to be wary of attempts to examine the historical events in the gospel accounts in the life of Jesus as a precise way of studying the life of the **historical Jesus**.

Syllabus Requirement 3

Students learn about:

- Jesus Christ

Students learn to:

- Explain why Jesus is the model for Christian life

Content Description

Jesus Inaugurates the Reign of God

Jesus is the embodiment of the reign of God

Jesus is seen as the model for Christian life through his embodiment of the **reign of God**. The synoptic gospels portray Jesus as emerging from obscurity in Galilee and announcing the inauguration of the reign of God (Mark 1:14-15). This reign of God, often referred to as the Kingdom of God, can be understood in simple terms as the realisation of God's vision or dream for the world. Jesus' preaching of the reign of God points to a **future yet already present** reality where the values of love, justice and peace prevail in a world living in accordance with God's plan. The reign of God is central to the preaching of Jesus and is at the heart of his life and ministry. Following his death and resurrection Jesus was recognised as the embodiment of the reign of God and those who seek to bring about the reign of God are encouraged to model their lives on the **example of Jesus**. This modeling can be identified according to four significant aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

Jesus lives a life of prayer

Christians model Jesus' attitude to prayer

The first significant aspect is the prayerful nature of Jesus' life. The gospel portraits of Jesus show him to be a **man of prayer**, frequently communing with God in a familiar and intimate manner (Luke 10:21). He often withdraws from the pressures of daily life to pray in a quiet place (Luke 5:16) and does so especially as he approaches key moments in his ministry such as the calling of his disciples (Luke 8:12-15). Jesus' prayer includes the traditions of the **Jewish liturgy** and often draws on the tradition of

the **Hebrew Scriptures** (Matthew 27:46). Jesus is also found at prayer in times of personal crisis as well as in the face of the needs of others (Matthew 26:39). Finally Jesus teaches his disciples some important principles of prayer and famously he **teaches them how to pray**. Christians throughout history have closely studied Jesus attitude of prayer and have sought to model their lives on a variety of lessons drawn from Jesus' example.

Jesus lives a life of service to others

Ministry of Jesus is characterised by service to others

From the outset, the ministry of Jesus is characterised by service of others. It is notable that the early scenes from the ministry in the synoptic gospels are littered with examples of **healing miracles** where Jesus seeks to bring the healing **power of God** into contact with the need of others (Mark 1:23-45).

While it appears that Jesus initially saw his ministry as directed solely to the needs of the **people of Israel**, an encounter with a determined Gentile woman seems to have transformed his understanding (Mark 7:24-30).

A number of the sayings attributed to Jesus including the famous **Beatitudes** (Matthew 5:3-12) and the **Golden Rule** (Matthew 8:12) highlight this attitude of service.

Another important example is the account of the last supper in John's gospel where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as an example of service to one another (John 13:1-15).

Christians have always embraced an ethos of service to others and have done so as a direct consequence of the example provided in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus acts as an advocate for the poor

Ministry of Jesus is characterised by advocacy for the needy

In the Jewish tradition, there is a strong ethical dimension which calls upon people to stand up for the **needs of the poor** and disadvantaged. This tradition is embraced emphatically in the ministry of Jesus who makes this a central characteristic of his ministry. The gospels provide many examples of Jesus taking the side of the **poor and oppressed** (John 9:1-41). In many cases the cause of the oppression is the harsh requirements of religious observance and Jesus is strident in his indictment of religious extremism which leads to the oppression of those who are vulnerable. While **advocacy for the poor** has always been present in the Christian tradition, recent developments such as **Liberation Theology** have brought this important dimension into sharper focus. This is particularly so for the majority of Christians who now live among the poorer countries of the world.

Jesus loves and forgives others

Jesus' attitude of love and forgiveness is a model for Christian life

The final example which highlights the role of Jesus as a model for Christian life has to do with an attitude of **love and forgiveness** of others. There are numerous examples in the gospels where Jesus' **love for others** is shown (John 8:2-11). Furthermore he is shown as being ever willing to forgive the failings of others. Most poignantly this is seen in the post resurrection appearances with the disciples who had abandoned him (John 21:1-14) and in the famous prayer for the **forgiveness** of his own executioners (Luke 23:34). Christians have modeled these attributes in a number of ways. Some denominations have incorporated **sacraments** or other ceremonies to ritualise the importance of forgiveness. Finally the famous prayer, the **Lord's Prayer** incorporates the petition asking for forgiveness as we also forgive others (Luke 11:4).

