

Introduction to Denominations

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Introduction

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Roman Catholic

The largest of the Christian denominations is the Roman Catholic church. As an institution it has existed since the **1st century AD**, though its form, extent, and teachings have been significantly modified over the centuries. The headquarters of the church is Vatican City in Rome, Italy. The head of the church is the pope, who is the supreme authority in belief and practice for all members. Churches were founded in major cities of the Roman Empire in the second half of the 1st century. The "mother church" was at Jerusalem, but the destruction of the city by Roman troops in AD 70 ended its role. The church at Rome gained some eminence because it was located in the capital of the empire, but until 313 the churches were either persecuted or ignored by the imperial power. The emperor Constantine published the Edict of Milan in 313, giving Christianity legal status. By the end of the century it had become the state religion. Alliance with the imperial power gave the church great authority, and from that day forward it persecuted its enemies relentlessly in an effort to maintain and enhance its position.

By this time there were two imperial capitals--the old one at Rome and the new one at Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). In effect, however, the emperors lived and governed from Constantinople. The empire in the West, centered on Italy, disintegrated as it was overrun by barbarians. The absence of an imperial presence at Rome created a power vacuum into which the popes stepped. They had little choice if civil order was to be preserved. As early as the 3rd century the popes were claiming for themselves a primacy over other churches in matters of doctrine. By the 5th century this claim had been transformed into complete legal jurisdiction over the churches. This claim was vigorously resisted by other bishops and never could be enforced in the East. The chief opponent was the patriarch of Constantinople. Dissension between these two leading bishops raged until, in 1054, they broke relations entirely. (From Compton's Encyclopedia)

Orthodox

The great schism between the Eastern and the Western Church (**1054**) was the culmination of a gradual process of estrangement between the east and west that began in the first centuries of the Christian Era and continued through the Middle Ages. Linguistic and cultural differences, as well as political events, contributed to the estrangement. From the 4th to the 11th century, Constantinople, the centre of Eastern Christianity, was also the capital of the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire, while Rome, after the barbarian invasions, fell under the influence of the Holy Roman Empire of the West, a political rival. In the West theology remained under the influence of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and gradually lost its immediate contact with the rich theological tradition of the Christian East. In the same time the Roman See was almost completely overtaken by Franks.

Theological differences could have probably been settled if there were not two different concepts of church authority. The growth of Roman primacy, based on the concept of the apostolic origin of the Church of Rome which claimed not only titular but also jurisdictional authority above other churches, was incompatible with the traditional Orthodox ecclesiology. The Eastern Christians considered all churches as sister churches and understood the primacy of the Roman bishop only as *primus inter pares* among his brother bishops. For the East, the highest authority in settling doctrinal disputes could by no means be the authority of a single Church or a single bishop but an Ecumenical Council of all sister churches. In the course of time the Church of Rome adopted various wrong teachings which were not based in the Tradition and finally proclaimed the teaching of the Pope's infallibility when teaching *ex cathedra*.

This widened the gap even more between the Christian East and West. The protestant communities which split from Rome in the course of centuries diverged even more from the teaching of the Holy Fathers and the Holy Ecumenical Councils. Due to these serious dogmatic differences the Orthodox Church is not in communion with the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. (From the website of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Raska and Prizren in Serbia.)

Anglican (Church of England)

In the **1530s**, when King Henry VIII wished to obtain a divorce from Queen Catherine of Aragon for not producing a male heir. The Pope would not grant it. After a long campaign to reverse this decision, the King ran out of patience and proclaimed himself Supreme Head of the Church of England and the Church began its separate existence from Rome, although, and this is important, its bishops have been consecrated in unbroken succession from St Peter. Innovative from the first, the new Church simplified the liturgy, ensured it was in English rather than Latin and set it out in a new *Book of Common Prayer*. (From the website of the Church of England.)

Episcopal (American)

When the United States achieved political independence, the ties that had bound the Anglican congregations to the Church of England were severed. However, English law required bishops consecrated by Church of England prelates to swear allegiance to the British crown. Permission was finally granted by the archbishop of Canterbury, and in 1787, bishops of the Church of England consecrated Samuel Provoost the first Episcopal bishop of New York, and William White the first of Pennsylvania. In **1784** clergyman Samuel Seabury had accepted consecration from nonjuring bishops of Scotland and became the first bishop of Connecticut. In 1789 the Episcopal Church was formally organized as an independent denomination. By the 1870s several church movements had given rise to bitter differences of opinion among Episcopal congregations. The movement resulted in 1873 in the organization of an independent denomination, the Reformed Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church has since joined with other Protestant denominations in an attempt to achieve a more unified Christian church. (From Encarta Concise Encyclopedia.)

Lutheran

The third largest grouping of Christians in this world is Lutheran, which as of 1993 numbers 58.5 million or 3 percent of the Christian population. The world's 59 million Lutherans belong to 250 different autonomous Lutheran churches around the world. Not surprisingly, the largest numbers of Lutherans are to be found in Germany, the place where the Lutheran tradition made its beginning during the early part of the **16th century**. [They are named after Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who found numerous teachings of the RCC to conflict with Scripture; many followed him after he was excommunicated from the Catholic church.] (From The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod: A Brief History by Dr. Samuel Nafzger.)

Mennonites

Mennonites are a branch of the Christian church, with roots in the radical wing of the **16th century** Protestant Reformation. Part of the group known as Anabaptists (because they rebaptized adult believers), the Mennonites took their name from Menno Simons, a Dutch priest who converted to the Anabaptist faith and helped lead it to prominence in Holland by the mid-16th century. Modern day Mennonites number almost 1 million worldwide.

