A FIELD GUIDE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY TREE

ONE LORD, MANY CHURCHES

Where Each Branch Came From, What It Believes, and How It Sees the End Times



Every claim traced to its source

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

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One Lord, Many Churches: A Field Guide to the Christian Family Tree: Where Each Branch Came From, What It Believes, and How It Sees the End Times

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The research in this book stops at November 18, 2026. Membership numbers change every year, and each one in this book carries the date of its source. Church names, logos and emblems mentioned in this book belong to their owners. They are described here for teaching purposes only, and no church named in this book has reviewed or endorsed it.

A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Contents

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book....3
Before You Begin....6
Part One: One Family, Many Branches....11
Chapter 1: What Every Branch Shares....12
Chapter 2: How Many Denominations Are There?....15
Chapter 3: The First Splits: 431, 451 and 1054....20
Part Two: The Ancient Churches Today....24
Chapter 4: The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches....25
Chapter 5: The Eastern Orthodox Church....28
Chapter 6: The Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East....30
Part Three: The Reformation Families....32
Chapter 7: Lutherans....33
Chapter 8: Reformed and Presbyterian Churches....35
Chapter 9: Anglicans and Episcopalians....37
Chapter 10: Anabaptists: Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites....39
Part Four: Free Churches, Revival and Restoration....41
Chapter 11: Baptists....42
Chapter 12: Congregationalists and Quakers....44
Chapter 13: Moravians and Methodists....46
Chapter 14: The Holiness Movement: Nazarenes and the Salvation Army....48
Chapter 15: The Restoration Movement....50
Chapter 16: Seventh-day Adventists....52
Part Five: The Pentecostal and Charismatic Explosion....54
Chapter 17: How the Pentecostal Movement Began....55
Chapter 18: The Assemblies of God....57
Chapter 19: Charismatics, Nondenominational Churches and the Global South....60
Part Six: How the Branches See the End Times....62
Chapter 20: Four Ways of Reading the Thousand Years....63
Chapter 21: When People Set Dates....66
Chapter 22: Has the Assemblies of God Ever Predicted the End?....69

Part Seven: Edges, Rumors and Conclusions....72
Chapter 23: Groups at the Edge of the Family....73
Chapter 24: Rumors and Disputed Claims....75
Chapter 25: What This Means for Us....80
Appendix A: Chronology....82
Appendix B: The Branches Compared....84
Appendix C: Claims and Evidence....85
Appendix D: Visuals and Credits....86
Appendix E: Glossary....87
Bibliography....88

Before You Begin

Walk down almost any main street in America and you will pass a Baptist church, a Catholic parish, a Methodist chapel, a Lutheran church, maybe an Assemblies of God church, a Church of Christ, a Seventh-day Adventist church, and a building with a name like "Grace Fellowship" that does not tell you what it belongs to at all. A lot of believers have never been told how all of these fit together. Some were raised in one tradition and assume the rest are strange. Some grew up with no church at all and find the whole picture confusing. And some have heard rumors about other churches that they have never checked.

This book is my attempt to lay out the whole Christian family tree in one place, plainly and fairly, with sources you can check yourself.

The question this book answers

The central question is simple: **How did one faith in one Lord become so many churches, and what does each branch actually teach, especially about the end times?**

Under that question sit several smaller ones:

- What do nearly all Christians share, and where exactly do they part ways?
- When and why did each major branch begin, who started it, and what changed because of it?
- How big is each branch today, and how reliable are the numbers?
- How does each branch read the Bible's teaching on the return of Christ?
- Has any major denomination tried to set a date for the end of the world? In particular, has the Assemblies of God ever done so?
- Which popular stories about other churches are true, which are partly true, and which are false?

Why I wrote it

This book started with a chart. Someone shared a popular graphic that sorted Christianity into four levels of "branches and denominations." It was a helpful start, but it left out whole families of churches that are older than most of the ones it showed, it mixed movements with denominations, and it said nothing about where the dates and numbers came from. An earlier draft built from that chart also repeated some claims that turned out to be wrong when I checked them against the churches' own documents. One of those claims was about the Assemblies of God and the rapture, and I will show you in Chapter 22 what the Assemblies' own position paper actually says.

So I started over. I treated the chart and the earlier draft as leads, not as sources, and I went back to the records.

How the research was done

I used four kinds of sources, and the bibliography at the back sorts every source into one of them:

1. **Official church documents and church sources.** These are a church's own statements of faith, position papers, histories and statistics. They are the best evidence for what a church teaches and what it reports about itself. They are weaker evidence for events, because every organization tells its own story in the best light. When I use a church's own history for an event, I say so.
2. **Scholarly books, articles and reference works.** These include encyclopedias edited by subject experts and articles by historians.
3. **Research centers and statistics.** These include the Pew Research Center and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. They count people in different ways, so I show you how each one counts.
4. **Journalism and other secondary sources.** I use these mainly for recent events and for what happened in public, such as a failed prediction or a church discipline case.

Every fact that matters has a footnote. The footnote names the author or organization, the title, the date and a web address or page so you can check it yourself. Where I could not confirm something, I say so in plain words. I did not use anonymous sources, and I did not count three websites that repeat one story as three witnesses.

The research for this book stops at November 18, 2026.

Labels I use

When a claim is disputed, I sort it into one of these plain labels:

- **Supported:** the records clearly back it up.
- **Partly supported:** part of it is true, but it is stretched or missing something important.
- **Disputed:** serious evidence exists on more than one side.
- **Unsupported:** no good evidence backs it up, though nothing proves it false.
- **Contradicted by the evidence:** the records show it is false.
- **Unresolved:** the records we have cannot settle it yet.

When I talk about a person's connection to a church, I keep these apart as well: confirmed membership, documented association, self-reported affiliation, disputed affiliation, and unsupported allegation. Visiting a church, sharing a symbol, or knowing a member does not make someone a member.

Where I stand

I want to be honest about my own convictions so you can weigh what I write. I am a Bible-believing Christian, and I attend a nondenominational church. Like most such churches, mine stands in the evangelical stream described in Chapter 19, so I am not writing as a member of any of the

denominations in this book. I hold to the historic faith summed up in the early creeds, and I believe the Bible is God's Word. On the end times I hold a premillennial, pre-tribulation view: I believe Christ will gather His church to Himself before the great tribulation, and that He will return to reign. I say so where it matters, mainly in Part Six.

But this is a field guide, not a debate. When I describe a church, my goal is that a faithful member of that church could read the description and say, "Yes, that is what we believe." Where I disagree, I will tell you that it is my view and why, and I will keep it separate from the description.

How this book fits with my other books

This book focuses on the branches of the church and how they differ. Three of my other free books go deeper on things this one only touches:

- *The Church Through the Ages* tells the story of church history from Pentecost to today. This book does not repeat that story; it follows each branch.
- *What Christians Believe* explains the core doctrines of the faith. Chapter 1 here only summarizes them.
- *Different Gospels* looks closely at groups whose teaching departs from the historic gospel. Chapter 23 here gives only a short, factual overview and points you there.

All three are free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

How the book is organized

Part One looks at what all branches share, how the branches are counted, and the first great splits. **Part Two** covers the ancient churches: Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and the Church of the East. **Part Three** covers the Reformation families: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Anabaptist. **Part Four** covers the churches born from later reform, revival and restoration: Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, Moravians, Methodists, the Holiness churches, the Restoration Movement and the Adventists. **Part Five** covers the Pentecostal movement, the Assemblies of God, and today's charismatic, nondenominational and Global South churches. **Part Six** covers the end times: how the branches read prophecy, the history of date-setting, and a full check of the Assemblies of God record. **Part Seven** covers groups at the edges of the family, the rumors and disputed claims, and what it all means for us.

The appendices give you a chronology, a comparison chart, a table of every disputed claim with its evidence, a list of visuals and their rights, and a glossary.

The Whole Book at a Glance

If you only have a few minutes, here is the summary.

What unites. Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians nearly all confess one God in three Persons; the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ; His virgin birth, death for sins and bodily resurrection; the authority of Scripture; and His future return to judge the living and the dead. These truths are summed up in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which most branches still confess.

How many Christians, and how many churches. The Pew Research Center counted about 2.3 billion Christians in 2020, about 29 percent of the world's people.[1] The often-repeated figure of 45,000 or more "denominations" comes from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.[2] It is a real research figure, but it counts church bodies in a way that is very different from what most people mean by "denomination," and it includes groups that most Christians do not consider Christian. Chapter 2 explains this.

The first splits. The first lasting divisions came over how to describe who Christ is. After the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Church of the East went its own way. After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Oriental Orthodox churches of Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, Syria and India separated. In 1054, the churches of Rome and Constantinople exchanged excommunications, a break that hardened into the division between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. In 1965 the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople removed those 1054 excommunications from memory, but they said plainly that this did not end their differences.[3]

The Reformation. In 1517 Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses set off the Protestant Reformation. Within a generation it produced four families: Lutheran, Reformed (including Presbyterian), Anglican and Anabaptist.

Revival and restoration. From the 1600s through the 1800s came the Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, renewed Moravians, Methodists, Holiness churches such as the Church of the Nazarene and The Salvation Army, the Restoration Movement churches, and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Pentecost again. The Pentecostal movement began in the early 1900s and became one of the largest movements in world Christianity. The Assemblies of God, organized in 1914, is one of its largest bodies.

The end times. Christians agree that Jesus will return. They differ on the thousand years of Revelation 20 and on when believers will be gathered to Him. Most ancient and Reformation churches hold an amillennial view. Many evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal churches hold a premillennial view, and many of those hold a pre-tribulation rapture.

Date-setting. Failed predictions of Christ's return have come mostly from individual teachers and new movements, not from the historic denominations. William Miller's movement set October 22, 1844; the Seventh-day Adventist Church later grew out of the people disappointed that day.[4] The Watch Tower organization raised expectations around 1914, 1925 and 1975. Individual authors and broadcasters set dates in 1988 and 2011.

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[1] Conrad Hackett, Marcin Stonawski, Yunping Tong, Stephanie Kramer, Anne Shi and Dalia Fahmy, "Christian Population Change (in How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020)", Pew Research Center, June 9, 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/christian-population-change/.

[2] Gina A. Zurlo, "The Annual Statistical Table for World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity", Overseas Ministries Study Center, Princeton Theological Seminary, February 12, 2024. https://omsc.ptsem.edu/the-annual-statistical-table/. Peyton Garland, "How Many Christian Denominations Are There Today?", Christianity.com, updated February 16, 2026. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/how-many-christian-denominations-are-there.html.

[3] Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, "Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration", December 7, 1965. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_common-declaration.html.

[4] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

The Assemblies of God. I found no evidence that the Assemblies of God, as a denomination, has ever set a date for Christ's return or the end of the world. Its official 1979 position paper teaches a pre-tribulation rapture and says Christ's coming is imminent, which means it could happen at any time.[5] The denomination has also disciplined some of its best-known ministers and rejected end-times teachings it judged to be in error, such as parts of the Latter Rain movement of 1948 and 1949.[6]

Rumors. Chapter 24 checks the best-known rumors about Christian branches, from "Constantine invented the Catholic Church" to "Luther never nailed anything to a door." Some are false, some are partly true, and a few are still unresolved.

What it means. The divisions are real, and some of them matter a great deal, because they touch the gospel itself. But the family resemblance is also real. My hope is that this book helps you understand your own church, treat other believers fairly, and hold fast to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[5] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

[6] John R. Miller, "New Order of the Latter Rain: A New Perspective", Pneuma Review, Fall 2013, posted December 16, 2013. https://pneumareview.com/new-order-of-the-latter-rain-a-new-perspective/.

Part One: One Family, Many Branches

Chapter 1: What Every Branch Shares

Before we look at what divides Christians, we need to see how much they hold in common. If you put a Greek Orthodox priest, a Roman Catholic nun, a Lutheran pastor, a Southern Baptist deacon and an Assemblies of God evangelist in one room and asked them about God, Jesus and the Bible, they would agree on far more than they would argue about. That shared ground is not an accident. It goes back to the apostles.

> **Ephesians 4:4-6** one body and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who ***is*** over all and through all and in you all.

The gospel the apostles handed on

Paul summed up the message he received and passed on in a few lines. He called it the matter "of first importance."

> **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** For I delivered to you among ***the*** first ***things*** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Every branch in this book, from the oldest to the newest, affirms these facts: Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day. Where a group denies the bodily resurrection or denies that Jesus is truly God, it has left the historic faith, and I will treat those groups separately in Chapter 23.

The early creeds

In the first centuries, the church faced teachers who said Jesus was not truly God, or not truly human. In answer, church leaders gathered in councils and wrote short statements of faith called creeds. Two of them are still confessed by most Christians on earth.

The **Apostles' Creed** grew out of the questions asked of new believers at baptism in the early church in Rome. The apostles did not write it word for word, but it sums up their teaching. Its traditional English form begins:

> I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. Amen.[7]

Two words in it confuse people today. "Catholic" here means universal, the whole church in every place, not the Roman Catholic Church. "The quick and the dead" means the living and the dead.

[7] Episcopal Church in Scotland, *The Book of Common Prayer*, Project Gutenberg eBook 29622, released August 6, 2009. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29622.

The **Nicene Creed** comes from the councils of Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. It says that the Son is "Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father."[8] Those words were chosen to shut the door on the teaching of Arius, who said the Son was a created being. Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist churches use the Nicene Creed in worship. Many Baptist, Pentecostal and nondenominational churches do not recite creeds in their services, but their own statements of faith teach the same truths about the Trinity and the person of Christ.

There is one famous difference inside the Nicene Creed itself, and we will meet it in Chapter 3. The Western churches say the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father and the Son." The Eastern churches say "from the Father." That one phrase helped divide the church in 1054.