Syllabus Requirement 4

Students learn about:

- The development of early Christian communities

Students learn to:

- Describe the early development of Christian communities after the death of Jesus

Content Description

Jesus movement and the New Testament period

There are two major periods within the history of the early Church. The death of Jesus marks the beginning of the **Jesus movement** which lasted approximately from 30-60 CE. The **New Testament** period which followed this is quite extensive and

lasted from approximately 45-110 CE. The characteristics of the Church changed quite considerably during this latter period. There are two divisions within the New Testament period, firstly the period of the Proto-Pauline letters which is followed by the period of the Deutero-Pauline letters. A considerable variety existed in the characteristics of these early Christian Churches due to the absence of precedent and a lack of centralised leadership stemming from the infancy of the Christian movement.

Characteristics of the Jesus movement

The term 'Jesus movement' describes a period where the infant Christian community saw itself as a sect which existed within the Jewish tradition. These earliest communities were characterised by their gender inclusive nature and **eschatological vision**, that is, they believed that they were living in the last days before the **Parousia**, the second coming of Christ. As a result little emphasis was given to laying down the infrastructure of the movement. So for the first forty years after Jesus' death the Churches were scattered in different areas and existed without a centralised code of Christian behaviour and practice.

Paul and Peter

Paul and Peter were the two most significant leaders in the early Church. Small groups of Palestinian Jews followed Jesus through the preachings of Peter. Larger groups of **Diaspora** Hellenistic Jews and **Gentile** Christians followed Jesus through the preachings of Paul. Paul is regarded by Brendon Byrne and others as the second founder of Christianity. Where Jesus set down the foundational message of Christianity concerning the reign of God, Paul helped to set up the structure of this new religion and hence confirm the status of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism. This was because Paul recognised that Jesus' message was not intended solely for people of the Jewish faith and consequently he utilised Hellenistic philosophy to help communicate many of Jesus' ideas. This included the introduction of the Pauline theology of salvation, justification and law into Christian life and belief.

Divisions in the early Church

The existence of a varied community which contained Jewish Christians of **Palestinian background**, Jewish Christians of **Hellenistic background** and **Gentile Christians** in the period of the early Church was a source of disagreement and conflict. In fact one of the most important controversies in the early Church arose because the original Jewish nature of the Christian Church was challenged by the **conversion of the Gentiles**. The debate regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles resulted in the formation of the **Council of Jerusalem** in 49 CE. This amounted to an early attempt to overcome differences within the Church. Paul's argument that Gentiles do not need to become Jews and undergo circumcision in order to become Christians prevailed at this council. Despite this formal solution, divisions of this nature continued for some time. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE the Pauline group of Diaspora Jewish converts to Christianity and the Gentile Christians became more closely knit. At the same time as the Palestinian group fragmented.

Reasons for the formalisation of the early Church

The Christian Churches became more formalised from 70 CE onwards. This was the result of unforeseen events which significantly changed the character of early Church communities. The **delay of the Parousia**, the second coming of Christ and the **death of the Apostles** meant that there was a need to institutionalise the charism of the movement by introducing more regulated practices. This formalisation of the Christian identity meant that Christianity was increasingly seen as a distinct and separate religion from Judaism. This was partly because during this period the Christian Churches came into great **conflict with Judaism**.

Conflict with Judaism

Jews persecuted Christians because they were seen as a threat to the purity of Judaism, for three main reasons: firstly, Christians spoke of and emulated Jesus, as God which made the Christians sound like they were **polytheistic**. Secondly, Christians and Jews could not interact as Christians were not seen as **ritually pure** due to their association with the Gentiles. Thirdly the Christians had refused to support the Jews in their attempts to overthrow the Roman occupation.

Roman persecution

The continued but sporadic **persecution of Christians** by the Romans during the second and third centuries meant that secret signs and meeting places had to be devised for the protection of Christians. The Romans persecuted the Christians because they appeared to be neglectful citizens in that they were pacifists who refused to join the army during a war ravaged age and because they refused to serve on the judiciary. The Christian monotheistic practice also offended Roman sensibilities as Romans worshipped **many gods**. On top of this there were rumours that Christians were incestuous and cannibalistic. These rumours developed as a result of the secretive nature of the Eucharistic celebrations.