In keeping with their spiritual roots, Mennonites still believe in the close textual readings of the Scriptures and a personal spiritual responsibility as the basis of their faith. The Amish, who separated from the Mennonites in the late 1600's, are widely known for their plain dress and rejection of modern technology and conveniences. Unlike the Mennonites, they form an exclusive and tight-knit community, with the church dictating much of what may or may not be done: for example, each local church district would dictate rules regarding the use of telephones, if indeed they are permitted at all.

While certain conservative branches of the Mennonite church still dress simply and require women to wear head coverings, Mennonites generally are not culturally separatist, choosing to embrace the larger communities outside of their church rather than forming a separate community around the church. Where the Amish believe in keeping themselves spiritually focused by limiting their interaction with modern society, Mennonites believe in practicing Jesus' teaching of service to others in a broader context. (From Mennonite.net.)

Presbyterian

John Knox, a Scotsman who studied with [John] Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, took Calvin's teachings back to Scotland [around **1560**]. Other Reformed communities developed in England, Holland and France. The Presbyterian church traces its ancestry back primarily to Scotland and England. Presbyterians have featured prominently in United States history. The Rev. Francis Mackemie, who arrived in the U.S. from Ireland in 1683, helped to organize the first American Presbytery at Philadelphia in 1706. One of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the Rev. John Witherspoon, was a Presbyterian minister. The Rev. William Tennent founded a ministerial "log college" in New Jersey that evolved into Princeton University. Other Presbyterian ministers, such as the Rev. Jonathan Edwards and the Rev. Gilbert Tennent, were driving forces in the so-called "Great Awakening," a revivalist movement in the early 18th century.

The Presbyterian church in the United States has split and parts have reunited several times. Currently the largest group is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has its national offices in Louisville, Ky. It was formed in 1983 as a result of reunion between the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS), the so-called "southern branch," and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA), the so-called "northern branch." Other Presbyterian churches in the United States include: the Presbyterian Church in America, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. (From the website of the Presbyterian Church-USA.)

Reformed

The RCA is the oldest active denomination in the United States with a continuous ministry since **1624**. It connected ecumenically in a Formula of Agreement with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is a mainline Protestant denomination. The word Reformed comes from the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 1500's with such leaders as Martin Luther and John Calvin. Calvin's reformation in Geneva spread to Scotland (where it was called Presbyterian) and to Holland (where it became our ancestor, the Dutch Reformed Church). Since the first congregation in New Amsterdam in 1628, the Reformed Church has included many different races and nationalities in its congregations. The Reformed Church has about 960 congregations in the United States and Canada with an active confirmed membership of 203,000 persons. (From the website of the Reformed Church of America.)

Methodist

Methodism [is a] worldwide Protestant movement dating from **1729**, when a group of students at the University of Oxford in England began to assemble for worship, study, and Christian service. The term *methodists* arose as a derisive allusion to the methodical manner in which they performed the various practices that their sense of Christian duty and church ritual required. Among the Oxford group were John Wesley, considered the founder of Methodism, and his brother Charles, the sons of an Anglican rector.

Together they brought about a spiritual revolution, which some historians believe diverted England from political revolution in the late 18th century. The theology of the Wesleys leaned heavily on Arminianism and rejected the emphasis in Calvinism on predestination. Preaching the doctrines of Christian perfection and personal salvation through faith, John Wesley quickly won an enthusiastic following among the English working classes.

Opposition by the English clergy, however, prevented the Wesleys from speaking in parish churches. Consequently, Methodist meetings were often conducted in open fields, leading to a revival of religious fervor throughout England. John Wesley's message as well as his personal activities among the poor encouraged a social consciousness that was retained by his followers and has become a hallmark of the Methodist tradition. Wesley never renounced his ties with the Church of England, but he provided for the incorporation and legal continuation of the new movement.

Soon after John Wesley's death in 1791, his followers began to divide into separate church bodies. During the 19th century many such separate Methodist denominations were formed in Britain and the United States, each maintaining its own version of the Wesleyan tradition.

Methodism was brought to the United States before the American Revolution (1775-1783) by emigrants from both Ireland and England. Francis Asbury, commissioned in 1771, was the missionary most instrumental in establishing the American Methodist church. At the end of the 18th century, black Methodists in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, withdrew from the church, where segregation had been forced upon them, and established an independent congregation. Soon church groups from other cities along the Atlantic seaboard joined with them to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The different groups formed their own churches, including the Evangelical United Brethren Church. In 1968 this church joined with the Methodist Church to become the United Methodist Church, bringing more than half of world Methodism into one denomination. (From Encarta Concise Encyclopedia.)

Baptist (Reformed)

The line of churches, which called themselves Baptist, began in **1610** in Holland. It began with a man named John Smyth who was a bishop in the Church of England. In 1606, after nine months of soul searching and study of the New Testament he was convinced that the doctrines and practices of the Church of England were not Biblical, and thus he resigned his position as priest and left the church.

Because of persecution by the Anglican church of all who disagreed with it and who refused to submit to its authority, John Smyth had to flee England. In Amsterdam, he along with Thomas Helwys and thirty six others formed the first Baptist church of Englishmen known to have stood for baptism of believers only.