The shared core

Here is what nearly all Christian churches share, stated plainly:

- **One God in three Persons.** The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, not three gods.
- **Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human.** He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
- **Christ died for sinners and rose bodily from the dead.** He ascended to the Father and will come again in glory.
- **Scripture is God's Word.** Every branch reads the Old and New Testaments as inspired Scripture, though they differ on a few books and on how Scripture relates to church tradition.
- **Salvation is by God's grace through Christ.** Branches differ sharply on how a person receives that grace, but none teaches that we can save ourselves without Christ.
- **The church is Christ's body,** marked by baptism and the Lord's Supper (or, for two groups we will meet, by inward realities instead of outward ceremonies).
- **Christ will return,** the dead will be raised, and God will judge the world.

My book *What Christians Believe* walks through each of these doctrines in detail.

Where the branches part ways

If that much is shared, why are there so many churches? The splits in this book come down to six questions. Keep them in mind; they will come back again and again.

1. **Authority.** Who has the final word: Scripture alone, Scripture and church tradition together, the bishops, the Pope, or a later prophet or revelation?
2. **Salvation.** How does God's grace reach a person? Through faith alone, through faith and the sacraments, or through faith followed by a life of obedience? Can a true believer fall away?
3. **Baptism.** Should infants be baptized, or only those old enough to believe? Does the mode matter (sprinkling, pouring, immersion)? What does baptism do?

[8] Episcopal Church in Scotland, *The Book of Common Prayer*, Project Gutenberg eBook 29622, released August 6, 2009. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29622.

4. **The Lord's Supper.** Is Christ's body and blood truly present, and if so, how? Or is the Supper a memorial?
5. **Church government.** Should churches be led by bishops, by elected elders, or by each congregation on its own?
6. **The Holy Spirit and the last things.** Are gifts such as tongues and prophecy for today? How should we read the prophecies about Christ's return and the thousand years?

Most branches were not born out of a love for arguing. They were born when sincere believers came to different answers to one of these questions and could not, in good conscience, stay together.

> **John 17:20-21** And I do not ask concerning these only, but also concerning those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, even as You, Father, ***are*** in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

What this means for us

Jesus prayed that His people would be one. That prayer is not answered by pretending differences do not matter. It is answered when we hold fast to the truth and still love those who belong to Christ. The rest of this book will help you see where the real lines are, so you do not draw them in the wrong places.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Ephesians 4:4-6. Which of the "ones" in that passage do you see shared across the churches in your town?
2. Which of the six questions above did your own church answer most strongly? How did that shape the way you were taught?
3. Why do you think the early church thought it was so important to write down what it believed about Jesus?

Chapter 2: How Many Denominations Are There?

You have probably heard it said that there are 30,000, 40,000 or even 45,000 Christian denominations. Sometimes it is said to show that Protestants cannot agree on anything. Sometimes it is said to show that Christianity is hopelessly divided. Before we use a number like that, we should ask where it comes from and what it counts.

Where the number comes from

The figure traces back to the work of David Barrett, Todd Johnson and their colleagues, whose *World Christian Encyclopedia* and *World Christian Database* try to count every Christian group in every country. Today that work is carried on by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Each year the center publishes a statistical table on world Christianity. In 2024, center co-director Gina Zurlo wrote that the number of denominations "this year" was estimated at "a perhaps shocking 47,000."[9] Popular writers usually round it to "over 45,000," a figure one Christian website credits to the center for 2023.[10] The Lausanne Movement, citing the same center's data, gives "47,300 Christian denominations/rites" for mid-2023. Note the word "rites": the count is of separately organized bodies and rites, not of separate belief systems.[11]

So the number is real. It is a serious research estimate made by careful people. The question is what it means.

What it counts

Three things about the way the number is built make it much bigger than what most of us mean by "denomination."

First, it counts by country. In this research, a church body is generally counted separately in each country where it is organized. A worldwide fellowship such as the Assemblies of God, which is organized as many national councils, can appear many times. The same is true of the Catholic Church, whose national bishops' conferences are counted separately. I was not able to open the center's own glossary page that defines the term, so I give this point as my understanding of their published method and not as a quotation. **[Not verified from the center's own definition.]**

Second, it counts independent groups. Many single congregations and small networks, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, belong to no larger body. Each one that is organized on its own can count as a separate unit.

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[9] Gina A. Zurlo, "The Annual Statistical Table for World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity", Overseas Ministries Study Center, Princeton Theological Seminary, February 12, 2024. https://omsc.ptsem.edu/the-annual-statistical-table/.

[10] Peyton Garland, "How Many Christian Denominations Are There Today?", Christianity.com, updated February 16, 2026. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/how-many-christian-denominations-are-there.html.

[11] Lausanne Movement, "Christian Denominations (in What Is Polycentric Christianity?)", Lausanne Movement, citing World Christian Database, Status of Global Christianity, 2023, page modified April 22, 2024. https://lausanne.org/report/polycentric-christianity/christian-denominations.

Third, it counts groups that most Christians do not consider Christian. The figure includes the Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, as even writers who quote it point out.[12]

None of this makes the number dishonest. It simply answers a different question from the one most people are asking. The center is asking, "How many separately organized Christian bodies exist, country by country?" Most of us are asking, "How many different kinds of Christian churches are there?"

A better way to count

If you ask the second question, the answer is much smaller and much more useful. Nearly every one of those tens of thousands of bodies belongs to one of a few large families. The Pew Research Center, which uses census and survey data from 232 countries and territories, sorts the world's Christians into four groups:[13]

Family	Share of the world's Christians (2010)
Catholic	about half
Protestant, broadly defined (including Anglicans and independent churches)	37%
Orthodox	12%
Other Christians (such as Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses)	1%

Source: Pew Research Center, *Global Christianity*, December 19, 2011.

Pew's newer study, published in 2025, found that the number of Christians grew from about 2.1 billion in 2010 to about 2.3 billion in 2020, while their share of the world's population fell from 31 percent to 29 percent.[14] The center at Gordon-Conwell counts in its own way and usually reports somewhat higher totals; for example, its 2026 report puts North America's Christians at about 275 million, while Pew counted about 238 million there in 2020.[15] Neither is wrong. They define a Christian differently and use different data. When you see a number in this book, look at its source and its year.

How this book sorts the branches

In this book I use the family tree that most historians use. It has six main families:

1. **The Church of the East**, which separated after 431.

[12] Peyton Garland, "How Many Christian Denominations Are There Today?", Christianity.com, updated February 16, 2026. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/how-many-christian-denominations-are-there.html.

[13] Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population", December 19, 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/.

[14] Conrad Hackett, Marcin Stonawski, Yunping Tong, Stephanie Kramer, Anne Shi and Dalia Fahmy, "Christian Population Change (in How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020)", Pew Research Center, June 9, 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/christian-population-change/.

[15] Obianuju Mbah, "Global Christianity Faces Major Challenges in 2026 Despite Signs of Growth, New Report Finds", Christian Today, April 26, 2026. https://www.christiantoday.com/news/global-christianity-faces-major-challenges-in-2026-despite-signs-of-growth-new-report-finds. Conrad Hackett, Marcin Stonawski, Yunping Tong, Stephanie Kramer, Anne Shi and Dalia Fahmy, "Christian Population Change (in How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020)", Pew Research Center, June 9, 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/christian-population-change/.

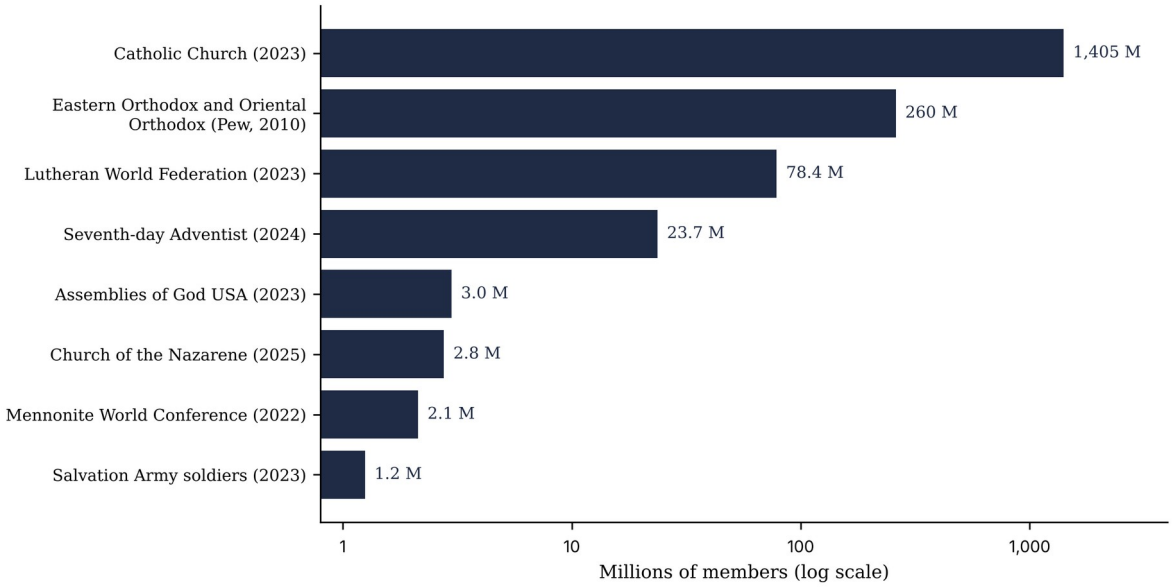
2. **The Oriental Orthodox churches**, which separated after 451.
3. **The Eastern Orthodox Church**, which divided from Rome after 1054.
4. **The Roman Catholic Church**, together with the Eastern Catholic churches in communion with Rome.
5. **The Protestant churches**, born in the Reformation of the 1500s and in the reform and revival movements that followed it. This is by far the largest number of separate bodies.
6. **Independent and Pentecostal-charismatic churches**, which some researchers place inside Protestantism and others count as their own family.

Below those families are the traditions (Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal and so on), and below those are the actual denominations and fellowships you see on church signs.

The membership numbers in this book

Each branch reports its members in its own way. Some count everyone baptized as an infant. Some count only adults who have been baptized as believers. Some count "adherents," which includes children and regular attenders who are not formal members. The table below gathers the newest figures I could confirm from each body's own reports, with the date and the kind of count.

Body or family	Reported size	What is counted, and when	Source
Catholic Church	1,405,454,000	Baptized Catholics, June 30, 2023	Fides, 2025
Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental together)	nearly 260 million	Estimate based on 2010 data	Pew, 2017
Lutheran World Federation	78,431,111	Members of 150 member churches, 2023	LWF
World Communion of Reformed Churches	more than 100 million	Members of 230-plus member churches	WCRC
Anglican Communion	about 85 million (no official count)	Frequently cited estimate	Aleteia, 2026
Seventh-day Adventist Church	23,684,237	Baptized members, end of 2024	Adventist reports
Church of the Nazarene	2,764,205	Members, 2025	General Secretary
Mennonite and other Anabaptist churches	2.13 million	Baptized believers in 86 countries (2022 census)	Mennonite World Conference
The Salvation Army	1,249,596	Soldiers, January 1, 2023	International Headquarters
Assemblies of God (USA)	2,984,352	Adherents in the United States, 2023	AG statistics



Reported size of selected Christian bodies, in millions, on a log scale so that small and large bodies fit on one chart. Each bar uses that body's own count and year, so the bars are not strictly comparable. The Assemblies of God bar is United States adherents only. Data: the table above. Chart by the author.

Sources: see the notes to each chapter.[16]

Two warnings go with this table. First, the numbers are not counted the same way, so you cannot add them up or compare them exactly. Second, some figures that are repeated everywhere could not be confirmed. The Anglican figure is a good example. One researcher, writing in the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, argued that the number of active Anglicans is far below the commonly quoted total, and the Anglican Communion Office itself said that membership figures "are almost impossible to pin down because Churches measure them in different ways."[17]

[16] Agenzia Fides, "Vatican: Catholic Church Statistics 2025", October 17, 2025. https://www.fides.org/en/news/76919-VATICAN_Catholic_Church_Statistics_2025. Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/. Lutheran World Federation, "LWF Membership Figures 2023", 2024. https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/LWF%20Membership%20Statistics%202023%20-%20EN.pdf. World Communion of Reformed Churches, "Communion", page updated September 18, 2026. https://wcrc.eu/communion/. I.Media, "Where the Anglican Communion Is Present Today", Aleteia, May 2, 2026. https://aleteia.org/2026/05/02/where-the-anglican-communion-is-present-today/. APD and EUD News (Seventh-day Adventist Church, Inter-European Division), "Adventists Grow Worldwide to 23.6 Million Members", May 30, 2025. https://news.eud.adventist.org/all-news/adventists-grow-worldwide-to-23.6-million-members. Church of the Nazarene, General Secretary, "General Secretary Releases 2025 Statistics", Church of the Nazarene Mesoamerica Region, January 17, 2026. https://www.mesonaz.org/en/general-secretary-releases-2025-statistics/. Mennonite World Conference, "Membership, Map and Statistics", 2022 census figures, page viewed November 18, 2026. https://mwc-cmm.org/node/30. The Salvation Army International Headquarters, "International Statistics (as at January 1, 2023)", 2023. https://salvationarmy.org/ihq/statistics. General Secretary's Office, Assemblies of God (USA), "2023 Summary Statistical Report", April 29, 2024. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Downloads/Statistics/Archived-Summary-Reports/2023-Summary-Statistical-Report.pdf.

[17] Ruth Gledhill, "Anglican Membership Figures Could Be Out by Millions", Christian Today, November 12, 2015. https://www.christiantoday.com/news/anglican-membership-figures-could-be-out-by-millions.