Constantine

Prior to the 3rd century CE, Christians occupied a small, insignificant part of society. The efforts of **Constantine** in the fourth century meant that Christianity became a powerful and dominant religion. Constantine who is typically known as the founder of Christendom helped the religion to gain the **privileges, wealth and influence** that it did not previously have during the age of persecutions.

Syllabus Requirement 5

Students learn about:

- Christianity
- Anglicanism
- Catholicism
- Orthodoxy
- Pentecostalism
- Protestantism

Outline the unique features of:

- Anglicanism
- Catholicism
- Orthodoxy
- Pentecostalism
- Protestantism

Content Description

Before considering the distinguishing characteristics of the major groupings within Christianity it will be helpful to briefly survey the contours of history which gave rise to the existence of different groups in the Christian family.

While there have undoubtedly been differences and divisions among Christians from the very beginning, the first major schism did not occur until over a thousand years after the life and ministry of Jesus.

East/ West Schism

This first schism, known as the Great Schism or **East West Schism** was formalised in 1054 CE. This formally divided the Christian Church into two major groups known today as **Catholic** (Western Christianity) and **Orthodox** (Eastern Christianity). The Catholic Church is predominantly Roman Catholic though there are other groups such as Maronite and Melkite which are known as Eastern Rite Catholic. In the Orthodox tradition a number of Churches exist including Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Antiochian (Syrian) Orthodox and Coptic (Egyptian).

Reformation

The next major schism occurred in the 16th century in the Western or Catholic Church. This Western schism is known as the **Reformation** and led to the formation of the **Protestant Churches** which separated from the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Churches following the reforms of **Martin Luther** included the Lutherans and Presbyterians. The Church of England (Anglican) also separated from Roman Catholicism at this time though it did so for different reasons.

As time went on the fragmentation of Western Christianity continued with various **reforms and realignments** taking place within the Protestant and Anglican groupings. For example the Baptist and Congregationalist Churches formed from within the Protestant tradition while the Methodist and Salvation Army groups grew from within the Anglican tradition.

The most recent fragmentations within Western Christianity have come through the development of **Pentecostal Churches** which have mostly emerged within the last 150 years from within Protestant groups.

Anglican Church

Origins

The Church of England or Anglican Church stems from the 16th century schism known as the Reformation. During this time the **King of England, Henry VIII**, formalised the separation between the **Church of England** and the Roman Catholic Church.

Head of Church

Today the Anglican Church is found in many countries throughout the world, principally in those with close historical ties to England. The nominal head of the Anglican Church is the English Monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II. However authority in the Anglican Church is more practically expressed in the leadership of the **Archbishop of Canterbury**, currently Archbishop Rowan Williams.

Principal beliefs and sacraments

The key elements of the Anglican Church are summed up according to the statements of the **Lambeth conference** in 1920 which stressed the **centrality of the bible** and confirmed that it contained everything necessary for salvation. It also highlighted the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed and statements which accurately and reliably expressed the Christian faith. Lambeth also confirmed that two sacraments are to be celebrated as part of the Christian faith. These **two sacraments** are Baptism and the

Lord's Supper. Finally, Lambeth affirmed the importance of the historical line of succession of Bishops known as the "**historic episcopate**".

Subdivisions within the Church

Within the Anglican Church there are two recognizable groups with their own particular emphases. The larger of the two groups is known as **High Church Anglican**, sometimes referred to as Anglo Catholic. The second group is known as **Low Church Anglican**, sometimes referred to as Evangelical Anglican. High Church Anglicans are recognizable through the retention of a number of **Roman Catholic rituals and practices**. These include the use of vestments, incense and their ministers being known as Priests. Low Church Anglicans are more closely aligned with the **Protestant tradition** with Ministers leading congregations and worship carried out with very little adornment. While the majority of Anglicans throughout the world belong to the High Church group, it is worth noting that the Anglican Church in Sydney is predominantly Low Church. It is the Low Church or Evangelical Church which has had **considerable historical influence** in the development of religious expression in Australia due to the prominence of the Anglican Church in **colonial times in NSW**.

Catholic Church

Origins

The Catholic Church teaches of itself that it is historically and in terms of its teaching in line and continuity with that of the **first disciples of Jesus**. It is the largest and most widespread of all the Christian denominations.

Principal beliefs

A key belief of the Catholic Church is that God's teachings have been preserved and safeguarded through the **guidance of the Holy Spirit** in the teaching authority of the Church. In particular this authority is exercised through the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope, currently **Pope Benedict XVI**. The Bishops of the local Churches, known as Dioceses, exercise this authority in unity with the Pope.