Smyth, believed that the only real apostolic succession is a succession of Biblical New Testament truth, and not of outward ordinances and visible organization such as the Church of England or the Roman Church. He believed apostolic succession had been lost and the only way to recover was to start again. He baptized himself and then the others of his congregation. In only a few years however, the church had lost all but ten members to the Mennonites and other groups in Holland. Smyth died in 1612, and the church ended in Holland shortly thereafter with Helwy, Thomas and John Murton returning to England as persecutions there had lessened.

History records that the members of this Baptist church went back to England or remained in Holland and joined Mennoites. It did not produce a succession of other churches, but those who founded it went on to establish other Baptist churches in England.

Roger Williams is credited with founding the first Baptist church on American soil. Williams graduated from Cambridge University in 1627, and was apparently ordained in the Church of England. He soon embraced "Separatists" ideas and decided to leave England. In 1631, he arrived in Boston. In 1638, Williams made his way to what is now Providence, Rhode Island, and there purchased some land from the Indians.

Some of his former congregation in Salem joined him and they established a colony. He continued to read the New Testament, and became fully aware that infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, and allowing unsaved persons to be members of the church was not Scriptural. Thus, resolving to follow the Lord's commands in Truth, in March, 1639 he formed the first Baptist church on American soil. He began by baptizing himself and then baptizing ten other members. (From A Brief Survey Of Independent Fundamental Baptist Churches by Cooper P. Abrams, III.)

Free Will Baptist

The Free Will Baptist Church is not a movement which has sprung up within the past few years. History accords a place for this movement as far back as the early seventeenth century. An entire church, consisting of pastor and congregation, came from Wales and settled on the Delaware River on what was known as the Welsh Tract. From this group came several men who preached the Arminian doctrine in contrast to the prevailing Calvinistic doctrine of the day.

One of these men, Paul Palmer, is credited with organizing the first Free Will Baptist church in **1727** in Perquimans County, NC. The work in the northeast was instituted under the leadership of Benjamin Randall, who organized the first Free Will Baptist Church in that area in New Durham, NH., June 30, 1780. The General Conference of Free Will Baptists was organized in 1827. (From the website of the Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church in Bryan, Texas.)

Primitive Baptist

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, most Baptist churches in America adopted various doctrines and practices which differed significantly from Baptist standards. During these same times, there were many Baptist churches which held to traditional views. The contention between these groups became so sharp that new fractures began to develop in Baptist fellowship as of the late 1820s. Division was accelerated in **1832** when a group of the conservative Baptists met at Black Rock, Maryland to compose a general address in which they announced and explained their resolve to withdraw fellowship from the liberal doctrines and practices. The resulting document, generally known as the *Black Rock Address*, had widespread influence, and led churches across the country to take similar action. The conservative churches deriving from this unfortunate but necessary division later became known as *Primitive Baptists*.

PRIMITIVE: (an adjective) which means: Pertaining to the origin; First or Original. That which existed first or was first-formed and has not changed much by evolution [growing and developing] in time. Our use of the word Primitive refers to the First or Original New Testament Church. **BAPTIST:** Is more than a name for identification. It primarily describes the scriptural activity of the individual or church, namely "one which baptizes" [by immersion]. The First (Primitive) Church was one that Baptized. Therefore, the church that carries out authoritative scriptural baptisms via a duly ordained Minister is called a Baptist Church.

Any church that does not BAPTIZE according to Scripture is not and can not be recognized as New Testament in nature. History shows that those which use alternative methods to scriptural Baptism do not have their ORIGIN with the Primitive Church that Jesus founded. Among Primitive Baptists, like the Primitive New Testament Churches, there is no denominational structure or headquarters. There is no such thing as THE Primitive Baptist Church, although the term is used generically to speak of ALL Primitive Baptist Churches. Denominations and headquarters are an invention of men. (Excerpted from Primitive Baptist websites.)

Southern Baptist

Since its organization in **1845** in Augusta, Georgia, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has grown to 15.8 million members who worship in more than 40,000 churches in the United States. Southern Baptist sponsor about 5,000 home missionaries serving the United States, Canada, Guam and the Caribbean, as well as sponsoring more than 4,000 foreign missionaries in 126 nations of the world.

The term Southern Baptist Convention denotes both the denomination and its annual meeting. Working through 1,221 local associations and 39 state conventions and fellowships, Southern Baptists share a common bond of basic biblical beliefs and a commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world. (From the Southern Baptist Convention website.)

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the first Protestant movement founded on American soil, yet it is uniquely equipped to live up to a declaration that it is "A Church for Today." The denomination was born in the **1800s**, and continues to be influenced by its founding ideals of informality, openness and diversity. The Disciples claim no official doctrine. Worship practices vary widely from congregation to congregation -- from the more common informal services to what some might describe as "high church" in others.

Disciples congregations also run the theological spectrum from ultra-liberal to solidly conservative and everything in between. Membership is granted after a simple statement of belief in Jesus Christ and baptism by immersion -- though most congregations admit transfers baptized differently in other denominations. Even though immersion is virtually the universal Disciples practice, no church authority requires baptism by a particular form.

The Lord's Supper -- generally called "communion" -- is open to all Christians. The practice is weekly communion, though, once again, no church law insists upon it. Lay persons routinely preside over the Lord's Supper as the central celebration of each worship. The lay persons, working as colleagues with ordained ministers, often preach and perform other pastoral functions.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) grew out of two movements that sprang up almost simultaneously in western Pennsylvania and Kentucky -- movements that were backlashes against the rigid denominationalism of the early 1800s. Thomas and Alexander Campbell, a Scottish Presbyterian father and son in Pennsylvania, rebelled against the dogmatic sectarianism that kept members of different denominations -- and even factions within the same denomination -- from taking the Lord's Supper together. Barton W. Stone in Kentucky, also a Presbyterian, objected to the use of creeds as tests of "rightness" of belief, feeling that such statements dealt with nonessentials and were a cause of disunity.