What this means for us

When someone tells you there are 45,000 denominations, you can say, "That is a real research number, but it counts every separately organized church body, including groups that are not Christian in the historic sense. The family tree is much simpler than that." And when you read about a church's size, ask the two questions a good researcher asks: Who counted, and what did they count?

Questions for Reflection

1. Before reading this chapter, what did you think the "45,000 denominations" number meant?
2. Why might a church count everyone baptized as an infant, while another counts only adult members? What does each way of counting say about how that church understands membership?
3. Read Revelation 7:9. How does that picture of the redeemed change the way you think about Christians in other nations and traditions?

   Revelation 7:9 After these things I saw, and look, a great multitude which no one was able to number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches in their hands;

Chapter 3: The First Splits: 431, 451 and 1054

The first lasting divisions in the church did not come from arguments about worship styles or church budgets. They came from the most important question anyone can ask: Who is Jesus? The church agreed He was fully God, and it agreed He was fully human. The hard part was explaining how both could be true of one Person without making Him two persons or turning Him into a blend that was neither.

My book *The Church Through the Ages* tells the story of the early councils in more depth. Here we will focus on the three breaks that created the oldest branches of the family tree.

431: The Council of Ephesus and the Church of the East

Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, objected to calling Mary *Theotokos*, a Greek word that means "God-bearer" or "Mother of God." He preferred to call her the mother of Christ. His opponents, led by Cyril of Alexandria, believed Nestorius was dividing Christ into two persons, one divine and one human. The Council of Ephesus, "the third ecumenical council, held in 431," removed Nestorius from office. The sentence against him was signed by 198 bishops.[18]

The title *Theotokos* was never mainly about honoring Mary. It was about Jesus. If the child in Mary's womb was truly God the Son, then the woman who bore Him bore God in the flesh. That is why Catholics, Orthodox and many Protestants, including Luther and Calvin, accepted the title in that sense, even when they rejected later teachings about Mary.

The churches beyond the eastern border of the Roman Empire, in Persia and Mesopotamia, did not accept the council's verdict. They had their own history, going back to the first centuries, and their own Syriac language and liturgy. Over the following decades they became a separate body that history calls the Church of the East. Its opponents called it "Nestorian," a label its members have never accepted. In 1994 the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East agreed that their old division over Christ was "due in large part to misunderstandings."[19]

The Church of the East became one of the great missionary churches of history. Its monks carried the gospel along the trade routes across Central Asia to India and China. A stone monument set up in the Chinese capital of Chang'an (modern Xi'an) in 781 records the arrival of a missionary bishop named Alopen in 635.[20] Today its main descendant is the Assyrian Church of the East, a much smaller body than its history would suggest, with members in Iraq, Iran, Syria and a large worldwide diaspora.

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[18] John Chapman, "Council of Ephesus", The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1909), 1909. https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05491a.htm.

[19] Pope John Paul II and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, "Common Christological Declaration Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East", November 11, 1994. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1994/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19941111_dichiarazione-cristologica.html.

[20] T. N. Ho, "What a 1,200-Year-Old Stone Tablet Tells Us About the Church in China (Xi'an Stele)", Christianity Today, November 11, 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/2022/11/china-nestorian-church-stele-mission.

451: The Council of Chalcedon and the Oriental Orthodox

Twenty years later, the argument swung the other way. Some teachers so stressed the unity of Christ that they seemed to swallow His humanity into His divinity. In 451 the emperor Marcian called a council at Chalcedon, across the water from Constantinople. About 520 bishops approved a letter of Pope Leo I and a definition "confirming two distinct natures in Christ," and "rejecting the monophysite doctrine that Christ had only one nature."[21]

The Chalcedonian Definition says Christ is one Person in two natures, divine and human, united without being mixed together or changed, and without being divided or separated. Most of the churches of Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia and Syria did not accept the council. They held, and still hold, that Christ has one united nature that is fully divine and fully human. They call this teaching *miaphysite*, from Greek words meaning "one nature," and they reject the label "monophysite" because they do not believe Christ's humanity was swallowed up.

Those churches are known today as the **Oriental Orthodox** churches. Pew estimates that they make up roughly 20 percent of the world's Orthodox Christians, and that Ethiopia alone has about 36 million Orthodox believers.[22] In the last century, scholars and church leaders on both sides have concluded that much of the dispute was over words more than over faith, and several joint statements have said so. The churches still are not in communion with one another.

1054: East and West

The third break was slower and less about a single doctrine. For centuries the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West drifted apart in language, culture, politics and church practice. Britannica's summary lists the main issues: the Pope's claim to authority over the whole church, which was "never acknowledged in the East"; the West's addition of the word *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed ("The Roman churches, without consulting the East, added 'and from the Son'"); and differences such as the West's use of unleavened bread in Communion and its rules on clergy marriage.[23]

In 1054 representatives of Pope Leo IX laid a sentence of excommunication against Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople, and Cerularius answered with an excommunication of his own. Historians date "the final break" to that year.[24] At the time, many people did not think the church had split for good. What hardened the division was what came after, especially "the Latin capture of Constantinople in 1204," when soldiers of the Fourth Crusade sacked the greatest Christian city in the East.[25]

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[21] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Council of Chalcedon", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/Council-of-Chalcedon.

[22] Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/.

[23] Encyclopaedia Britannica (revised and updated by Adam Augustyn), "East-West Schism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054.

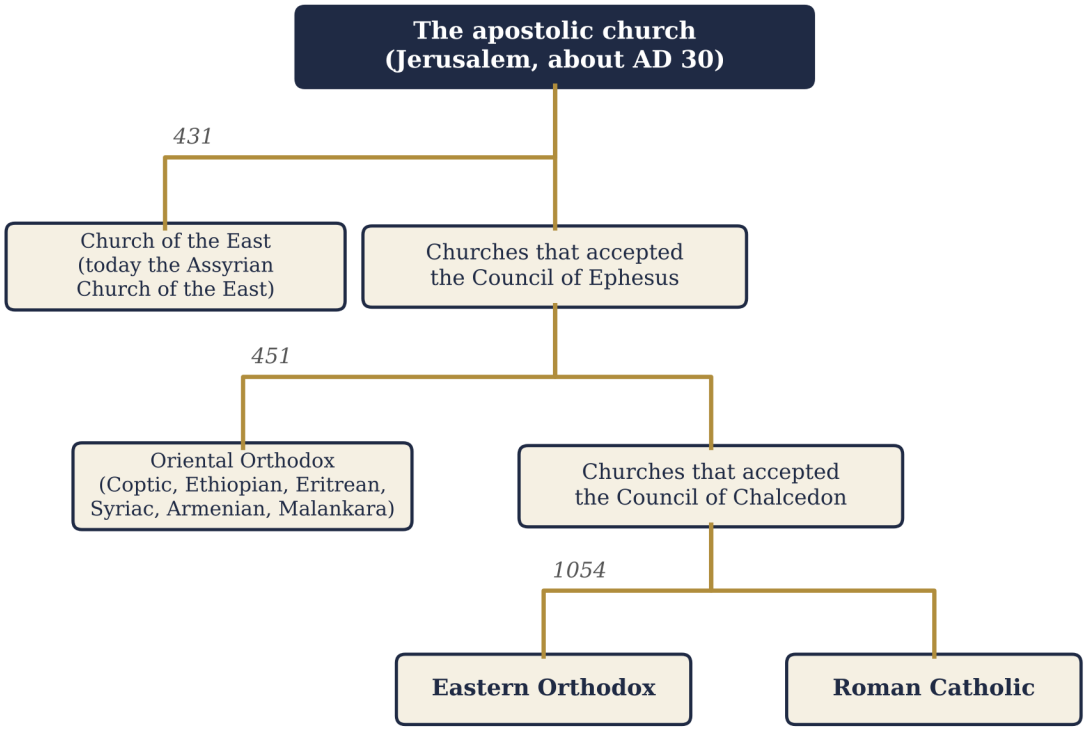
[24] Encyclopaedia Britannica (revised and updated by Adam Augustyn), "East-West Schism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054.

[25] Encyclopaedia Britannica (revised and updated by Adam Augustyn), "East-West Schism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054.

In 1965 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I issued a joint declaration. They said they "regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication" of 1054. But they were careful to say that this "gesture of justice and mutual pardon is not sufficient to end both old and more recent differences" between the two churches.[26] The excommunications are gone. The division is not.

A simple family tree

The chart below shows how the oldest branches relate. Solid lines show documented separations. The dates are the usual dates historians give; in each case the break took years to harden.



The oldest branches of the Christian family tree. Dates are the conventional dates of separation. Chart by the author.

What this means for us

It is easy for modern Christians to think these early councils were arguments over fine print. They were not. If Jesus is not truly God, He cannot save us. If He is not truly man, He cannot stand in our place. The church fought hard over the words because the gospel depends on the reality behind them. At the same time, these early splits remind us that sincere believers who love the same Lord can talk past each other for centuries. Patience and careful listening matter.

[26] Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, "Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration", December 7, 1965. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_common-declaration.html.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does it matter that Jesus is one Person who is both fully God and fully human?
2. The Church of the East sent missionaries all the way to China in the 600s. What does that tell you about the faith of churches many Western Christians have never heard of?
3. The 1965 declaration removed old excommunications but did not end the division. What is the difference between forgiving an old wrong and solving a real disagreement?

Part Two: The Ancient Churches Today

Chapter 4: The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches

The Catholic Church is the largest Christian body on earth. As of June 30, 2023, it counted 1,405,454,000 baptized Catholics, about 17.8 percent of the world's population, served by 5,430 bishops and 406,996 priests.[27] Most Catholics today live not in Europe but in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Origins

The Catholic Church traces itself to the apostles, and especially to Peter, whom it regards as the first bishop of Rome. Catholic teaching rests that claim on Jesus' words to Peter:

> **Matthew 16:18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and ***the*** gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Protestants and Orthodox read that verse differently. Many Protestants hold that the "rock" is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, or Peter as the first preacher of that confession, not an office passed down to later bishops of Rome. The Orthodox honor Peter and the early bishops of Rome but reject the Pope's claim to authority over the whole church.

As a matter of history, the church in Rome was one of the most respected churches from very early on, and its bishop's influence grew over the centuries. The Catholic Church as a body distinct from the Eastern Orthodox dates from the break with Constantinople that hardened after 1054 (Chapter 3). Its doctrine was given much of its modern shape at the Council of Trent (1545 to 1563), which answered the Protestant Reformation, and at the First and Second Vatican Councils (1869 to 1870 and 1962 to 1965).

How it is governed

The Catholic Church is governed by bishops in communion with the Pope, the bishop of Rome. Catholic teaching holds that the Pope and the bishops together form the church's teaching office, called the Magisterium. It also teaches that when the Pope, as supreme teacher, solemnly defines a doctrine of faith or morals, he is protected from error. This is the doctrine of papal infallibility. The Catechism adds that the same gift belongs to the bishops acting together with the Pope, "above all in an Ecumenical Council."[28] Papal infallibility itself was defined at the First Vatican Council in the constitution *Pastor Aeternus* on July 18, 1870.[29] Infallibility is often misunderstood. It does not mean the Pope cannot sin or cannot be wrong in ordinary statements. It applies only to rare, solemn definitions.

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[27] Agenzia Fides, "Vatican: Catholic Church Statistics 2025", October 17, 2025. https://www.fides.org/en/news/76919-VATICAN_Catholic_Church_Statistics_2025.

[28] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 891 (infallibility of the Pope and bishops)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/891.htm.

[29] David Werning, "An Unfailing Treasure: Pastor Aeternus and Defining Papal Infallibility", Our Sunday Visitor, February 7, 2022. https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/an-unfailing-treasure-pastor-aeternus-and-defining-papal-infallibility/.

What it teaches

- **Authority.** Scripture and sacred Tradition together, interpreted by the Magisterium, form one deposit of faith.[30] Catholic Bibles include seven Old Testament books that Protestants call the Apocrypha and Catholics call the deuterocanonical books.
- **Sacraments.** The Catholic Church teaches seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance (also called Reconciliation), the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.[31] It baptizes infants.
- **The Eucharist.** It teaches that at the consecration the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, a change the Council of Trent called transubstantiation, while the appearance of bread and wine remains.[32]
- **Salvation.** Catholic teaching holds that justification is God's work of grace, received in Baptism, by which a person is made righteous, and that grace must be cooperated with and can be lost through mortal sin. It teaches purgatory, a final purification after death for those who die in God's grace.
- **Mary and the saints.** It teaches that Mary was "preserved free from all stain of original sin" (the Immaculate Conception, defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854) and was "taken up body and soul into heavenly glory" (the Assumption, defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950).[Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 966 (the Assumption of Mary)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/966.htm.]

  [Frederick G. Holweck, "Immaculate Conception", The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910); New Advent edition, 1910. https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm.][33] Catholics ask the saints to pray for them.
- **The end times.** Catholic teaching rejects the idea of a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ before the final judgment. The Catechism calls that idea "millenarianism" and rejects it.[34] In practice this places Catholic teaching close to what Protestants call the amillennial view (Chapter 20).

The Eastern Catholic churches

Many people do not know that the Catholic Church is not only "Roman." There are 23 Eastern Catholic churches that keep their own Eastern liturgies, laws and customs while being in full communion with the Pope.[35] The largest include the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Syro-Malabar Church of India and the Maronite Church of Lebanon. Many of their priests may marry. Most of these churches came

[30] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 97 (Tradition and Scripture)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/97.htm.

[31] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1113 (the seven sacraments)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/1113.htm.

[32] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1376 (transubstantiation)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/1376.htm.

[33] Pope Pius XII, "Munificentissimus Deus: Defining the Dogma of the Assumption", Apostolic constitution, November 1, 1950. paragraph 44. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html.