Head of Church

Catholics believe there is a direct and unbroken line from the Apostle Peter as the first **Bishop of Rome** to his current successor Benedict XVI. Catholics also believe in an historic episcopate with each Bishop continuing in a **direct line from the Apostles** who are regarded as the first groups of Bishops of the Church.

Subdivisions within the Church

Most Catholics in the world belong to the Roman Catholic Church although there are other **Eastern Rite Catholics** such as the Maronites and Melkites.

Ecumenical councils

Throughout history when the Church faced significant questions and challenges it has assembled the leaders of the Church in councils known as **Ecumenical Councils**. The most recent of these councils was the **Second Vatican Council** held from 1962 - 1965. Many of the priorities and directions of the Catholic Church in recent decades have stemmed from the documents of Vatican II. It included important statements on Liturgy, Priesthood, Ecumenism, Religious Freedom, the Role of the Church in the Modern World and the role of the Laity.

Bible and Church teaching work in conjunction with each other

Catholics regard the Bible as the **normative text** for Christian teaching, however, they understand that the **tradition of the Church** has an indispensable role in interpreting and explaining the meaning of sacred scripture. The teaching tradition of the Church is regarded as an important element within the Catholic Church. Catholics regard Scripture and Tradition as two pillars which work hand in hand to explain the central elements of Catholic teaching.

Sacraments

The Catholic Church teaches that there are **seven sacraments** which are celebrated in the Church. These are Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick. Of these sacraments, **Eucharist** is considered to be the source and summit of the Christian life. Accordingly it plays a **central role** in the lives of Catholics.

Orthodox Churches

Subdivisions within the Church

The Orthodox Churches can be divided into two distinct groups. The larger is known as the **Eastern Orthodox Churches**. This group of approximately 20 Churches is organized under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople currently **All Holiness Bartholomew**. The smaller group of 5 Orthodox Churches is known as the **Oriental Orthodox Churches**.

Tradition and scripture are of equal value

The Orthodox Churches derive their beliefs from the **sacred scripture** and the **sacred tradition** of Church teaching. They regard scripture and tradition to be of equal value. The Christians of the Orthodox Churches share the basic Christian beliefs in the unity of God in the Trinity of persons.

Head of Church

They believe that the Church is a sacred institution **founded by Jesus** Christ to provide for the salvation of human kind. For Christians in the Orthodox Churches, the clergy hold office in a **line of descent** from the Apostles who are regarded as the first Priests and Bishops.

Sacraments

Orthodox Christians believe in **seven sacraments** which were inaugurated by Jesus Christ to assist in living the Christian life. The seven Sacraments are Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Eucharist, Ordination, Marriage, Confession and Holy Unction.

Divine Liturgy

The **Divine Liturgy** plays a central role in the lives of Orthodox Christians. Worship in Orthodox Churches is characterized by the chanting of prayers and the frequent use of incense which symbolizes the prayers ascending to God. Also of great importance is the expression of faith contained in the **Nicene Creed** and the teaching of the seven **Ecumenical Councils**.

Saints and icons

The Orthodox Christians honor the saints and ask in prayer for their intercession. Foremost among the saints is **Mary the mother of God**. Orthodox Churches characteristically feature depictions of saints known as icons. These **sacred icons** are venerated by Orthodox Christians, though it is not the image itself which is venerated, rather the person who is represented in the icon.

Pentecostal Churches

Characteristics

The term Pentecostal refers to a group of Christian Churches which are identified through their ecstatic worship and emphasis on the **gifts of the Holy Spirit**. Their name clearly derives from the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Origins

Modern Pentecostalism emerged from within **Protestant congregations** in America in the late 1900's and is now a world wide phenomena and is one of the fastest growing of Christian groups.

Organisation

Some Pentecostal Churches are single, **independent congregations**. Others belong to **collections of Pentecostal groups** such as the Assemblies of God, Four Square Gospel and Christian City Church.

Principal beliefs

Whether standing alone as a single congregation or being affiliated with other similar Churches Pentecostals have a number of distinguishing features. They are generally characterized by lively worship and an emphasis on the **gifts of the Holy Spirit** such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues. Additionally they usually feature **emphatic preaching** based on literal interpretations of biblical texts.

