

# A History of Christianity

The hidden origins and turbulent evolution of the world's largest religion.



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Programme running: 6 x 60 mins    Production: BBC

How did a small Jewish sect evolve into the world's largest religion? This series explores the forgotten origins of Christianity and the key to its unexpected spread into Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. Deep down the Christian faith boats a shared core, but what is it? And what does it actually feel like to be a Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or Pentecostal? Christianity has brought human beings to acts of criminal folly as well as the highest achievements of goodness and creativity. It has survived persecution, splits, wars of religion and hatred. But in today's Europe, Christianity seems under pressure from the apathy of a secular society. Is this the Christian story's final chapter?

## The First Christianity

Did Christianity really begin when the apostle Paul travelled from Jerusalem to Rome? This episode reveals that the true origins of Christianity lie east, and that the headquarters of Christianity might have been in Baghdad instead of Rome. Christianity's forgotten origins could have given rise to a barely recognisable Christianity today, based in Asia or China.

## Catholicism: the Unpredictable Rise of Rome

Over one billion Christians look to Rome; that's more than half of all Christians on the planet. But how did a small Jewish sect from the backwoods of first century Palestine, which preached humility and poverty, become a wealthy and powerful worldwide religion? We discover how confession was invented by monks on a remote island and how the Crusades gave birth to the university system.

## Orthodoxy: from Empire to Empire

Christianity is traditionally split into Catholicism and Protestantism, but Eastern Orthodox Christianity

flourishes in Russia and the Balkans with over 150 million members worldwide. It's quite unlike Catholicism or Protestantism: worship is carefully stage-managed and a symbol of a fierce-looking bird is everywhere: the double-headed eagle. What story is this ancient drama trying to tell us?

## Reformation: the Individual before God

The ancestors of today's peaceful Amish were once seen as some of the most dangerous people in Europe. Early Protestants were radicals who tore apart the Catholic Church. We look at the battle that split Christianity into two faiths, one based on obedience and authority and one based on individual conscience. We follow the reformers who tore down statues of saints and allowed the clergy to get married.

## The Evangelical Explosion

Evangelical Protestantism is a lively expression of faith that has spread across the globe, marketed with all the flair and swashbuckling enterprise of American commerce. The Evangelical explosion has been driven by the search for a direct emotional relationship with God. Its popularity has been helped by adopting local traditions, but is a new message of wealth in this world an adaptation too far?

## God in the Dock

Scepticism has transformed Western culture and transformed Christianity. Where did this religious doubt come from? Is fading belief due to the advance of science and reason, or due to its entanglement with world wars, Fascism and Nazism? However, in the middle of this crisis, the Church has nonetheless rediscovered deep and enduring truths about itself, and these may even hold clues to its future.

Image: Ron Chapple Studios, Dreamstime

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