[34] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 676 (millenarianism)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/676.htm.

into union with Rome in the centuries after 1054, often out of Orthodox or Oriental churches, and that history is still a sore point between Catholics and Orthodox.

The Catholic emblem

The best-known Catholic emblem is the crossed keys, one gold and one silver, on the coat of arms of the Holy See. They recall Jesus' promise to give Peter "the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" (Matthew 16:19). Like all church emblems, it is described here, not reproduced.

Where I land

I am a Protestant, and I disagree with the Catholic Church on the authority of tradition, on the Pope, on the sacrifice of the Mass and on how a person is justified. But I also know Catholic believers who love Jesus deeply, and the Catholic Church has faithfully defended the Trinity, the deity of Christ and His bodily resurrection for many centuries. A fair description has to say both things.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 16:13-19. How do Catholics and Protestants read the word "rock" in this passage?
2. Why do you think the Catholic Church places so much weight on the continuity of bishops from the apostles?
3. What did you learn about the Eastern Catholic churches that you did not know before?

[35] Victoria Cardiel (EWTN News), "The 23 Eastern Catholic Churches: Ancient Traditions in Communion with Rome", Catholic World Report, September 20, 2026. https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2026/09/20/the-23-eastern-catholic-churches-ancient-traditions-in-communion-with-rome/.

Chapter 5: The Eastern Orthodox Church

If you step into an Orthodox church, the first things you will notice are the icons covering the walls, the smell of incense, the singing that hardly stops, and the fact that, in many parishes, most people stand for the whole service. The Orthodox believe they have kept the faith and worship of the early church without adding or taking away.

Size and spread

Pew estimated nearly 260 million Orthodox Christians in the world, including the Oriental Orthodox churches covered in the next chapter, and noted that Russia alone has more than 100 million.[36] Orthodox Christians make up about 12 percent of the world's Christians.[37] Their heartland is Eastern Europe, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, the Balkans, Georgia and the Middle East.

How it is organized

The Orthodox Church is a family of self-governing churches, called autocephalous churches, that share one faith and receive Communion together. Examples include the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, and the churches of Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece and others. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a place of honor as "first among equals," but he does not have the kind of authority the Pope has in the Catholic Church. Decisions for the whole church are made by councils of bishops.

The Orthodox family is not free of conflict. On October 15, 2018, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church declared it "impossible to continue to be in Eucharistic communion with the Patriarchate of Constantinople," after Constantinople decided on October 11 to grant self-governing status (autocephaly) to an Orthodox Church of Ukraine.[38]

What it teaches

- **Authority.** Holy Tradition, with Scripture at its heart, guarded by the whole church and expressed in the seven ecumenical councils (from Nicaea in 325 to Nicaea II in 787).
- **The Creed.** The Orthodox confess the Nicene Creed without the Western phrase "and the Son."
- **Salvation.** The Orthodox describe salvation as *theosis*, a word meaning being made by grace a partaker of God's life. They often quote Peter's words about becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

[36] Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/.

[37] Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/.

[38] Vatican News, "Russian Orthodox Church Breaks "Eucharistic Communion" with Patriarchate of Constantinople", Vatican News, October 16, 2018. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2018-10/russian-orthodox-break-communion-with-ecumenical-patriarch.html.

- **Sacraments.** The Orthodox usually speak of "mysteries" and commonly list seven. They baptize infants by triple immersion and give them Communion and chrismation (anointing) right away.
- **Icons.** The Orthodox venerate icons, but they insist that the honor passes to the person shown and that worship belongs to God alone. The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 defended this practice.
- **Clergy.** Married men may be ordained priests, but bishops are chosen from the celibate monks.
- **The end times.** Orthodox teaching looks for Christ's return, the resurrection and the final judgment, and like the Catholic Church it has not taught a literal thousand-year reign before the judgment.

The Orthodox cross

The cross most associated with Russian and Slavic Orthodoxy has three bars: a short top bar for the sign above Jesus' head, the main crossbar, and a slanted footrest near the bottom. Orthodox tradition says the footrest points upward toward the thief who repented and downward toward the one who did not. This is a traditional meaning, not a historical record.

Where I land

I find much to admire in Orthodox reverence, their deep love of the early church fathers, and the faith of Orthodox believers who held on under communist persecution in the twentieth century. I differ with them on the authority of tradition and on how a sinner is justified before God. Again, both things are true.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read 2 Peter 1:3-4. What do you think Peter means by "partakers of the divine nature"? How does that compare with how your church speaks about salvation?
2. Why might a church that suffered under communism value tradition so highly?
3. What can Western Christians learn from Orthodox worship?

Chapter 6: The Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East

Most Western Christians have never heard of the Oriental Orthodox churches, even though some of them are among the oldest Christian communities on earth. These are the churches that did not accept the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (Chapter 3).

The six Oriental Orthodox churches

The Oriental Orthodox family is usually counted as six churches in full communion with each other:

- **The Coptic Orthodox Church** of Egypt, which traces itself to the preaching of Mark the Gospel writer in Alexandria. Pew estimated about 4 million Orthodox Christians in Egypt, about 5 percent of the population.[39]
- **The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church**, the largest, with an estimated 36 million members, nearly 14 percent of all the world's Orthodox.[40] *Tewahedo* means "made one," a word for the union of Christ's two natures. Christianity became the faith of the royal court of Aksum in the 300s, and Acts 8 records an Ethiopian official's baptism even earlier.
- **The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church**, which became independent of the Ethiopian church after Eritrea's independence in the 1990s.
- **The Armenian Apostolic Church.** Armenian tradition says King Tiridates III adopted Christianity through the preaching of Gregory the Illuminator in 301, which would make Armenia the first kingdom to do so. Some historians date it a few years later, around 314. **[Disputed date]**
- **The Syriac Orthodox Church**, centered historically in Antioch and Syria.
- **The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church** of India, part of the ancient "Saint Thomas Christians" of Kerala, who trace their faith to the apostle Thomas. That tradition is very old, but there is no first-century record that proves Thomas reached India. **[Unresolved]**

What they teach

The Oriental Orthodox share most of what Eastern Orthodox and Catholics believe about the sacraments, the saints and church tradition. Their difference is their wording about Christ. They confess "one incarnate nature of God the Word," united from two natures without mixture, change, separation or division. In recent decades, theologians from the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox families have stated in joint meetings that they share the same faith in Christ even though they use different words. Full communion between the two families has not been restored.

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[39] Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/.

[40] Pew Research Center, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century", November 8, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/.

The Church of the East

The Church of the East, which separated after the Council of Ephesus in 431, once stretched from Syria to China. Its best-known monument is the stone tablet of 781 in Chang'an (Xi'an), China, which records the arrival of the missionary Alopen in 635.[41] Today the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East are its main heirs, with a much smaller membership living in Iraq, Iran, Syria and a worldwide diaspora.

In 1994 Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church of the East signed a common declaration on the person of Christ. In it the two churches recognized that they share the same faith in Christ, even though one says "Mother of God" and the other "Mother of Christ."[42]

Why they matter

These churches remind us that Christianity was never a European religion. It was Middle Eastern, African and Asian long before it was American. Many of these churches have lived as small minorities under hostile rulers for over a thousand years, and some still suffer persecution today.

Questions for Reflection

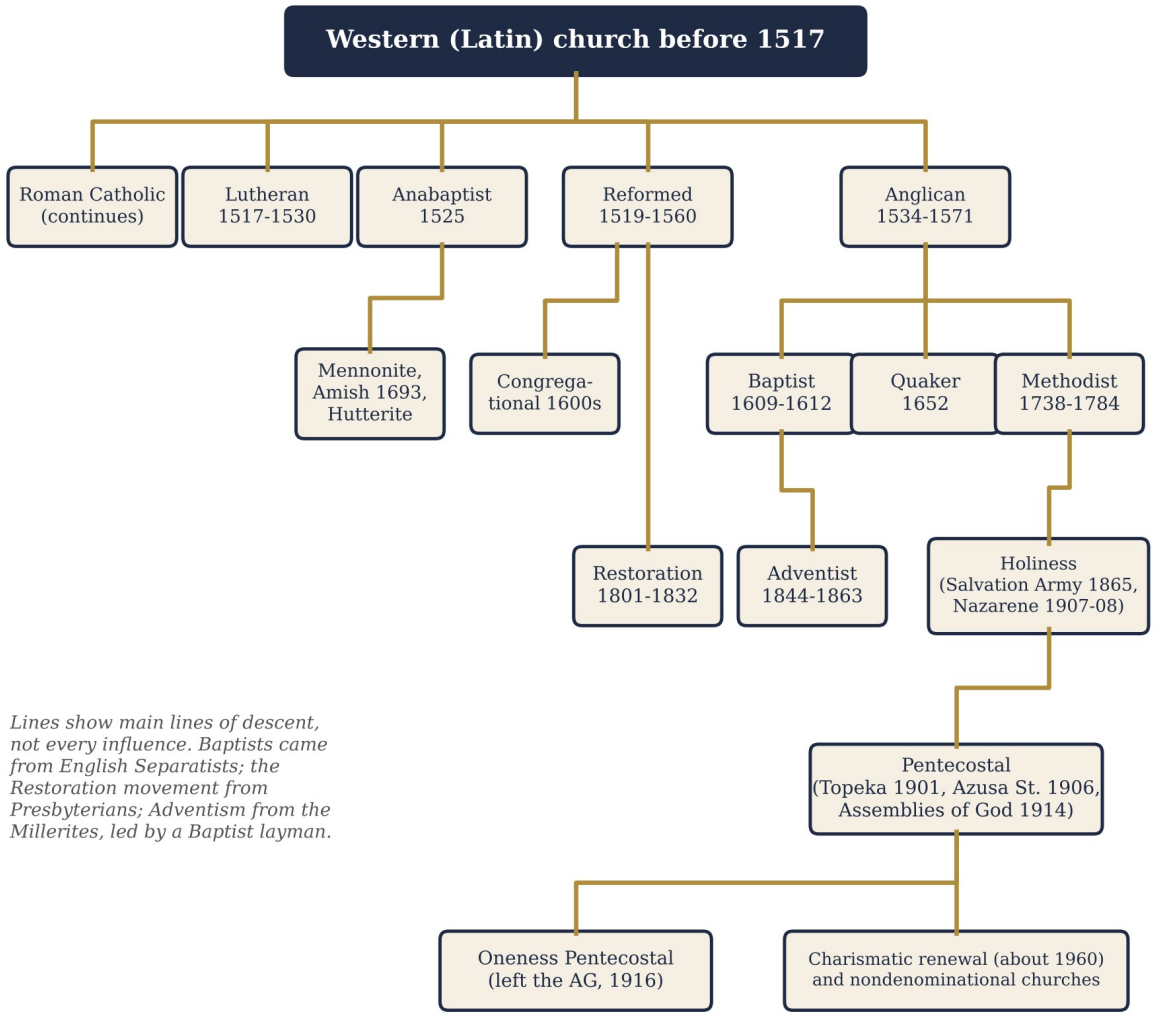
1. Read Acts 8:26-39. How does the story of the Ethiopian official connect with the church in Ethiopia today?
2. Why do you think so many Western believers know little about these churches?
3. What can we learn from churches that have kept their faith as minorities for centuries?

[41] T. N. Ho, "What a 1,200-Year-Old Stone Tablet Tells Us About the Church in China (Xi'an Stele)", Christianity Today, November 11, 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/2022/11/china-nestorian-church-stele-mission.

[42] Pope John Paul II and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, "Common Christological Declaration Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East", November 11, 1994. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1994/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19941111_dichiarazione-cristologica.html.

Part Three: The Reformation Families

Parts Three, Four and Five follow the Western branch of the family after 1517. The chart below shows how the main Protestant families are related. Each box is explained in its own chapter.



The Western branches of the Christian family tree after 1517. Dates are those given in the chapters that follow. Chart by the author.

Chapter 7: Lutherans

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk and university teacher in Wittenberg, Germany, named Martin Luther sent out ninety-five theses, or propositions for debate, attacking the sale of indulgences. An indulgence was a church grant that was said to reduce the punishment due for sins, including for the dead in purgatory, and in Luther's day they were being sold to raise money for the rebuilding of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Luther did not set out to start a new church. He set out to reform the one he loved. But within a few years he had been excommunicated by the Pope and condemned by the emperor, and the churches that followed his teaching became the first Protestant family.

The famous picture of Luther hammering his theses to the church door is less certain than most people think. I look at that question in Chapter 24.

What Lutherans teach

The heart of Lutheran faith is justification by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Luther found it in Paul's letter to the Romans:

> **Romans 3:28** Therefore we reckon a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law.

Lutheran teaching is set out in the *Book of Concord* (1580), which gathers the ancient creeds and the Reformation confessions, above all the Augsburg Confession presented to Emperor Charles V in 1530.[43]

- **Authority.** Scripture is the only rule and norm of teaching. The creeds and confessions are valued because they agree with Scripture.
- **Baptism.** Lutherans baptize infants and teach that baptism is a means by which God gives grace.
- **The Lord's Supper.** Lutherans teach that Christ's true body and blood are present "in, with and under" the bread and wine. Outsiders sometimes call this "consubstantiation," a word most Lutherans do not use.
- **Worship.** Lutheran worship keeps much of the historic liturgy, the church year and vestments, while removing what Luther believed contradicted the gospel.
- **The end times.** The Augsburg Confession teaches that Christ "will appear for judgment" at the end of the world and condemns "certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world."[44] Lutherans are generally amillennial.

[43] Lutheran reformers, "Augsburg Confession (1530), Article XVII: Of Christ's Return to Judgment", Book of Concord (bookofconcord.org), read November 18, 2026. https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/article-xvii/.