Demographics

Another feature of many Pentecostal Churches is their belief that they are living in the final days before the second coming of Christ, the **parousia**. Consequently, in many Pentecostal services there is a strong emphasis on preaching about the end of the world. Many Pentecostal congregations are quite small in numbers which allows for a closer and more **personal sense of community**. In contrast, a number of Pentecostal groups now attract large numbers in stadium like gatherings.

In comparison to other Christian denominations many Pentecostal congregations have comparably **young congregations**. The majority of Pentecostal Christians have previously belonged to other Christian denominations, mostly Protestant.

Head of Church

While the Pastors of Pentecostal Churches may have authority in their own congregation there is little **authority or established doctrine** outside of the individual congregation. The commonalities among Pentecostal Churches depend on a similar interpretation of certain biblical texts rather than any formalised or centralised doctrine.

Pentecostal Churches are also less inclined to have formalised rituals than other Christian denominations. There are usually no sacraments or equivalent rituals practised in Pentecostal Churches although some customs relating to **prayers for conversion**, repentance and healing may include ritual elements.

Protestant Churches

Origin

The Protestant Churches trace their origins back to the 16th century schism in Western Christianity known as the **Reformation**. There are a number of groups within Protestantism, some have their origin at the time of the Reformation while others have stemmed from further fragmentations later in time.

Lutheran Church

Principal beliefs

Taking its name from the catalyst of the Reformation, the Lutheran Church is mostly concentrated in the Germanic and Scandinavian regions of Europe as well as in North America. The Lutherans place considerable emphasis on the fundamental teachings of Luther such as **justification through faith** which refers to the need for a person to have **personal faith** in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

Characteristics

There is a strong emphasis on bible based preaching in the Lutheran Church and **two sacraments**, Baptism and Eucharist are celebrated. Lutheran churches also have a strong tradition of **hymn singing**.

In Australia, the largest group of Lutherans is found in South Australia, a result of German immigrants settling in the mid 19th century.

Calvinist Churches

Origins

Also known as **Reformed Churches** these Churches follow the teachings of 16th century French reformer **John Calvin**. Leadership in these churches is often in the hands of an **elder or presbyter**. It is from this practice that the term Presbyterian Church comes.

Demographics

The Presbyterian Church, the national Church of Scotland is the most significant Calvinist Church in Australia.

Principle beliefs

Calvinist or Reformed Churches have a strong emphasis on **bible based preaching** which emphasizes a temperate lifestyle. Two sacraments are celebrated in the Calvinist Churches, these are **Baptism and the Lord's Supper**.

Free Churches

From within the Church of England a number of new Churches arose during the **seventeenth and eighteenth centuries**. The main examples of these are the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, the Salvation Army and the Quakers (Society of Friends). Pentecostal Churches can also be seen as a more recent group arising from within this tradition of Protestantism.

Baptist Church

Two principal characteristics of the Baptist Church are their belief in the priesthood of all believers and their practice of **believers' baptism**. They believe that all Christians participate fully in every aspect of Church life. They also believe that only people who are able to understand and personally accept the Christian faith should be baptised. Accordingly they do not baptise babies or children.

Methodist Church

The Methodist Church was founded by two Church of England clergymen **John and Charles Wesley**. In some parts of the world the Methodist Church is known as the Wesleyan Church after its founders. The Methodist follow a very **simple method of Christian worship** comprising Hymn singing, prayers, bible readings and a sermon. They rarely use a formal order of service other than for the service of Holy Communion.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army was founded by William Booth, a Methodist Minister in the early 1800's. It follows the lines of **military organization** with ministers known as "Officers", members known as "Soldiers" and the meeting place known as a "Citadel". There is no set form of worship in the Salvation Army with the **worship leader** free to determine the form. It is common, however, to find a significant emphasis on music in Salvation Army worship. The Salvation Army is most widely recognised for its outstanding commitment to the **welfare of others**.

Society of Friends (Quakers)

The Society of Friends (Quakers) is a group who believe that God speaks directly to the heart of the **individual believer**. They have no formal dimension to worship, nor do they have creeds, ministers or sacraments. Perhaps the most well known aspect of the Quakers is that they are pacifists, categorically rejecting anything to do with war and or the use of violence.