"Christians," the name adopted by Stone's movement, represented what he felt to be a shedding of denominational tags in favor of a scriptural and inclusive term. Campbell had similar reasons for settling on "Disciples of Christ" but he felt the term "Disciples" less presumptuous than "Christians."

The aims and practices of the two groups were similar, and the Campbell and Stone movements merged quite naturally in 1832 after about a quarter of a century of separate development. Many of the Stone congregations were in parts of the country where there were few Disciples and some gradually related instead to a body that was one of the predecessors to the United Church of Christ. The founders of the Christian Church hoped to restore Christian unity by returning to simple New Testament practices. But the church found that even this led to division. Some believed in a restrictive interpretation of the Scriptures. Others were more permissive. One group which opposed practices not specifically authorized by the New Testament, such as instrumental music in the church and organized missionary activity, gradually pulled away. That group finally was listed separately in the 1906 federal religious census as the "Churches of Christ." (Some Disciples congregations still bear the name "Church of Christ" also.) Another conservative group remained with the Disciples but began a separation in 1926 over what it felt were too liberal membership policies on the mission field. More than 40 years later (1967-69) some 3,000 of those congregations formally withdrew as the Disciples restructured. They refer to themselves as the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. (From the official website of the Disciples of Christ.)

Latter-day Saints

After the Crucifixion of the Savior and the death of the Apostles, centuries of spiritual darkness covered the earth. Then in the spring of 1820, God appeared to a 14-year-old boy named Joseph Smith. This event started the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ to the earth. Joseph Smith was born 23 December 1805 in Sharon, Vermont. He later moved with his family to the rural community of Palmyra, New York, where, in 1820, a religious revival occurred. Confused by the conflicting claims of the various faiths, Joseph went to the Bible for guidance and there found the challenge to "ask of God" for himself (James 1:5). In a wooded grove near the family farm, Joseph knelt to pray for guidance.

God, the Eternal Father, and his Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to him there and gave him instructions. He was commanded to join none of the existing churches and was told that through him God would restore to earth the Church originally organized by Jesus Christ, with all of its truths and priesthood authority. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized on 6 April 1830, in Fayette, New York.

In September of 1823, a resurrected being named Moroni appeared to Joseph and directed him to a hill near Palmyra, where he showed him a religious history of an ancient American civilization engraved on metal plates and buried in the ground. Four years later Joseph translated this record, the Book of Mormon, named for one of the ancient American prophets who had compiled it.

The Book of Mormon was first published in 1830. The Book of Mormon contains religious writings of some civilizations in ancient America between about 2200 B.C. and A.D. 420. It includes an eyewitness account of the ministry of Jesus Christ on the American continent following his resurrection in Jerusalem. (From the official website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

Church of God (Seventh Day)

The Church of God (Seventh Day) grew from the efforts of dedicated advent believers living in Michigan and Iowa in the late **1850's**. In 1863, the Michigan church began to extend its influence into the eastern and central U.S. through a publication called *The Hope of Israel*. This magazine invited fellow Christians to assemble at conferences and camp meetings, and created interest in their distinctive doctrines: the second advent of Christ and the seventh-day Sabbath. Through these means, the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) was organized in 1884 and incorporated in Missouri in 1899.

Its offices were located in Stanberry, Missouri, until 1950, when they were transferred to Denver, Colorado. Over the years, *The Hope of Israel* also moved from Michigan to Iowa, then to Missouri. After several name changes, it is now known as the *Bible Advocate*. More than 100 years later, this flagship publication of the Church continues to be published and mailed ten times a year from the Denver offices. (From the website of the Church of God-Seventh Day).

Church of God (Anderson, IN)

The Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) began in **1881** when Daniel S. Warner and several associates felt constrained to forsake all denominational hierarchies and formal creeds, trusting solely in the Holy Spirit as their overseer and the Bible as their statement of belief. These people saw themselves at the forefront of a movement to restore unity and holiness to the church, not to establish another denomination but to promote primary allegiance to Jesus Christ so as to transcend denominational loyalties.

Deeply influenced by Wesleyan theology and Pietism, the Church of God has emphasized conversion, holiness, and attention to the Bible. Worship services tend to be informal, accentuating expository preaching and robust singing.

There is no formal membership. Persons are assumed to be members on the basis of witness to a conversion experience and evidence that supports such witness. The absence of formal membership is also consistent with the church's understanding of how Christian unity is to be achieved--that is, by preferring the label Christian before all others. The Church of God is congregational in its government. Each local congregation is autonomous and may call any recognized Church of God minister to be its pastor and may retain him or her as long as is mutually pleasing.

Ministers are ordained and disciplined by state or provincial assemblies made up predominantly of ministers. National program boards serve the church through coordinated ministries and resource materials. There are Church of God congregations in 85 foreign countries, most of which are resourced by one or more missionaries. There are slightly more Church of God adherents overseas than in North America. The heaviest concentration overseas is in the nation of Kenya. (From the official website of the Church of God-Anderson, IN.)