[44] Lutheran reformers, "Augsburg Confession (1530), Article XVII: Of Christ's Return to Judgment", Book of Concord (bookofconcord.org), read November 18, 2026. https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/article-xvii/.

Lutherans today

The Lutheran World Federation, a communion of 150 member churches, reported 78,431,111 members in 2023. Its largest member church is not in Germany or Scandinavia but in Africa: the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, with 12 million members.[45] Some Lutheran bodies, such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the United States, are not members of the federation, so the total number of Lutherans is higher.

In the United States the two largest bodies are the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). They differ on the ordination of women, on sexual ethics, and on how strictly they hold to the Lutheran confessions.

Luther's Rose

Luther adopted a personal seal: a black cross inside a red heart, set in a white rose on a blue field with a gold ring. In a letter he explained each part as a picture of faith in the crucified Christ bringing joy and peace. The seal is old enough to be in the public domain, and many Lutheran churches use it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Romans 3:21-28. Why did these verses change Luther's life?
2. What did Luther intend to do in 1517, and what actually happened?
3. Lutherans and Baptists both say "faith alone," but they disagree about baptism. Why do you think that is?

[45] Lutheran World Federation, "LWF Membership Figures 2023", 2024. https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/LWF%20Membership%20Statistics%202023%20-%20EN.pdf.

Chapter 8: Reformed and Presbyterian Churches

The second Protestant family began in Switzerland. In Zurich, the pastor Huldrych Zwingli began on January 1, 1519, to preach straight through the Gospel of Matthew and led the city into reform. John Calvin, a French lawyer turned theologian, published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in Basel in 1536,[46] and he spent most of his life building a church that would shape much of Protestant Europe. From Geneva, John Knox carried Reformed teaching home to Scotland, where in 1560 six ministers, Knox among them, drafted the Scots Confession in four days and Parliament ratified it.[47]

"Reformed" describes the theology of this family. "Presbyterian" describes its usual form of church government. They are two sides of the same tradition, which is why the popular chart that started this book should not have listed them as separate families.

What Reformed churches teach

- **The sovereignty of God.** God rules over all things, including salvation. Reformed churches teach that God chose His people for salvation by grace, not because of anything in them.
- **Scripture alone,** confessed through statements such as the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).
- **Covenant.** God deals with His people through covenants, which is also why most Reformed churches baptize the infants of believers, as Israel circumcised its children.
- **The Lord's Supper.** Calvin taught that Christ is truly present to believers by the Holy Spirit, who lifts them up to feed on Him by faith. Zwingli stressed the Supper as a memorial.
- **Church government.** Presbyterian churches are led by elders. Teaching elders (pastors) and ruling elders govern each congregation as a session, and congregations are joined in presbyteries, synods and general assemblies.
- **The end times.** Most Reformed churches are amillennial, and some are postmillennial. The Westminster Confession speaks of the last judgment and Christ's return without setting out a thousand-year earthly reign.

Reformed churches today

The World Communion of Reformed Churches reports "more than 230 member churches in 109 countries" with more than 100 million Christians.[48] The family is large in the Netherlands, Scotland, Switzerland, Hungary, South Korea, Indonesia, southern Africa and the United States. In the United

[46] Patheos Religion Library, "Presbyterian Christianity: Founders", Patheos, n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://patheos.com/library/presbyterian/origins/founders.

[47] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "The Scots Confession: Historical Note", Book of Confessions, Geneva Press, 1996; reproduced at creeds.net, 1996. https://www.creeds.net/reformed/Scots/intro.htm.

[48] World Communion of Reformed Churches, "Communion", page updated September 18, 2026. https://wcrc.eu/communion/.

States the largest bodies include the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church.

The burning bush

The emblem of the Church of Scotland and many other Presbyterian churches is the burning bush, from the account of Moses in Exodus 3, often with the Latin motto *Nec tamen consumebatur*, "yet it was not consumed." It pictures a church that suffers but is not destroyed.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-6. How do Reformed Christians understand these verses? How does your church understand them?
2. Why might a church led by elders be slower to change than one led by a single pastor?
3. What can every believer learn from the Reformed emphasis on God's sovereignty?

Chapter 9: Anglicans and Episcopalians

The English Reformation began with a king's marriage, but it did not end there. In 1534 Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which declared that the English monarch had always been "Supreme Head of the Church of England."[49] Henry himself stayed close to Catholic doctrine. Real Protestant reform came under his son Edward VI, when Archbishop Thomas Cranmer produced the *Book of Common Prayer*, which Parliament required in 1549.[50] After a return to Catholicism under Mary I, Queen Elizabeth I settled the church on a Protestant footing that kept bishops and much of the old liturgy. The Thirty-Nine Articles of 1571 set out its doctrine.

What Anglicans teach

Anglicans are often described as a "middle way" between Rome and Geneva. They are held together less by one detailed confession than by a shared prayer book, the historic creeds, and bishops who trace their ordination back through the centuries.

- **Authority.** Scripture is the highest authority. The Thirty-Nine Articles say Scripture "containeth all things necessary to salvation." Anglicans also give weight to the early church and to reason.
- **Sacraments.** Two "sacraments of the gospel," Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Anglicans baptize infants.
- **Wings.** "High church" or Anglo-Catholic Anglicans stress liturgy and sacraments. "Low church" or evangelical Anglicans stress preaching, conversion and the Reformation confessions. A broad middle stands between them.

Anglicans today

The Anglican Communion is made up of about 40 self-governing provinces "spread across 165 countries." There is "no official count" of Anglicans; "85 million is a frequently cited estimate."[51] That figure has been challenged. One scholar argued the number of active Anglicans is far lower, and the Communion's own office said membership figures "are almost impossible to pin down because Churches measure them in different ways."[52] The largest Anglican churches by membership are now in Africa, especially Nigeria and Uganda.

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[49] Olivia Isil (ed. lebame houston and Wynne Dough), "Unit 1: The Church of England in the Sixteenth Century", National Park Service, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, updated April 14, 2015. https://home.nps.gov/fora/forteachers/unit-1-the-church-of-england-in-the-sixteenth-century.htm.

[50] Olivia Isil (ed. lebame houston and Wynne Dough), "Unit 1: The Church of England in the Sixteenth Century", National Park Service, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, updated April 14, 2015. https://home.nps.gov/fora/forteachers/unit-1-the-church-of-england-in-the-sixteenth-century.htm.

[51] I.Media, "Where the Anglican Communion Is Present Today", Aleteia, May 2, 2026. https://aleteia.org/2026/05/02/where-the-anglican-communion-is-present-today/.

[52] Ruth Gledhill, "Anglican Membership Figures Could Be Out by Millions", Christian Today, November 12, 2015. https://www.christiantoday.com/news/anglican-membership-figures-could-be-out-by-millions.

The Communion is deeply divided over sexual ethics and the authority of Scripture. Many conservative Anglican provinces, especially in Africa, have formed their own networks, such as GAFCON, which claims to represent most of the world's active Anglicans.[53] In the United States, the Episcopal Church is the official member of the Communion, while the more conservative Anglican Church in North America was formed in 2009.

The compass rose

The emblem of the Anglican Communion is a compass rose around the cross of Saint George, with a Greek inscription of Jesus' words, "the truth will make you free" (John 8:32), and a bishop's mitre on top. It was designed in the 1950s and is a protected emblem; it is described here, not reproduced.

Questions for Reflection

1. The English Reformation began with politics but became a matter of faith for many people. Can God use mixed motives to bring about good?
2. What value do you see in praying with written prayers, as Anglicans do? What dangers?
3. How should Christians respond when a church body is divided over the authority of Scripture?

[53] I.Media, "Where the Anglican Communion Is Present Today", Aleteia, May 2, 2026. https://aleteia.org/2026/05/02/where-the-anglican-communion-is-present-today/.

Chapter 10: Anabaptists: Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites

The fourth Reformation family was the most radical, and the most persecuted. Some of Zwingli's own students in Zurich came to believe that only those who personally confessed faith should be baptized. In January 1525, at Zollikon, just outside Zurich, they baptized one another as believers. Britannica dates the first adult baptism to "probably" January 21, 1525, and names Conrad Grebel among the leaders.[54] Their enemies called them *Anabaptists*, which means "rebaptizers." They called themselves brothers and sisters.

Both Catholic and Protestant authorities treated them as dangerous. Thousands were executed, many by drowning, a cruel mockery of their baptism. Their faith under persecution is one of the great stories of the Reformation.

What Anabaptists teach

In 1527 a group of Swiss Anabaptists agreed on seven articles at Schleitheim, drafted under the leadership of Michael Sattler, who was martyred later that year.[55]

- **Believer's baptism.** Baptism is for those who confess faith, not for infants.
- **A gathered church.** The church is a community of committed disciples, separate from the world and disciplined by its members.
- **Nonresistance.** Most Anabaptists refuse to take up the sword, including in war.
- **No oaths.** They take Jesus' command, "do not swear at all" (Matthew 5:34), literally.
- **The Lord's Supper** is a memorial and a sign of unity among believers.
- **The end times.** Anabaptist churches hold a range of views, and most emphasize faithful living now over detailed prophecy charts.

The Anabaptist families

- **Mennonites** take their name from Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest in the Netherlands who became a leader of the peaceful Anabaptists, along with Dirk Philips.[56]
- **Hutterites** follow Jakob Hutter, who taught that believers should hold all goods in common. Their colonies are "now located primarily in the western United States and Canada."[57]

[54] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anabaptist", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anabaptists.

[55] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anabaptist", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anabaptists.

[56] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anabaptist", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anabaptists.

[57] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Anabaptist", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anabaptists.

- **The Amish** separated from the Swiss Brethren in 1693 in the Emmental region of Bern under Jakob Ammann, who insisted on the strict shunning (Meidung) of excommunicated members and introduced foot washing.[58]

The Mennonite World Conference counts "2.13 million baptized believers in 86 countries." More than a third of them are now in Africa, about 36 percent, and about 30 percent are in North America.[59]

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 5:38-48. How do Anabaptists apply these words? How does your church apply them?
2. Why do you think both Catholics and other Protestants persecuted the Anabaptists so harshly?
3. What can the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship teach the rest of us?

[58] Harold S. Bender and Samuel J. Steiner, "Ammann, Jakob (17th/18th century)", Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, January 2005. https://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A463ME.html.

[59] Mennonite World Conference, "Membership, Map and Statistics", 2022 census figures, page viewed November 18, 2026. https://mwc-cmm.org/node/30.

Part Four: Free Churches, Revival and Restoration

Chapter 11: Baptists

The Baptists did not come out of the Anabaptists, though the two share a conviction that baptism belongs to believers. Baptists came out of the English Separatists, Puritans who decided the Church of England could not be reformed from within and who left it to form their own congregations.

Origins

In 1609 an English Separatist pastor named John Smyth, living in exile in Amsterdam, "organized the first Baptist church."[60] One of his members, Thomas Helwys, wrote a Declaration of Faith in 1611, and in 1612 Helwys led part of the congregation home "and established the first Baptist church on English soil at Spitalsfield," outside London.[61] That same year Helwys published *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity*, which historian Doug Weaver calls "the first treatise in England to call for complete religious liberty for all people."[62] Helwys died in prison.

These first Baptists were called General Baptists because they believed Christ died for all people. A second group, the Particular Baptists, formed from the late 1630s. They were Calvinists, and by 1641 they had settled on immersion as the proper mode of baptism.[63]

In America, Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts in 1635 for his views on religious liberty. He founded Providence, Rhode Island, and "helped to establish the first Baptist church in America around 1639," though he himself remained a Baptist for only a few months.[64]

What Baptists teach

Britannica sums up the Baptist distinctive simply: Baptists "insist that only believers should be baptized and that it should be done by immersion."[65] Around that conviction stand several others:

- **Authority.** Scripture alone is the final authority. Many Baptist bodies publish confessions of faith, but they treat them as summaries, not as binding creeds equal to Scripture.
- **Baptism and the Lord's Supper** are called ordinances, acts of obedience and witness, rather than sacraments that convey grace.

[60] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

[61] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

[62] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

[63] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

[64] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

[65] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Baptist", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baptist.

- **The local church** governs itself. Each congregation calls its own pastor and owns its own property. Conventions and associations cooperate for missions and education but do not rule the churches.
- **Religious liberty.** From Helwys and Williams forward, Baptists have argued that the state has no right to command the conscience.
- **The end times.** Baptists hold every view in Chapter 20. Many American Baptists are premillennial, and a large share of those hold to a pre-tribulation rapture, but no single view is required across the Baptist family.

Baptists today

Because each congregation is independent, there are many Baptist conventions, from the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention in the United States to large Baptist bodies in Nigeria, Brazil, India and Myanmar. Membership figures are reported by each convention in its own way, and many Baptist churches belong to no convention at all, so I do not give a single world total.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Acts 8:35-38. What does this account show about who was baptized and when?
2. Why do you think religious liberty became so important to the early Baptists?
3. What are the strengths and the risks of having every congregation govern itself?

Chapter 12: Congregationalists and Quakers

Two other movements came out of the same English Puritan world in the seventeenth century. Both rejected bishops. One kept a learned ministry and the Reformed faith. The other set aside clergy and outward sacraments altogether.

Congregationalists

The Congregationalists were Puritans who held that each local congregation, gathered by covenant under Christ, is a complete church that needs no bishop or presbytery above it. Unlike the Baptists, they kept infant baptism and Reformed theology. The Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth and the Puritans who settled Massachusetts Bay built their churches on this pattern, and Congregational churches shaped New England's schools, town meetings and early colleges.