Summary Points: Origins

Students learn about:

The historical and cultural context in which Christianity began

Students learn to:

Outline the historical and cultural context in which Christianity began

- Power was centred in Jerusalem during first century Judaism
- Fierce sectarian rivalry existed between the different Jewish sects, particularly between the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Zealots who sought to control the direction of the religion
- The Messianic expectation, a central tenet of Jewish belief reached a high point during the time of Jesus. Jewish speculation that the Messiah was to be a political saviour was the result of centuries of political oppression by the Romans
- Jesus who sought to renew the Jewish religion in the spirit of the prophets, came to be seen as the Messiah by his followers

Students learn about:

Jesus Christ

Students learn to:

Examine the principal events of Jesus' life

- Whilst Jesus is typically known as the founder of Christianity, he did not seek to establish a new religion. Rather he intended to oppose the legalism of Judaism and reform the tradition in the spirit of the prophets
- The main focus of Jesus' preaching was the reign of God
- The reign of God envisages a world where God's values such as love, peace and cooperation are realised. This vision, that was inaugurated through Jesus' ministry, will be completed at the end of time. Until then it is the responsibility of the followers of Jesus to live in accordance with these values and to lead others to them. Subsequently, the reign of God is considered to be a present yet future reality
- Jesus is believed to have been born of a virgin in Bethlehem
- Jesus travelled from Nazareth to Galilee where he was baptised by John the Baptist
- He preached around the region of Galilee and attracted disciples some of whom were women and many were socially disadvantaged
- Jesus taught in parables mostly concerning the reign of God
- In the Gospels he is frequently depicted as a healer or a miracle worker
- Jesus' preaching brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities
- Jesus' ministry took him to Jerusalem where he stayed for the Passover
- He was arrested and sentenced to death by crucifixion
- He was placed in a tomb on the eve of the Passover and appeared to his disciples after being raised on the third day
- The synoptic problem and modern biblical scholarship reminds us that the Gospels were written for a particular target audience as a way of passing on the faith of the community rather than with the intent of providing an accurate historical account of the life of Jesus

Students learn about:

Jesus Christ

Students learn to:

Explain why Jesus is the model for Christian life

- Jesus is the model for Christian life because he embodies the reign of God, that is God's dream for humankind that lies at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry
- The reign of God refers to the realisation of God's vision for the world, where the values of love, justice and peace prevail. Jesus inaugurated God's dream for the world through his ministry, and showed people how to bring about the reign of God, which will be completed at the end of time
- Jesus' embodiment of the reign of God can be identified according to four significant aspects of Jesus' life and ministry: Jesus lives a life of prayer, Jesus lives a life of service to others, Jesus acts as an advocate for the poor and Jesus loves and forgives others
- The Gospel portraits of Jesus show him to be a man of prayer, often withdrawing from the pressures of daily life to pray in a quiet place, and does so especially as he approaches key moments in his ministry and during times of personal crisis
- Jesus also teaches his disciples some important principles of prayer such as the importance of praying for the needy
- The Christian ethos of service to others is directly modelled upon Jesus' life and ministry which is characterised by its service to others
- A number of the sayings attributed to Jesus including the Beatitudes and the Golden Rule highlight this attitude of service
- Jesus emphatically identifies with the strong ethical tradition in the Hebrew scriptures by making advocacy for the poor and disadvantaged a central characteristic of his ministry
- Whilst advocacy for the poor has always been present in the Christian tradition, recent developments such as Liberation Theology has brought this important dimension into sharper focus
- Jesus' attitude of love and forgiveness for the failings of others is most evident firstly in his forgiveness of the disciples who abandoned him and secondly in the famous prayer for the forgiveness of his own executioners
- Some denominations have incorporated sacraments and other ceremonies to ritualise the importance of forgiveness
- Jesus Christ

Students learn about:

The development of early Christian communities

Students learn to:

Describe the early development of Christian communities after the death of Jesus

- The Jesus movement which lasted from approximately 30-60 CE describes a period immediately following the death of Jesus where the infant Christian community saw itself as a sect which existed within the Jewish tradition
- Little emphasis was placed on laying down the infrastructure of the movement because the followers believed that they were living in the last days before the Parousia, the second coming of Christ.
- Small groups of Palestinian Jews followed Jesus through the preaching of disciples such as Peter in and around Palestine
- Larger groups of Diaspora Jews and Gentiles responded to the preaching of Paul
- Paul is typically considered as the second founder of Christianity because he helped to set up the structure of this new religion and hence confirm the status of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism
- The Council of Jerusalem in 49 CE formally resolved the debate which divided the Pauline and Palestinian groups. The Council accepted Paul's argument that Gentiles need not undergo circumcision in order to become Christians. This Council is an attempt to overcome differences within the infant Church. Despite the formal resolution of the problem the tensions between the two early communities continued for some time
- The New Testament period which lasted from approximately 45 to 100 CE saw the gradual formalisation and centralisation of the Christian Churches which meant that this new religion was increasingly seen as distinct and separate from Judaism. The need to institutionalise the charism of the movement came about as a result of the delay of the Parousia and the death of the Apostles
- In the 2nd and 3rd century Christians were persecuted by Jews and Romans alike