Church of God (Cleveland, TN)

The Church of God, with international headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee, traces its roots to **1886** in a meeting house located at Barney Creek in the mountains of eastern Tennessee. The *Christian Union* was organized with eight members. Since that inauspicious start, the Church of God has become an international church with a membership approaching 4 million. The Church of God is a grassroots organization with an appeal to and a concern for the common man and his needs." (From the official website of the Church of God, International-Cleveland, TN.)

Old/American Catholic

If we are to single out the primary cause of the first division of this Church, it would be the deeply rooted objection of the Patriarch of Rome to this particular theory of Church government. Rome maintained that they and their successors held supreme authority over all Christendom as spiritual heirs of St. Peter, whom, they held, was the first Bishop of Rome and to whom, they contended, the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" were alone divinely entrusted.

The four patriarchs of the Church in the East maintained the traditional belief in the administration of Christ's Church, offering for the sake of unity the title "primus inter pares" (first amongst equals) to the Roman bishop. But with the Church of the West developing a strong belief that a kind of primacy resided in the Roman bishop by divine enactment, the breach widened into an open division and henceforth the Christian Church in the East and in the West was to be distinct and divided.

In the East, to this day, the patriarchal theory of the Church's government is held, while in the West the emphasis on the personal supremacy of the Pope over all Christendom was gradually increased from the year 1054 until the final definition of Papal infallibility was decreed in the Vatican Council of A.D. **1870** as a dogma which all Christians were bound to accept as an article of faith. (From the Old Catholic website.)

The following are the distinctions of Saint Matthew Church that make us different from the Roman Catholic Church:

The Catholics of Saint Matthew Church, though recognizing the importance of the Pope in his role as a sign of unity and as an important source of leadership within the Church, reject the proclamation of the first Vatican Council (1869) promulgated by Pope Pius IX concerning the dogma of Papal Infallibility. We view such a dogma as being inconsistent with Catholic theology and as not being a part of authentic Catholic Tradition. We see this dogma as an abuse of power that reinforces an authoritarianism within the Church which runs counter to the spirit and teachings of Jesus.

The Dogma of Infallibility of the Pope, though an effort to create unity within the Church, has had the opposite effect. It now stands as an immense obstacle to the unity of the Church and actually diminishes the important ministry of the Pope as the successor of Peter and as a sign of unity. At best, the Dogma of Papal Infallibility is sectarian and not truly Catholic.

The priests, deacons, and bishops of Saint Matthew Church are free to marry and raise families or to remain celibate. To deny marriage to those who have an authentic vocation to the ministerial priesthood is to diminish the spiritual and psychological health and growth of the Church's clergy. Rather than enhancing the priesthood, we weaken its potential and make our clergy vulnerable to unhealthy psychological development.

At Saint Matthew Church women are not denied the opportunity to respond to a genuine vocation and to participate in the ministerial priesthood. As Saint Paul writes, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, all are one in Christ Jesus." We see the tremendous injustice to women that currently exists in the Church. The Church must act to correct this injustice which unfairly diminishes the role of women not only within the Church but within the growing world culture of our day.

People who have gone through the painful experience of divorce and have chosen to remarry are not excluded from the sacramental life of the Church. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. Therefore, a divorced person may remarry with the blessing of the Church without being required to seek a Church annulment which may be perceived as a violation of one's privacy as well as a violation of one's conscience.

The use of contraception and artificial birth control as a way of responsibly limiting the size of one's family is an issue of conscience to be decided by the husband and wife. The use of contraception is not considered intrinsically evil. We see very little difference between discovering infertility and creating infertility in that the intention in both actions are the same, that is, to avoid pregnancy. (From the website of the Saint Matthew Church, Orange, CA .)

Seventh-day Adventist

Between 1831 and 1844, William Miller--a Baptist preacher and former army captain in the War of 1812--launched the "great second advent awakening" which eventually spread throughout most of the Christian world. Based on his study of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller calculated that Jesus would return to earth on October 22, 1844. When Jesus did not appear, Miller's followers experienced what became to be called "the great Disappointment." Most of the thousands who had joined the movement, left it, in deep disillusionment. A few, however, went back to their Bibles to find why they had been disappointed. Soon they concluded that the October 22 date had indeed been correct, but that Miller had predicted the wrong event for that day. They became convinced that the Bible prophecy predicted not that Jesus would return to earth in 1844, but that He would begin at that time a special ministry in heaven for His followers. They still looked for Jesus to come soon, however, as do Seventh-day Adventists yet today.

From this small group who refused to give up after the "great disappointment" arose several leaders who built the foundation of what would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Standing out among these leaders were a young couple--James and Ellen G. White -- and a retired sea captain named Joseph Bates. This small nucleus of "adventists" began to grow -- mainly in the New England states of America, where Miller's movement had begun. Ellen G. White, a mere teenager at the time of the "great Disappointment," grew into a gifted author, speaker and administrator, who would become and remain the trusted spiritual counselor of the Adventist family for more than seventy years until her death in 1915. Early Adventists came to believe -- as have Adventists ever since -- that she enjoyed God's special guidance as she wrote her counsels to the growing body of believers. In **1860**, at Battle Creek Michigan, the loosely knit congregations of Adventists chose the name Seventh-day Adventist and in 1863 formally organized a church body with a membership of 3,500. In just a century and a half the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown from a handful of individuals, who carefully studied the Bible in their search for truth, to a world-wide community of over eight million members and millions of others who regard the Adventist Church their spiritual home. (From the official website of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.)