In the United States most Congregational churches, by then joined with the Christian Church as the Congregational Christian Churches, became part of the United Church of Christ, which was born on June 25, 1957, from a union with the Evangelical and Reformed Church.[66] Others stayed independent in smaller fellowships, such as the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

George Fox (1624-1691) was a young Englishman who searched the churches of his day for spiritual help and found none that satisfied him. In 1652 he had a vision on Pendle Hill, and soon after he preached to a large crowd from a rock near Sedbergh, a sermon "considered by many to be the beginning of the Quaker movement."[67] Fox taught that every person can know God directly, "without needing clergy to intercede."[68] His followers called themselves Friends. Their enemies called them Quakers, because they were said to tremble at the word of the Lord.

- **The Inner Light.** Friends teach that the light of Christ is present in every person. Historic Quakers tied this closely to Scripture. Some modern liberal Friends hold it more loosely.
- **Worship.** Traditional Friends meet in silence, with no pastor and no set order, and anyone may speak as moved. Many Friends churches in the United States, Africa and Latin America now have pastors and planned services.
- **No outward sacraments.** Friends do not practice water baptism or the Lord's Supper, teaching that the true baptism and communion are inward and spiritual.
- **Testimonies.** Friends are known for plain speech, honesty in trade, refusal to swear oaths, opposition to war, and early opposition to slavery.

[66] United Church of Christ, "History", ucc.org, page modified January 26, 2026. https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/history/.

[67] Quaker Information Center (quaker.org), "George Fox (1624-1691)", page updated July 31, 2024. https://quaker.org/george-fox/.

[68] Quaker Information Center (quaker.org), "George Fox (1624-1691)", page updated July 31, 2024. https://quaker.org/george-fox/.

Quakers matter to this book because they show how far the Reformation principle of going back to the source could be taken. Most Protestants believe the Friends went too far in setting aside baptism and the Lord's Supper, which Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19).

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 18:20 and 1 Corinthians 14:26-33. What do these verses suggest about how a congregation should worship and decide?
2. What do you admire about the Quaker testimonies? Where would you disagree with Quaker teaching?
3. Why do you think the Congregationalists and Baptists, so close in their beginnings, parted over baptism?

Chapter 13: Moravians and Methodists

The Moravians

The Moravian Church is older than Luther. It was "founded in 1457 in Bohemia" by followers of the Czech reformer Jan Hus, who had been burned at the stake in 1415, and it called itself the Unitas Fratrum, the Unity of the Brethren.[69] Persecution nearly destroyed it. In the 1720s a small group of surviving Brethren found refuge on the estate of Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf in Saxony, where they built the village of Herrnhut. The renewed church dates itself from 1727, and the Moravians remember August 13, 1727 as a day when the Holy Spirit fell on their gathering.[70]

From Herrnhut, Moravian missionaries went to the West Indies, North America and beyond, among the first Protestants to send missionaries in large numbers.[71] Their simple, heartfelt faith had a direct effect on John and Charles Wesley, who met Moravians on a voyage to Georgia and later took part in a Moravian-influenced religious society at Fetter Lane in London.[72]

The Methodists

John Wesley was an Anglican priest, and so was his brother Charles. Both were earnest and disciplined, and both lacked assurance of their own salvation. In May 1738 that changed. Charles found peace on May 21. Three days later, on May 24, John attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London where someone was reading Luther's preface to Romans, and he wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed."[73]

The Wesleys never meant to leave the Church of England. They organized converts into societies, classes and bands for prayer, Bible study and accountability, and John preached in fields and town squares when the parish churches closed their doors to him. Charles wrote thousands of hymns. After the American Revolution, Wesley sent Thomas Coke to ordain Francis Asbury and set up a Methodist church in the United States. Preachers met at Lovely Lane Chapel beginning December 24, 1784, "to found and organize a new church," the Methodist Episcopal Church.[74] In Britain the Methodists separated from the Church of England after Wesley's death.

- **Grace for all.** Methodists follow the teaching of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius on this point: Christ died for all, and God's grace goes before every person, enabling them to respond, though they can resist.

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[69] Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland, "The History of the Moravian Church", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://www.moravian.org.uk/about/moravian-church-history.

[70] Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland, "The History of the Moravian Church", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://www.moravian.org.uk/about/moravian-church-history.

[71] Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland, "The History of the Moravian Church", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://www.moravian.org.uk/about/moravian-church-history.

[72] Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland, "The History of the Moravian Church", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://www.moravian.org.uk/about/moravian-church-history.

[73] Roger J. Green, "1738 John and Charles Wesley Experience Conversions", Christian History 28, 1990. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/john-and-charles-converted.

[74] Joe Iovino, "The Christmas Conference: 10 Days That Started a Church", United Methodist Communications (UMC.org), December 12, 2017. https://www.umc.org/content/the-christmas-conference-10-days-that-started-a-church.

- **Assurance.** A believer can know by the witness of the Spirit that he or she is a child of God (Romans 8:16).
- **Holiness.** Wesley taught that believers should go on to "Christian perfection," a love for God and neighbor that fills the heart. He did not mean sinless perfection in every act. This teaching became the seed of the Holiness movement (Chapter 14) and, through it, of Pentecostalism (Chapter 17).
- **Sacraments.** Methodists keep two sacraments, baptism (including infants) and the Lord's Supper.
- **The end times.** Mainline Methodist teaching is generally amillennial or postmillennial in outlook. Wesley himself spent little time on prophetic timetables.

Methodists today

The Methodist family includes the United Methodist Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Church, and large Methodist churches in Africa, Korea and the Pacific. Between 2019 and the end of 2023, 7,659 United Methodist congregations in the United States, nearly one in four, left that denomination in a split "over issues of sexuality and authority." Many of them joined the Global Methodist Church, which "launched in May 2022."[75]

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Romans 8:14-17. What does Paul say about knowing we belong to God?
2. Why do you think Wesley's small groups were so effective?
3. What would it take for your church to have the missionary courage of the early Moravians?

[75] Christianity Today, "United Methodists Down 7,659 Churches as Exit Window Ends", Christianity Today, December 18, 2023. https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/12/united-methodist-church-split-total-umc-disaffiliation-lgbt/.

Chapter 14: The Holiness Movement: Nazarenes and the Salvation Army

In nineteenth-century America and Britain, many Methodists felt that their church had grown comfortable and had lost Wesley's call to holiness. Camp meetings, revival preachers and new associations pressed believers to seek a second work of grace, entire sanctification, that would cleanse the heart and fill it with love. Out of this Holiness movement came several new denominations.

The Church of the Nazarene

The Church of the Nazarene was born from mergers of Holiness groups. In October 1907, at a General Assembly in Chicago, the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America joined with the Church of the Nazarene led by Phineas Bresee of Los Angeles. In October 1908, at Pilot Point, Texas, the Holiness Church of Christ joined them.[76] Bresee became the first general superintendent. The church first took the name Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, using "Pentecostal" in the older Holiness sense of the Spirit's sanctifying work.[77] When the word came to mean speaking in tongues, the church dropped it.

The church reported 2,764,205 members and nearly 30,000 churches in its 2025 statistics.[78]

The Salvation Army

William Booth, born in Nottingham in 1829, was a Methodist preacher. In June 1865 he preached in London's East End outside the Blind Beggar pub, and from that work his Christian Mission was born.[79] His wife Catherine was a preacher in her own right and had defended women's ministry in print in 1859.[80] In 1878 the mission took the name The Salvation Army, with ranks, uniforms and a military discipline that suited its campaign against sin and poverty.[81]

The Salvation Army is both a church and a charity. As of January 1, 2023, it reported work in 134 countries, 14,893 worshipping communities, 16,077 active officers and 1,249,596 senior soldiers.[82] The Army does not practice water baptism or the Lord's Supper as rituals, "believing rather that no ceremony is essential to salvation."[83]

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[76] Church of the Nazarene, "Our History", page updated August 7, 2026. https://nazarene.org/our-history/.

[77] Church of the Nazarene, "Our History", page updated August 7, 2026. https://nazarene.org/our-history/.

[78] Church of the Nazarene, General Secretary, "General Secretary Releases 2025 Statistics", Church of the Nazarene Mesoamerica Region, January 17, 2026. https://www.mesonaz.org/en/general-secretary-releases-2025-statistics/.

[79] The Salvation Army International Headquarters, "History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://salvationarmy.org/history.

[80] The Salvation Army International Headquarters, "History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://salvationarmy.org/history.

[81] The Salvation Army International Headquarters, "History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://salvationarmy.org/history.

[82] The Salvation Army International Headquarters, "International Statistics (as at January 1, 2023)", 2023. https://salvationarmy.org/ihq/statistics.

[83] Rick Munn, "Deeper Doctrine: Sacraments", SAconnects (The Salvation Army, USA Eastern Territory), February 15, 2023. https://saconnects.org/2023/02/15/deeper-doctrine-sacraments/.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 and 5:23-24. What does Paul pray for these believers?
2. How did the Holiness movement join personal holiness with care for the poor?
3. What can churches learn from the Salvation Army's practical compassion?

Chapter 15: The Restoration Movement

On the American frontier around 1800, a group of preachers grew tired of denominational labels and creeds. They wanted to restore the church of the New Testament and unite all Christians on the Bible alone.

Origins

In August 1801 a camp meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, drew a crowd that estimates place between 10,000 and 20,000 people.[84] One of its leaders, the Presbyterian Barton W. Stone, soon left his presbytery. In June 1804 Stone and his colleagues dissolved their new presbytery with a document called the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, declaring their will that the body "sink into union with the Body of Christ at large."[85] They called themselves simply Christians.

Meanwhile Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander, Presbyterians from Ireland and Scotland, were working toward the same goal in Pennsylvania and western Virginia. Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* of 1809 pleaded for unity on the plain teaching of Scripture.[86] Their followers called themselves Disciples of Christ. The two movements "united in 1832 in Lexington, KY."[87]

What the movement teaches

- **No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible.** Restoration churches reject creeds as tests of fellowship.
- **Baptism by immersion** of believers, connected closely with the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
- **The Lord's Supper every Sunday.**
- **Local congregations** governed by elders.

Three streams

The movement that set out to end division divided itself. Disagreements over missionary societies and the use of instruments in worship led to a split, and the 1906 federal religious census listed the a cappella Churches of Christ separately from the Disciples.[McGarvey Ice and the editors, "Christian History Timeline: From Stone and Campbell to the Great Communion", Christian History 106, 2013. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/from-stone-and-campbell-to-the-great-communion.]

[Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), "Early History", page updated March 17, 2026. https://disciples.org/our-identity/history-of-the-disciples/.] After a restructuring in 1968, the more liberal wing became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and many conservative congregations

[84] McGarvey Ice and the editors, "Christian History Timeline: From Stone and Campbell to the Great Communion", Christian History 106, 2013. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/from-stone-and-campbell-to-the-great-communion.

[85] McGarvey Ice and the editors, "Christian History Timeline: From Stone and Campbell to the Great Communion", Christian History 106, 2013. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/from-stone-and-campbell-to-the-great-communion.

[86] McGarvey Ice and the editors, "Christian History Timeline: From Stone and Campbell to the Great Communion", Christian History 106, 2013. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/from-stone-and-campbell-to-the-great-communion.

[87] Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), "Early History", page updated March 17, 2026. https://disciples.org/our-identity/history-of-the-disciples/.

remained as independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.[88] The story is a sobering lesson. Good intentions about unity do not by themselves prevent division.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read John 17:20-23. Why does Jesus pray for the unity of believers?
2. Why do you think a movement that rejected creeds still divided?
3. Which of the Restoration movement's goals do you share?

[88] McGarvey Ice and the editors, "Christian History Timeline: From Stone and Campbell to the Great Communion", Christian History 106, 2013. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/from-stone-and-campbell-to-the-great-communion.

Chapter 16: Seventh-day Adventists

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew directly out of the most famous failed prediction in American religious history. I tell the full story of that prediction in Chapter 21. Here I describe the church that emerged from it.

Origins

William Miller was a Baptist farmer and veteran of the War of 1812. Studying Daniel 8 and 9, he concluded that the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 would end "between 1843-1844," and his followers "eventually" set a date: October 22, 1844.[89] When Jesus did not return, Adventists call what followed "The Great Disappointment."[90]

A small group of Millerites reinterpreted the date. They concluded that on October 22, 1844, Christ had begun a new phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary rather than returning to earth.[91] Joseph Bates persuaded them to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. James White and Ellen G. White became their leaders. In 1860 the group took the name Seventh-day Adventists, and in May 1863 the General Conference was formed.[92]

What Adventists teach

- **The Sabbath.** Adventists worship on Saturday, the seventh day, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.
- **The second coming.** Adventists expect the personal, visible return of Christ and teach that the righteous will be taken to heaven during the thousand years of Revelation 20 while the earth lies desolate. They do not set a date, and the church's own history page quotes Jesus' words in Mark 13:32.[93]
- **The state of the dead.** Adventists teach that the dead sleep unconscious until the resurrection and that the wicked will finally be destroyed rather than suffer forever.
- **Ellen G. White.** Adventists believe she had the gift of prophecy.[94] They say her writings are subject to the Bible, but they give them great weight.
- **Health.** Adventists emphasize healthful living, and many are vegetarians.

[89] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[90] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[91] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[92] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[93] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[94] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

The church reported 23,684,237 members at the end of 2024.[95]

How other Christians see Adventists

Most evangelical scholars count Seventh-day Adventists as Christians, because Adventists affirm the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith. Many evangelicals strongly disagree with Adventist teaching on the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary, the state of the dead and the role of Ellen White. Some independent Sabbath-keeping groups that came out of Adventism hold teachings much further from historic Christianity. I place the Adventist church here, with the Protestant families, while noting those disagreements.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Mark 13:32-37. How should Christians live in light of these words?
2. What can every Christian learn from the Great Disappointment?
3. Why do you think Adventism grew so fast after such a painful beginning?