Glossary

Eschatological vision	Belief that the end of the world and subsequently the day of judgement is near.
Gentile	A non-Jewish person
High Church Anglicans (also known as Anglo Catholic)	tradition within the Anglican Church that is more closely aligned with the Catholic Church and places a greater emphasis upon sacraments, ritual and priestly authority than Low Church Anglicans.
Jesus movement	Period within the early Christian community lasting from approximately 30 to 60 CE that saw itself as a sect within Judaism and is characterised by its eschatological vision, lack of infrastructure and gender inclusive nature.
Low Church Anglican (also known as Evangelical Anglican)	tradition within the Anglican Church that is more closely aligned with the Protestant tradition and places less emphasis upon rituals, sacraments and the authority of the clergy than High Church Anglicans.
Messianic expectation	The belief prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures that God will intervene in human history by sending a Messiah to save the nation of Israel.
Parousia	refers to the second coming of Christ.
Pharisees	Sect within Judaism that flourished during the latter part of the Second Temple Era, formed by devout lay people who sought a purer, more traditional expression of Judaism.
Reign of God (also known as the kingdom of God)	God's vision for humankind that is characterised by love, peace, cooperation, tolerance and justice. The reign of God was inaugurated through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and will be completed at the end of time.
Sadducees	An influential sect within Judaism that held a majority representation on the Sanhedrin at the time of Christ and is characterised by their emphasis on the acceptance of the Written Law alone.
Synoptic problem	concerns the relationship between the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the similarities and differences between these Gospels.
Zealots	Political movement within 1st century Judaism that sort to overthrow the Romans through military methods in favour of a Jewish theocracy.

Specimen Questions

Evaluate the role of Jesus and Paul in the founding and development of early Christianity (20 marks)

Outline the origins and describe the main characteristics of two significant groups within the Christian tradition (20 marks)

Sample Responses

Evaluate the role of Jesus and Paul in the founding and development of early Christianity (20 marks)

Jesus, who is typically known as the founder of Christianity and Paul, who is considered as the second founder of Christianity, were instrumental in the development of early Christianity. Where Jesus set down the foundational message of Christianity concerning the reign of God Paul helped to set up the structure of this new religion and transformed the status of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism. There is no evidence to suggest that Jesus wanted to found a new religion. In fact Jesus' opposition to the legalism Judaism exhibited at the time was an attempt to renew Judaism in terms of the prophets. On the other hand, Paul integrated Hellenistic philosophy with the Jewish message of Jesus to develop a Christian identity which was increasingly distinct and separate from Judaism.

Jesus is typically hailed as the founder of Christianity yet there is no indication that he intended to found a new religion. Rather Jesus was born a Jew, lived as a Jew and died a Jew. Jesus' greatest contribution to Christianity was the central focus of his teachings concerning the reign of God. Essentially, the reign of God is a state where justice, love, peace etc is lived. The reign of God was inaugurated through the ministry of Jesus and this reign will be fulfilled at the end of time. Until then, it is the

responsibility of the followers of Jesus to live in accordance with these values and to lead others to them as well. Thus, the reign of God is considered as a present yet future reality. Jesus sought to renew Judaism from within by emphasising the broad principles of mercy, love, peace and justice as a challenge to the legalistic nature of Judaism during that time. Since he did not intend to found a new religion it is not surprising therefore to find that he left very few instructions. He only left instructions to preach, baptise, heal the sick, feed the poor and forgive and these instructions are surprisingly direct and simple.