Salvation Army

It was founded in London, England, by William Booth, a Wesleyan Methodist minister, who severed his connection with that denomination and set out as an independent evangelist. A tent meeting conducted by Booth in 1865 on a disused burial ground in Whitechapel, London, marked the beginning of what was to become The Christian Mission. From this evolved The Salvation Army, so named in **1878**, which spread rapidly throughout the world and currently operates in more than 100 countries. It was apparent to Booth and his helpers that something more than "church going" religion was needed to alleviate the poverty of his time. Social welfare programmes were soon started and later spread worldwide. The 19th century was militant era and as the newly fledged Salvation Army declared war on sin and poverty it formulated its structure on military lines. Consequently military titles and phraseology were adopted and are still used for its "officers" (full time ordained ministers of the gospel), "soldiers" (laymen and women) etc. Its distinctive uniforms are recognised throughout the world and are a passport to safety in most hazardous areas and situations. (From the Salvation Army website.)

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses had their modern-day start in the **1870's**. At first, they were called Bible Students. But in 1931 they adopted the Scriptural name Jehovah's Witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10) From small beginnings the organization has grown to millions of Witnesses, who are busy preaching in more than 230 lands. [They teach that]

God has many titles but has only one name. That name is JEHOVAH. In most Bibles, God's name has been removed and has been replaced with the titles LORD or GOD. But when the Bible was written, the name Jehovah appeared in it some 7,000 times!-Exodus 3:15; Psalm 83:18. The true religion must also *honor God's name*. (Matthew 6:9) Jesus made God's name, Jehovah, known to others. True Christians must do the same. (John 17:6, 26; Romans 10:13, 14)

Jesus lived in heaven as a spirit person before he came to earth. He was God's first creation, and so he is called the "firstborn" Son of God. (Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14) Jesus is the only Son that God created by himself. Jehovah used the prehuman Jesus as his "master worker" in creating all other things in heaven and on earth. (Proverbs 8:22-31; Colossians 1:16, 17) God also used him as His chief spokesman. That is why Jesus is called "the Word."-John 1:1-3; Rev 19:13.

Jesus did not die on a cross. He died on a pole, or a stake. The Greek word translated "cross" in many Bibles meant just one piece of timber. The symbol of the cross comes from ancient false religions. The cross was not used or worshiped by the early Christians.

To become a friend of God, you must *obtain a good knowledge of Bible truth* (1 Timothy 2:3, 4), *put faith in the things you have learned* (Hebrews 11:6), *repent of your sins* (Acts 17:30, 31), *and turn around in your course of life*. (Acts 3:19) Then your love for God should move you to *dedicate yourself to him*. This means that in a personal, private prayer you tell him that you are giving yourself to him to do his will.-Matthew 16:24; 22:37. After you have made your dedication to God, you should *be baptized*. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Baptism lets everyone know that you have dedicated yourself to Jehovah. So baptism is only for those who are old enough to make a decision to serve God. When a person is baptized, his whole body should be put under the water momentarily. -Mark 1:9, 10; Acts 8:36.

Is it wrong to accept a blood transfusion? Remember, Jehovah requires that we abstain from blood. This means that we must not take into our bodies in any way at all other people's blood or even our own blood that has been stored. (Acts 21:25) So true Christians will not accept a blood transfusion. They will accept other kinds of medical treatment, such as transfusion of nonblood products. They want to live, but they will not try to save their life by breaking God's laws.-Matthew 16:25. (Excerpted from the official website of the Watchtower Organization.)

First Church of Christ, Scientist

In **1879**, four years after the first publication of *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy and some of her students voted to "organize a church designed to commemorate the word and works of our Master [Christ Jesus], which should reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing." The Church was reorganized in 1892, and the *Church Manual* was first issued in 1895 to provide a framework for church government and a blueprint for future development of its mission. Its government is set forth in the *Church Manual*, a constitutional document that has remained unchanged since Mrs. Eddy completed it in 1910. Under this *Manual*, the worldwide business of The Mother Church is transacted by its Board of Directors. Each local church is a democratically governed branch of The Mother Church. Each branch church member has an equal opportunity to participate in branch church work, vote in the election of its local church officers, and serve in these positions. Christian Science is based on the words and works of Christ Jesus, and draws its authority from the Bible. Its teachings are set forth in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Although a distinctive part of Christian Science is the healing of disease by spiritual means alone, its higher purpose is universal salvation from every phase of evil - including sin and death (see Matthew 10:8). (From the official website of the Church of Christ, Scientist.)

Holiness

When American Methodism was formed in 1784, the church accepted Wesley's mandate to "reform the continent and spread scriptural holiness over these lands." For over a century the holiness cause was promoted by Methodist preachers and churches throughout the nation. As the church grew larger and wealthier, however, the holiness testimony tended to fade as a distinctive teaching and experience in the church. Despite attempts to renew the holiness message in the church both before and after the Civil War, the trend away from holiness theology and experience was clearly established by the end of the nineteenth century. The last major holiness revival among the Methodists and other mainline Protestant churches came after the formation of the National Holiness Association in Vineland, New Jersey, in 1867. But the resulting revival failed to bring the majority of the American church back to the holiness cause. When the Southern Methodist Church rejected the holiness movement in **1894**, over 25 new holiness groups were formed in the United States dedicated to the promotion of holiness preaching and living. (From the International Pentecostal Holiness Church website.)