[95] APD and EUD News (Seventh-day Adventist Church, Inter-European Division), "Adventists Grow Worldwide to 23.6 Million Members", May 30, 2025. https://news.eud.adventist.org/all-news/adventists-grow-worldwide-to-23.6-million-members.

Part Five: The Pentecostal and Charismatic Explosion

Chapter 17: How the Pentecostal Movement Began

No branch of the Christian family has grown faster in the last hundred years than the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. It is also the branch most often described carelessly, by friends and critics alike, so I want to tell its beginning with care.

Topeka, 1901

Charles Fox Parham was a Holiness preacher who ran a small Bible school in Topeka, Kansas. He and his students were studying the Book of Acts and asking what the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit should be. According to Britannica, "On January 1, 1901, Agnes Oznam" (more often spelled Ozman) "became the first of Parham's students to speak in an unknown tongue."[96] Parham went on to teach that speaking in tongues was the "initial evidence" of the baptism in the Spirit.[97] That teaching became the mark of classical Pentecostalism.

Azusa Street, 1906

William J. Seymour, a Black Holiness preacher and, in Britannica's words, "a one-eyed Holiness church pastor and former member of the African Methodist Episcopal church," had heard Parham teach in Houston.[98] He went to Los Angeles to preach, and the revival that followed "began in 1906 at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission at 312 Azusa Street."[99] For about three years people came from across the country and around the world. Black and white, rich and poor, men and women worshipped together in a way that was remarkable for that time. Visitors carried the message home, and within a few years Pentecostal congregations had appeared on every inhabited continent.

What Pentecostals teach

Pentecostals hold the historic Christian faith: the Trinity (with the exception noted below), the deity of Christ, His atoning death and bodily resurrection, the authority of Scripture, and salvation by grace through faith. To that they add an emphasis on the present work of the Holy Spirit:

- **The baptism in the Holy Spirit** as an experience after conversion, empowering believers for witness, as in Acts 1:8.
- **Speaking in tongues** as the initial physical evidence of that baptism (classical Pentecostal view).
- **Spiritual gifts** such as prophecy, healing and miracles, which they believe did not end with the apostles (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

[96] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pentecostalism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism.

[97] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pentecostalism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism.

[98] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pentecostalism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism.

[99] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pentecostalism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism.

- **Divine healing** as provided in the atonement.
- **The soon return of Christ.** Early Pentecostals believed the outpouring of the Spirit was the "latter rain" that would come just before the end (Joel 2:23-29; Acts 2:16-21). Most classical Pentecostal denominations teach a premillennial return of Christ, and many teach a pre-tribulation rapture.

Three early divisions

Early Pentecostals soon divided along lines that still exist today.

- **Holiness Pentecostals**, such as the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Church of God in Christ, and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, kept the Holiness teaching that sanctification is a distinct second work of grace, with the Spirit baptism as a third.
- **Finished Work Pentecostals**, such as the Assemblies of God, taught that sanctification begins at conversion and continues through life, so the Spirit baptism is the second experience, not the third.
- **Oneness Pentecostals** rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and taught that baptism must be "in the name of Jesus" only. When the Assemblies of God adopted its Statement of Fundamental Truths in 1916, with a strong statement on the Trinity, "a significant minority of Assemblies of God ministers" who had sided with the Oneness movement left.[100] I describe Oneness teaching further in Chapter 23.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Acts 2:1-21. How does Peter explain what was happening on the day of Pentecost?
2. Why do you think the Azusa Street revival crossed racial lines in a segregated age?
3. What can non-Pentecostal Christians learn from Pentecostal expectancy?

[100] Assemblies of God News, "This Week in AG History -- Oct. 21, 1916", October 2022. https://news.ag.org/en/article-repository/news/2022/10/this-week-in-ag-history-oct-21-1916.

Chapter 18: The Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world and the one that the earlier draft I was given asked the most questions about. This chapter describes what it is and what it teaches. Chapter 22 answers the specific question of whether it has ever predicted the end of the world.

Origins

The Assemblies of God was "founded in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1914."[101] About 300 men and women met there on April 2-12, 1914, and came together[102] to give the scattered new churches some cooperation in missions, credentials and teaching, without building a heavy denominational structure. Two years later, at the General Council in St. Louis in 1916, the fellowship "voted to adopt its Statement of Fundamental Truths."[103]

What the Assemblies of God teaches

The Statement of Fundamental Truths opens by saying, "The Bible is our all-sufficient rule for faith and practice," and calls the statement itself "a basis of fellowship among us."[104] It lists sixteen truths. Some of the most distinctive are these, quoted from the current text on the denomination's website:[105]

- **Ordinances.** "Baptism by immersion is commanded," and the Lord's Supper is a "symbol," a "memorial" of Christ's suffering and death, and "a prophecy of His second coming."
- **The baptism in the Holy Spirit** is "distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth."
- **The evidence.** That baptism is "witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance."
- **The Blessed Hope (Truth 13).** The resurrection of believers who have died "and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the church."
- **The Millennial Reign of Christ (Truth 14).** "The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on earth for one thousand years."

[101] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Pentecostalism", n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism.

[102] Darrin J. Rodgers, "AG History", Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, 2014. https://ifphc.org/About/AG-History.

[103] Assemblies of God News, "This Week in AG History -- Oct. 21, 1916", October 2022. https://news.ag.org/en/article-repository/news/2022/10/this-week-in-ag-history-oct-21-1916.

[104] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

[105] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

The denomination's position paper on the rapture, adopted by its General Presbytery in 1979, goes further. It states, "The weight of Scripture supports a pre-Tribulation Rapture."[106] I return to that paper in Chapter 22, because the earlier draft I was asked to check got it wrong.

The Assemblies of God today

In the United States the Assemblies of God reported 2,984,352 adherents, 12,681 churches and 37,885 ministers in 2023.[107] Its numbers grew slightly from 2022 but remain below its 2013 total of 3,127,857.[108]

Outside the United States, national Assemblies of God churches belong to the World Assemblies of God Fellowship.[109] The earlier draft gave a worldwide figure of 70 million. I could not confirm that number on the fellowship's own website, so I do not use it. [Not verified]

The scandals of 1987 and 1988

Two of the most famous American television preachers of the 1980s were Assemblies of God ministers, and the way the denomination handled their failures says something about it.

Jim Bakker, founder of the PTL television ministry, resigned in 1987 amid a sexual and financial scandal, and he "was subsequently defrocked by the Assemblies of God."[110] He was later convicted of fraud. In his later years his television ministry "emphasized end-times preparation and included selling survival food and supplies."[111] On October 5, 1989, a federal jury found him guilty on all 24 counts of mail and wire fraud and conspiracy, and on October 24 he was sentenced to 45 years in prison. He was released in 1994.[112] He died on October 5, 2026, at age 86.[113] His later end-times programs were his own and did not represent the denomination that had removed him decades earlier.

Jimmy Swaggart confessed to sin in 1988. The denomination's leaders set terms of discipline that would have kept him out of the pulpit for a time. He refused, and on April 8, 1988, the General Presbytery

[106] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

[107] General Secretary's Office, Assemblies of God (USA), "2023 Summary Statistical Report", April 29, 2024. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Downloads/Statistics/Archived-Summary-Reports/2023-Summary-Statistical-Report.pdf.

[108] General Secretary's Office, Assemblies of God (USA), "2023 Summary Statistical Report", April 29, 2024. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Downloads/Statistics/Archived-Summary-Reports/2023-Summary-Statistical-Report.pdf.

[109] World Assemblies of God Fellowship, "Fellowship Overview", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://worldagfellowship.org/Fellowship/Overview.

[110] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

[111] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

[112] United States Postal Inspection Service, "Heritage USA Fraud", USPIS History Spotlight, n.d., read November 18, 2026. https://www.uspis.gov/history-spotlight/heritage-usa-fraud.

[113] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

dismissed him.[114] A spokesman for the denomination explained, "There's a difference between forgiveness and restoration to leadership."[115]

Questions for Reflection

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How does Paul use the hope of Christ's return to comfort grieving believers?
2. Why do you think the Assemblies of God's founders wanted a "fellowship" rather than a tightly governed denomination?
3. What does the handling of the 1987-1988 scandals teach about accountability for leaders?

[114] Julia Duin, "Why the Assemblies Dismissed Swaggart", Christianity Today, May 1988. https://www.christianitytoday.com/1988/05/why-assemblies-dismissed-swaggart.

[115] Julia Duin, "Why the Assemblies Dismissed Swaggart", Christianity Today, May 1988. https://www.christianitytoday.com/1988/05/why-assemblies-dismissed-swaggart.

Chapter 19: Charismatics, Nondenominational Churches and the Global South

The charismatic renewal

Beginning around 1960, Pentecostal experience spread into the older churches. Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian and later Catholic believers began to speak in tongues and pray for healing while staying in their own churches. These believers are called charismatics, from the Greek word *charismata*, "gifts." Unlike classical Pentecostals, most charismatics do not teach that tongues must be the initial evidence of the Spirit's baptism.

Counting Spirit-filled Christians

Pew Research Center, drawing on the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, estimated that in 2010 there were about 279 million Pentecostals and about 305 million charismatics in the world, together roughly a quarter of all Christians.[116] These estimates depend on definitions, and they overlap with other categories, since a charismatic Catholic is counted as a Catholic too. They should be read as orders of magnitude, not exact counts.

Nondenominational churches

In the United States the fastest-growing Protestant "group" is not a denomination at all. Many large churches describe themselves as nondenominational. They usually teach evangelical doctrine, practice believer's baptism, and are governed by elders or a founding pastor. Many are charismatic in worship. Pew's 2011 report counted independent and nondenominational churches inside its broad Protestant category, which it defined to include Anglicans and independents.[117] Nondenominational does not mean without a tradition. Most of these churches stand in the Baptist, Pentecostal or Restoration stream, whether or not they say so.

The center of gravity has moved

In 1910 most Christians lived in Europe and North America. That is no longer true. Pew estimated that in 2020 there were about 697 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with about 505 million in Europe and about 238 million in North America.[118] The typical Christian today is more likely to be an African, a Latin American or an Asian than a European, and more likely to be Pentecostal or charismatic in worship than at any time in history. Any field guide that treats American denominations as the whole story is out of date.

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[116] Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population", December 19, 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/.

[117] Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population", December 19, 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/.

[118] Conrad Hackett, Marcin Stonawski, Yunping Tong, Stephanie Kramer, Anne Shi and Dalia Fahmy, "Christian Population Change (in How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020)", Pew Research Center, June 9, 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/christian-population-change/.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-13. What does Paul teach about the variety of gifts and the unity of the body?
2. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in nondenominational churches?
3. How should the growth of the church in Africa, Asia and Latin America change the way Western Christians think about the church?

Part Six: How the Branches See the End Times

Chapter 20: Four Ways of Reading the Thousand Years

Every branch of the Christian family confesses with the Nicene Creed that Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." Where they part ways is over the details, and especially over one passage:

> **Revelation 20:4** And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them; and the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and who did not worship the beast nor its image, and did not receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

How a church reads the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 shapes how it reads the rest of prophecy. There are four main views. I hold one of them, and I say so below, but I have tried to describe each the way its own best teachers would.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists read the thousand years as a symbol of the present age, in which Christ reigns from heaven and the souls of believers who have died reign with Him. Satan is "bound" in the sense that he cannot stop the gospel from going to the nations. At the end of this age Christ returns once, the dead are raised, and the final judgment and the new creation follow.

This is the historic majority view of the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican churches. The Catechism of the Catholic Church rejects what it calls "millenarianism,"[119] and the Augsburg Confession condemns the expectation that "the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world" before the resurrection.[120]

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists believe Christ will return after a long golden age in which the gospel spreads and most of the world is converted. The thousand years may be literal or symbolic, but either way the church's mission succeeds before the Lord comes. This view was strong among American Protestants in the nineteenth century, when missions and reform movements seemed to be changing the world, and it has been revived in some Reformed circles today.

Historic premillennialism

Premillennialists believe Christ will return before (pre) the thousand years and reign on earth. Several early church fathers held a form of this view. The Catholic Encyclopedia names Papias, Justin Martyr

[119] Catholic Church, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 676 (millenarianism)", 2nd ed., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/676.htm.

[120] Lutheran reformers, "Augsburg Confession (1530), Article XVII: Of Christ's Return to Judgment", Book of Concord (bookofconcord.org), read November 18, 2026. https://bookofconcord.org/augsburg-confession/article-xvii/.

and Irenaeus among them, while noting that Justin admitted "there are many" Christians who did not share it.[121] Historic premillennialists usually expect the church to pass through the great tribulation and to meet the Lord at His one visible return.

Dispensational premillennialism and the pre-tribulation rapture

Dispensationalists also believe Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. They draw a sharp line between God's promises to Israel and His purposes for the church, and most of them teach that Christ will come for His church before a seven-year tribulation:

> **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with ***the*** voice of an archangel and with ***the*** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in ***the*** clouds to meet the Lord in ***the*** air; and so we will always be with ***the*** Lord.

In this view, the rapture is the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), which could happen at any moment. After the tribulation, Christ returns visibly with His saints, judges the nations, and reigns from Jerusalem, during which God fulfills His promises to Israel.

The view was developed in the nineteenth century by John Nelson Darby, an Irish clergyman and early leader of the Plymouth Brethren, and spread in America through Bible conferences, study Bibles and, later, popular books and novels. It is the view of the Assemblies of God and of many Baptist, Bible church and nondenominational congregations.[122] Some critics claim it began with a vision given to a young Scottish woman in 1830. I examine that claim in Chapter 24.