In order to appreciate the contribution of Jesus to Christianity we need to understand the influence of the concept of Jesus of History and Christ of Faith. This is a term used by scholars to differentiate historical aspects of story of Jesus from those that belong in the realm of faith. Historically, Jesus was a man who was from Nazareth in Galilee. He travelled to Jerusalem with a reputation as a miracle worker and after coming into conflict with the political leaders of the time he was executed. The search for the historical Jesus has been a major focus of biblical scholarship. It includes the process of examining the similarities and differences between the synoptic gospels, that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Scholars have tried to explain the relationship between the Gospels which are quite similar yet unique. This area of study is known as the Synoptic problem. The most important lesson that can be drawn from the synoptic problem is that whilst the Gospels provide an historical framework for the life and ministry of Jesus they do not set out to provide an exact historical record. We need to remember that the Gospels were written for a specific audience and that rhetoric rather than historical accuracy is the dominant concern of the writer. Consequently when we consider the importance of Jesus to the development of Christianity we should not merge the different Gospel stories together to form a composite picture of Jesus as each Gospel stands alone.

Another stage in the search for a historical Jesus was the use of rhetorical criticism which is a scientific study of the reasons behind why the Gospels were written and how they were edited. Through rhetorical criticism, scholars have been able to provide some understanding about intention of the gospel writers and the message they were seeking to convey. Similarly, we learn that the Gospels were written so that the early Church could pass on their faith rather than as an historical or scientific account of the life of Jesus.

Whilst the search for a historical Jesus is important if we are to assess the contribution of Jesus to Christianity there is a need to balance this search with an understanding of the Christ of Faith concept. It is the statements of faith, regarding his death, resurrection and ascension which have had the greatest impact on the development of early Christianity. This influence is twofold: firstly, it laid the foundation for doctrinal teachings such as the belief that Christ died for our sins and that life after death can overcome the limitations of human mortality. The difficulty of explaining Jesus' resurrection without depicting it as a bodily resuscitation led to the Christological debates regarding the humanity and divinity of Jesus which raged in the fourth and fifth centuries. Secondly, the eschatological nature of Jesus' ministry meant that he left no instructions for an institutional Church. His followers believed that they were living in the last days before the Parousia which refers to the second coming of Christ. Thus they did not see the need to institute a formal structure for the religion and consequently there was a considerable variety in the nature of the early Church.

After the death of Jesus, groups of Diaspora Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles followed Jesus through the teachings of Paul. Paul's major contribution to Christianity was that because he employed Hellenistic philosophy to translate Jesus' Jewish message and in doing so assisted to set up the structure of this new religion. The introduction of Hellenistic philosophy resulted in the formation of the theology of salvation, justification and law which was not in Jesus' original teachings. These new concepts utilised Hellenistic philosophy that was deeply ingrained within the culture of the time. This helped to transform the status of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism. Jesus unlike Paul made no attempt to establish a new religion. Jesus saw his contribution as one which revived the Jewish tradition in terms of the prophets.

While the earliest followers of Jesus believed that they were following a sect within Judaism, Paul's efforts meant that Christianity was becoming an increasingly distinct and separate religion from Judaism. Paul played a key role in some of the more decisive debates in early Christianity. The original Jewish nature of Christianity was soon challenged by the conversion of the Gentiles who gradually came to outnumber the Jewish Christians of Palestinian descent. Peter who led the group of Palestinian Christians argued that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to become Christian. Paul argued otherwise in claiming that the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism was not necessary. This debate led to the formation of the Council of Jerusalem in 49 CE which represents an early attempt to centralise differences within the diverse Church community. Despite the apparent resolution of this issue this topic continued to be the source of some uneasiness in the early Christian community. After 70 CE Paul's group of Jewish Christians of Diaspora Hellenistic background merged with the Gentile Christians, and continued to grow whilst the Palestinian group continued to break up and decrease in size. During this time Christian beliefs were becoming increasingly centralised as the institutionalisation of the charism was necessary due to the delay of the Parousia. The death of Paul meant that there was an even greater need to institutionalise the charism and provide a framework for the growth of Christianity.

In conclusion, it can be seen that two key figures of Christianity, Jesus and Paul were highly influential in the founding and development of early Christianity. Where Jesus' greatest contribution was his eschatological message regarding the reign of God, Paul assisted to translate this concept and make it accessible to the wider world by utilising Hellenistic philosophy. Paul translated the Jewish message into one that could be understood outside Palestinian confines. It is clear that where Jesus set out to reform the legalistic nature of Judaism, Paul gradually transformed the status of Christianity as a religion distinct and separate from Judaism. Both Jesus and Paul were nevertheless instrumental in the founding and development of Christianity.

Resources

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