Pentecostal/Apostolic

Pentecostal Churches [are a] large and varied group of revivalistic religious bodies characterized by belief in the experience of holiness or Christian perfection. This perfection is climaxed by an "infilling of the Holy Spirit," as evidenced by "speaking in tongues," ecstatic utterances frequently unintelligible to listeners, as the apostles did on the day of Pentecost. The theology of Pentecostalism is usually fundamentalist, but no one body of doctrine is universally accepted by all groups. Certain beliefs are held in common, however, such as the premillennial second coming of Jesus Christ. Baptism, usually by immersion, and the Lord's Supper are the two practices usually observed. Many groups practice divine healing. Pentecostal denominations are found throughout the world. In the United States most Pentecostal churches had their beginnings in the revival movement in the Negro Holiness Church in Los Angeles in **1906**. (From Encarta Concise Encyclopedia.)

Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God is one of several church groups which form the present-day Pentecostal Movement. This movement grew out of an international religious awakening which began in the late 19th century. As a deep spiritual hunger grew in the hearts of many evangelical believers, prayer bands sprang up, and Bible conferences and revival meetings increased both in frequency and intensity. In response, the Holy Spirit came upon these groups simultaneously in such widely separated places as the United States, Great Britain, Holland, Germany, Norway, Latin America, and India. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was universally accompanied with the phenomenon of speaking with other tongues, also referred to as "glossolalia." Thus, the Pentecostal Movement developed among members of the mainline denominations. It disturbed the organized churches, which generally rejected the Pentecostal element. The Pentecostal Movement was thereby forced out of those churches, and gradually, with deep reluctance, they formed their own organizations in order to survive and have effective ministry. The Movement has grown to an estimated 100 million worldwide, and it is still growing. The Assemblies of God was formed in **1914**, in an effort to unite Pentecostal ministers and churches into an effective fellowship. (From a website of the Assemblies of God.)

Nazarene

Organized October 8, **1908**, in Pilot Point, Texas, the Church of the Nazarene has made its home in Kansas City, Mo., since shortly after the birth of the denomination. The Nazarene International Center provides support services to more than 1.2 million members worshiping in more than 11,800 churches in the United States, Canada, and 114 other world areas. The Church of the Nazarene is the largest denomination in the Wesleyan-Arminian theological tradition. The doctrine that distinguishes the Church of the Nazarene and other Wesleyan denominations from most other Christian denominations is that of entire sanctification. Nazarenes believe that God calls Christians to a life of holy living that is marked by an act of God, cleansing the heart from original sin and filling the individual with love for God and humankind. This experience is marked by entire consecration of the believer to do God's will and is followed by a life of seeking to serve God through service to others.

Like salvation, entire sanctification is an act of God's grace, not of works. Our pursuant service to God is an act of love whereby we show our appreciation for the grace that has been extended to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The government of the Church of the Nazarene is a combination of episcopacy and congregationalism. Six elected representatives serve on the Board of General Superintendents. This board is charged with the responsibility of administering the worldwide work of the Church of the Nazarene. They also serve as the interpreters of the denomination's book of polity, the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene. (From the Nazarene website.)

Worldwide Church of God

In the early 1930s, Herbert Armstrong began a radio ministry, a magazine and a church that eventually became "The World Tomorrow," *The Plain Truth*, and the Worldwide Church of God. He had many unusual doctrines. These he taught so enthusiastically that eventually more than 100,000 people attended weekly services. But growth began to slow in the 1970s. Christ did not return in 1975, as many ministers had speculated. Minor doctrines were changed, weakening some members' respect for Armstrong's doctrinal authority. Armstrong's son, widely considered to be an heir apparent, was accused of improprieties, and he eventually left with a few thousand other members to form the Church of God International. [Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong, founder of The Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association, is the head minister of the Intercontinental Church of God.]

Nevertheless, many people continued to be attracted to Herbert Armstrong's style and teachings, and the church continued to grow slowly until Armstrong died in 1986 at the age of 93. He left a denomination that numbered 120,000 people in attendance every week. Annual income was 200 million dollars. *Plain Truth* circulation was in the millions every month, and the television program was one of the top two religious programs in America.

Armstrong preached that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but he also stressed the necessity of obeying God. An emphasis on law-keeping formed another major component of WCG culture. Armstrong believed that if a person loves God, the person will obey God's commands. If a person does not keep the Sabbath, Armstrong concluded, then that person must not love God. Unfortunately, he viewed the Sabbath as the "test commandment" - in effect, a requirement for being considered a true Christian.

Other churches were false churches, children of the devil. In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the WCG observed seven annual Sabbaths, based on Leviticus 23. WCG members also avoided pork, shrimp and certain other meats (Lev. 11). They gave one tithe to support the ministry, used another to keep the annual Sabbaths, and in some years gave a third tithe to the church for its poor members. The financial requirements were high, but they also increased the levels of commitment. Where a person's treasure is, there the heart will be also. Members of the WCG had their hearts in the church and its work.

Armstrong taught that repentance involves a change in behavior, that Christianity involves a way of life. In the WCG, this focused primarily on prohibitions. WCG members were not allowed to vote, serve in the military, marry after divorce, go to doctors, use cosmetics, or observe Christmas, Easter and birthdays. All this emphasis on rules, however, meant that grace was rarely mentioned. Many members became legalistic in their own relationship with God, and judgmental of other Christians. Armstrong viewed himself as God's apostle, leading the one true church. Armstrong had all authority - doctrinally, financially, and administratively. If anyone was disloyal, that person would be fired and expelled from the church fellowship.

