

# Introduction to Christianity

Christianity &  
Catholic Christianity

Christianity is based on the belief in Jesus Christ being the Son of God. It is the main religion in Britain.

## The Bible is the Christian Sacred Text

The Bible is divided into two main parts — the Old and New Testaments:

- 1) Depending on the version, the Old Testament has at least 39 books, which include the Creation story (see p.3) and the Ten Commandments. These 39 books are the Jewish scriptures — they are also considered sacred by Jews.
- 2) The New Testament is the specifically Christian part of the Bible. Its 27 books include the 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), which are accounts of Jesus's life. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St Paul describe the early years of Christianity.



## Christianity is Divided into Different Traditions

The different branches of Christianity are called denominations. They share key beliefs, but interpret some points of the faith differently and worship in different ways (see p.8).

- 1) Roman Catholics respect the authority of the Bible and Church tradition, plus the authority of the Pope and his teachings. The seven sacraments (which include the Eucharist — see p.10) are an important part of their faith.
- 2) Protestants base their beliefs and practices on the Bible, rather than Church tradition or the teachings of the Pope. In England and Wales, Protestant denominations that are not part of the 'Anglican Communion' are often called 'Nonconformists'. These include Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, The Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Salvation Army.
- 3) Orthodox Christians are found mainly in Eastern Europe, Russia and Greece. They also have 7 sacraments, and honour (but don't worship) icons — pictures of Saints.

The Church of England has both Roman Catholic and Protestant features. Its beliefs are set out in the 39 Articles. Anglicanism is the worldwide 'communion' of Churches in fellowship with the parent Church of England.

## There are Many Beliefs About the Nature of God

Christianity is a monotheistic (one god) religion. The Ten Commandments say "you shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:3 NIV). Christians believe God has the following characteristics, though they differ in the emphasis placed on each, e.g. some focus more on God's loving nature than his role as judge.

- 1) **OMNIPOTENT** — God is all-powerful, although he still allows each person free will.
- 2) **BENEVOLENT** — God is loving and caring: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16 NIV). Christians try to follow his example in their actions.
- 3) **JUST JUDGE** — God judges people's actions fairly. Those who reject him and live sinful lives will be punished, as shown in the story of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46 (see p.14). But God forgives people who are sorry for what they've done and become faithful to him — the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) shows God will forgive anyone who returns to his ways.
- 4) **OMNISCIENT** — God knows everything — in the past, present and future.
- 5) **ETERNAL** — God has always existed, and he will continue to exist forever.
- 6) **TRANSCENDENT** — God is beyond this world — he doesn't depend on it to exist.
- 7) **IMMANENT** — But God is present in the human world, and takes an active role in humanity.
- 8) **PERSONAL** — God is a 'person', albeit an almighty and divine person. If God is personal, then a relationship is possible through prayer — which can be a 'conversation' with God.

### Omnipotent or omniscient? Get them the right way round...

Cover this page and see how many characteristics of God you can write down. No peeking now...