Armstrong also had many unusual ideas about prophecy, and these may have been the most attractive doctrines of all. He taught that the United States and Britain are modern descendants of the northern ten tribes of Israel, and that therefore many biblical prophecies apply to the Anglo-Saxon peoples. He saw himself as an end-time fulfillment of prophecy, with a message of warning for the "Israelite" peoples.

The Great Tribulation would soon start, he warned in the 1930s, in the 1940s, in the 1950s, in the 1960s, in the 1970s, and in the 1980s - but the good news is that Christ will soon return and rule for 1,000 years. In fact, the millennium was so important to Armstrong that it became the center of the gospel. It was the reason the radio and television broadcasts were titled "The World Tomorrow." The millennium was the good news.

In 1986, shortly before he died, Herbert Armstrong appointed Joseph Tkach (pronounced Ta-cotch) to be his successor. The church continued to grow slowly. In 1988, Tkach made minor doctrinal changes. He taught members that it was permissible to go to doctors, take medicines, observe birthdays and wear cosmetics. He realized that many of the prophetic speculations that had made the television program and magazine so interesting couldn't actually be proven from Scripture. Questions also arose about some of the things that Armstrong had written, and some of his books were withdrawn from circulation until further study could resolve the questions. Some members were troubled that the church was no longer teaching the same things that Armstrong had, and in 1989, 3,000 members left to form the Philadelphia Church of God to preserve Armstrong doctrines.

In 1990, the church peaked at 133,000 in weekly attendance. More doctrinal changes were made as Tkach realized that some of Armstrong's unusual beliefs, though sincere, were not biblical. The focus of the gospel is Jesus Christ and grace, not prophecy or the millennium. Budgetary reductions began to affect the television broadcast. More Armstrong literature was discontinued and/or edited. In 1991, Tkach revised the church's explanation of what it means to be born again, noting also that humans will never become Gods. He also announced a study about the modern identity of the lost ten tribes, and accepted the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Membership, attendance, and income began to decrease slowly. In 1993, the church accepted the doctrine of the Trinity. The church declared that the cross was not a pagan symbol, that it is not a sin to have illustrations of Jesus, and that Christians may vote. Such changes may seem inconsequential to most Christians, but each change was significant for WCG members because each change attacked strongly held beliefs about how we ought to express our devotion to God. Each change had to be explained from the Scriptures and had to explain how previous explanations were not correct.

In 1994, the television program was cancelled and employees were laid off. The church also explained to the members that true Christians can be found in other denominations. But perhaps the most traumatic change came in December 1994: Tkach announced that Christians do not have to keep old covenant laws such as the weekly and annual Sabbaths, two and three tithes, and avoid pork, shrimp and other meats. In many ways, the Sabbath had been the foundational doctrine of the entire denomination, so this was the biggest change of all. Many members did not accept these changes. After decades of understanding their identity as Christians in terms of Sabbath-keeping, and after making many sacrifices in order to keep the Sabbath, they could not easily accept the idea that it really didn't matter. In early 1995, hundreds of ministers and 12,000 members left to form the United Church of God. Thousands more stopped attending any church, and many congregations were left with only half the members they used to have. Church income dropped another 50 percent, and hundreds of employees were laid off. Friends and families were split. It was a time of anguish and depression.

Something unexpected also happened: Many members, after struggling to understand the doctrinal change, began to experience a new sense of peace and joy through a renewed faith in Jesus Christ. Their identity was in him, not in the particular laws they kept. The Sabbath doctrine was changed in order to be more biblical; the result was that members became more spiritual. Members focused more their relationship with Jesus Christ; they also had an increased interest in worship. Organizationally, this doctrinal change had catastrophic results. But spiritually, it was the best thing that ever happened to the WCG.

It was a tumultuous decade. Now, the Worldwide Church of God is about half the size it used to be. When our foundational doctrines were changed, some people claimed that the Worldwide Church of God should just close its doors and tell all its members to go to authentic Christian churches. Ironically, we heard this not from other Christian churches, but from a few of our own members! They were angry and bitter that the WCG had caused such pain in their lives by teaching erroneous doctrines. They concluded that the WCG had been built on false pretenses and therefore had no right to exist.

We acknowledge that many of our doctrines were erroneous. We acknowledge that the WCG would not exist without those erroneous doctrines. But we do not conclude that Jesus Christ rescued us as a group merely to have us disband. He has bought and paid for this church. It belongs to him, and we have told him that he can have it! If it is of any value to him, he can use it as his instrument, and we are happy to let him lead us. We rejoice in the fellowship we have with him, and we believe that he is already leading us into usefulness.

Due to our shared experiences, we have things we need to learn as a group, and we will not learn these things as well if we disband. We also hope that our shared experiences also give us something to teach. As a group, we are enjoying a new interest in worship. We are discovering spiritual gifts and lay ministry. We are learning to function in new ways. Our strengths as a denomination include a high respect for Scripture and a willingness to do what it says. We recognize that Jesus, as our Savior and as our Lord, gives us instructions for our thoughts, words and actions. We know that Christ makes a difference in the way we live. He transforms our lives in this age, as well as giving us eternal life. We have also stressed prayer and study as important aspects of spiritual growth.

Our recent history gives us a concern for grace, and an awareness of legalism. Of course, the story is not yet over. Jesus is not done with us yet. We are still being shaped and fashioned for his purpose. We praise him and worship him, and seek to know his will for our lives. (From the official website of the Worldwide Church of God.)