Where I stand

I hold the pre-tribulation view, as many nondenominational churches like mine do. I believe it best explains why Paul comforts believers with the Lord's coming for them (1 Thessalonians 4:18) and why the New Testament urges us to be ready at every moment. But I know that faithful, Bible-loving Christians in every century have read these passages differently. A church's view of the millennium is not a test of whether it belongs to Christ. Every branch in this book that confesses the historic creeds agrees on the main thing: Jesus is coming back.

The four views compared

View	When Christ returns	The thousand years	Common in
Amillennial	Once, at the end of this age	Symbol of the present reign of Christ	Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican
Postmillennial	After a gospel golden age	Long era of gospel success	Some Reformed and older American Protestants
Historic premillennial	Before a literal earthly reign,	Future earthly reign	Some Baptists, some

[121] J. P. Kirsch, "Millennium and Millenarianism", The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1911); New Advent edition, 1911. https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10307a.htm.

[122] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

View	When Christ returns	The thousand years	Common in
	after the tribulation		evangelical scholars
Dispensational premillennial	For the church before the tribulation, then visibly after it	Future earthly reign centered on Israel	Assemblies of God, many Baptist, Bible and nondenominational churches

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Revelation 20:1-10 slowly. Which view seems most natural to you, and why?
2. What do all four views agree on?
3. How should the hope of Christ's return change the way you live this week?

Chapter 21: When People Set Dates

Jesus told His disciples plainly:

> **Matthew 24:36** But concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens, except My Father alone.

And just before He ascended, He told them again:

> **Acts 1:7** And He said to them, "It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority.

Even so, Christians have repeatedly tried to name the day. The history of date-setting is mostly a history of individuals and small movements, not of whole denominations, and every date so far has failed.

William Miller and October 22, 1844

The most influential prediction in American history began with a careful Bible student. William Miller, a Baptist farmer from New York, concluded from Daniel 8:14 that the 2,300 "evening and morning" would end "between 1843-1844," and his followers "eventually" fixed the date of October 22, 1844.[123]

> **Daniel 8:14** And he said to me, "Until evening ***and*** morning, two thousand and three hundred; and ***the*** holy place will be vindicated."

Tens of thousands of people, from many denominations, believed him. When the day passed, the movement shattered in what its survivors called "The Great Disappointment."[124] Some returned to their old churches. Some gave up faith. A small group reinterpreted the date and became the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Chapter 16), which today does not set dates.

The Watch Tower and 1914, 1925 and 1975

The Watch Tower movement, which later took the name Jehovah's Witnesses (Chapter 23), has attached great prophetic weight to several dates. Its own 1993 history, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, discusses a drop in its numbers after expectations surrounding 1975. It asks whether the decrease was due to "disappointed expectations concerning 1975," and answers, "Perhaps. But there were other influencing factors."[125]

Edgar Whisenant and 1988

In 1988 an author named Edgar Whisenant published *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. He placed the rapture during the Jewish Feast of Trumpets, between sunset on September 11 and sunset on

[123] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[124] Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Our History", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/.

[125] Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993. chapter 9, pages 108-117, Watchtower Online Library. https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101993010.

September 13, 1988.[126] According to the Christian Research Institute, 3.2 million copies were printed and 200,000 were mailed free to pastors.[127] "Thousands took the booklet seriously, some even quitting their jobs."[128] When nothing happened, Whisenant moved the date to October 3.[129] Whisenant acted as an individual, not as the representative of any denomination.

Harold Camping and 1994 and 2011

Harold Camping, a California radio preacher with the Family Radio network, "originally claimed the world would end in 1994."[130] He later named May 21, 2011, as Judgment Day, and his followers paid for billboards across the country. When May 21 passed, he said a spiritual rapture had happened and set October 21, 2011, as the final end.[131] That day passed as well. Years earlier, in 2001, Camping had taught that the church age had ended and told Christians to leave their congregations: "No longer are you to be under the spiritual rulership of the church."[132] His predictions were not those of any denomination.

What the record shows

Who	Date or dates	Tradition	Outcome
William Miller and followers	1843-1844, then October 22, 1844	Baptist layman; movement drew from many churches	Failed; Great Disappointment; Adventism followed
Watch Tower movement	Several dates, including expectations about 1975	Jehovah's Witnesses	Failed; numbers fell afterward
Edgar Whisenant	September 11-13, 1988, then October 3	Individual author	Failed
Harold Camping	1994; May 21, 2011; October 21, 2011	Independent radio ministry	Failed

The Bible gives a clear test for a prophet who names a date that does not come:

> **Deuteronomy 18:21-22** And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that ***is*** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him.'

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[126] Dean C. Halverson, "88 Reasons: What Went Wrong?", Christian Research Journal 11, no. 2, Fall 1988; posted by the Christian Research Institute April 20, 2009. https://www.equip.org/articles/88-reasons-what-went-wrong/.

[127] Dean C. Halverson, "88 Reasons: What Went Wrong?", Christian Research Journal 11, no. 2, Fall 1988; posted by the Christian Research Institute April 20, 2009. https://www.equip.org/articles/88-reasons-what-went-wrong/.

[128] Dean C. Halverson, "88 Reasons: What Went Wrong?", Christian Research Journal 11, no. 2, Fall 1988; posted by the Christian Research Institute April 20, 2009. https://www.equip.org/articles/88-reasons-what-went-wrong/.

[129] Dean C. Halverson, "88 Reasons: What Went Wrong?", Christian Research Journal 11, no. 2, Fall 1988; posted by the Christian Research Institute April 20, 2009. https://www.equip.org/articles/88-reasons-what-went-wrong/.

[130] Stephanie Pappas, "No Show? Preacher's Doomsday Prediction Echoes Past Failures", Live Science, October 22, 2011. https://www.livescience.com/16663-camping-failed-doomsday-prediction-oct-21.html.

[131] Stephanie Pappas, "No Show? Preacher's Doomsday Prediction Echoes Past Failures", Live Science, October 22, 2011. https://www.livescience.com/16663-camping-failed-doomsday-prediction-oct-21.html.

[132] Christianity Today, "New Dispensation? Camping: "Leave Church"", Christianity Today, May 2002. https://www.christianitytoday.com/2002/05/new-dispensation-camping-leave-church/.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think date-setting is so appealing, even after so many failures?
2. Read 2 Peter 3:3-13. How does Peter answer people who mock the delay of Christ's coming?
3. What is the difference between watching for Christ's return and calculating it?

Chapter 22: Has the Assemblies of God Ever Predicted the End?

This book began with a question asked out loud and captured by a voice-to-text program: had a particular denomination ever made an end-times prediction? The transcription garbled the name, but the denomination meant was the Assemblies of God. A draft written earlier, which I was given to check, tried to answer and made several claims about the Assemblies' teaching. This chapter checks each one against the denomination's own records.

The short answer

I found no record that the Assemblies of God, as a denomination, has ever set a date for the rapture, the return of Christ or the end of the world. Its official teaching insists on the opposite: that Christ's coming for His church is "imminent," meaning it could happen at any time and that no date can be known. That conclusion has limits, which I state at the end of this chapter.

What the denomination officially teaches

The Assemblies of God's Statement of Fundamental Truths calls the resurrection and catching away of believers "the imminent and blessed hope of the church" (Truth 13), and it says, "The second coming of Christ includes the rapture of the saints, which is our blessed hope, followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on earth for one thousand years" (Truth 14).[133]

Its 1979 position paper on the rapture is even more direct. It states, "The weight of Scripture supports a pre-Tribulation Rapture," and that "the Church will be raptured before the period called the Great Tribulation."[134] It also warns that "any teaching that certain events must transpire before the Rapture is out of harmony with the doctrine of imminence."[135] A church that teaches that no event has to happen before Christ comes for His people has no basis for naming the day.

Checking the earlier draft's claims

Claim: The Assemblies of God takes no mandatory position on the timing of the rapture.
Contradicted. The denomination's Fundamental Truths call the rapture "imminent," and its 1979 position paper states that Scripture supports a pre-tribulation rapture.[General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.][General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979.

[133] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

[134] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

[135] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.] Individual ministers may hold their own views privately, but the official position is not neutral.

Claim: The word "rapture" was removed from the Statement of Fundamental Truths in 1927. *Unsupported, and contradicted as to the present.* I found no record of such a change. The current Statement uses the word "rapture" in Truth 14.[136] The position paper notes that the word itself "is not in the English Bible," which may be the source of the confusion.[137]

Claim: The World Assemblies of God Fellowship has about 70 million adherents. *Unresolved.* The fellowship's own overview page does not give that figure, and I could not confirm it from an official source.[138]

Claim (implied): Assemblies of God leaders were behind famous end-times predictions. *Unsupported.* The date-setters in Chapter 21 were not Assemblies of God officials. Jim Bakker's later end-times programs came long after the denomination had defrocked him.[139]

When the denomination faced an end-times movement

The clearest test of the Assemblies of God's attitude came in 1948 and 1949. A revival called the New Order of the Latter Rain began in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, in 1948.[140] Some of its leaders taught that God was restoring present-day apostles and prophets, imparting spiritual gifts by the laying on of hands, and preparing a company of perfected believers, the "manifest sons of God," who would rule in the last days.[141]

The Assemblies of God rejected it. At its General Council in Seattle on September 13, 1949, the denomination resolved that it "disapproves of the so-called 'New Order of the Latter Rain.'"[142] The resolution listed specific errors, including the "erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets," the imparting of gifts by laying on of hands, and the

[136] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

[137] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.

[138] World Assemblies of God Fellowship, "Fellowship Overview", page viewed November 18, 2026. https://worldagfellowship.org/Fellowship/Overview.

[139] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

[140] John R. Miller, "New Order of the Latter Rain: A New Perspective", Pneuma Review, Fall 2013, posted December 16, 2013. https://pneumareview.com/new-order-of-the-latter-rain-a-new-perspective/.

[141] John R. Miller, "New Order of the Latter Rain: A New Perspective", Pneuma Review, Fall 2013, posted December 16, 2013. https://pneumareview.com/new-order-of-the-latter-rain-a-new-perspective/.

[142] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council, Seattle, Washington, September 9-14, 1949", 1949. pages 26-27, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center digital archive. https://archives.ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Minutes%20General%20Council/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949.pdf.

imparting of foreign languages for missionary service.[143] The resolution passed "with an overwhelming majority."[144]

What this chapter cannot rule out

No researcher can read every sermon, magazine article and book written by Assemblies of God ministers since 1914. It is possible that individual ministers, at one time or another, preached that the end would come by a particular year. What I can say is that I found no such prediction in the denomination's statement of faith, its position papers, its General Council minutes I examined, or the historical articles I read, and that its official teaching on imminence rules date-setting out.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 24:42-44. What does it mean to be ready for an hour you do not know?
2. Why do you think the Assemblies of God moved quickly against the Latter Rain movement?
3. How can you check an end-times claim before you believe or share it?

[143] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council, Seattle, Washington, September 9-14, 1949", 1949. pages 26-27, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center digital archive. https://archives.ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Minutes%20General%20Council/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949.pdf.

[144] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council, Seattle, Washington, September 9-14, 1949", 1949. pages 26-27, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center digital archive. https://archives.ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Minutes%20General%20Council/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949.pdf.

Part Seven: Edges, Rumors and Conclusions

Chapter 23: Groups at the Edge of the Family

Some groups use Christian language, read the Bible and honor Jesus, but reject teachings that every branch in Parts Two through Five holds in common, above all the Trinity and the full deity of Christ as confessed in the Nicene Creed (Chapter 1). Pew's 2011 report placed groups such as the Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses in an "other Christian" category of about one percent of all Christians.[145] The earlier draft I was given folded them into the main family tree without comment. I list them here, separately, and describe each in its own words where I could. My book *Different Gospels* covers them in more depth.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Founded by Joseph Smith in New York in 1830, the church accepts the Book of Mormon and other modern revelations as Scripture alongside the Bible. Its teaching on God differs from the historic creeds. It teaches that "the members of the Godhead are three separate beings" and that "the Father and the Son have tangible bodies of flesh and bones."[146]

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Witnesses grew from the Bible Student movement of Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s. Their official website says that "Jesus is not Almighty God" and that there is "no Scriptural basis for the Trinity doctrine." They teach that Christ began ruling as King in heaven in 1914.[147] Their history of prophetic dates is described in Chapter 21.[148]

Oneness Pentecostals

Oneness Pentecostals, the largest body of which is the United Pentecostal Church International, share the Pentecostal experience of Chapter 17 but reject the Trinity. They teach that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are titles or manifestations of one God, Jesus, and that baptism must be in Jesus' name only. They separated from the Assemblies of God in 1916 (Chapter 17).[149]

Others

Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the nineteenth century, and Unitarian Universalism, which grew from churches that rejected the Trinity, are also sometimes listed among Christian

[145] Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population", December 19, 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/.

[146] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Godhead", Gospel Topics (Topics and Questions), 2023. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/manual/gospel-topics/godhead.

[147] Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, "What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?", jw.org, read November 18, 2026. https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jehovah-witness-beliefs/.

[148] Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993. chapter 9, pages 108-117, Watchtower Online Library. https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101993010.

[149] Assemblies of God News, "This Week in AG History -- Oct. 21, 1916", October 2022. https://news.ag.org/en/article-repository/news/2022/10/this-week-in-ag-history-oct-21-1916.

denominations. Neither confesses the Nicene faith, and Unitarian Universalism no longer describes itself as an exclusively Christian body.

How I draw the line

I do not draw the line by size, age, piety or sincerity. Many members of these groups are kind and devout people. I draw it where the early church drew it, at the confession of who Jesus is:

> **John 1:1** In ***the*** beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read John 1:1-18. What does John teach about who Jesus is?
2. Why do you think the early church considered the Trinity worth defending at such cost?
3. How can you speak with a Latter-day Saint or a Jehovah's Witness both truthfully and kindly?

Chapter 24: Rumors and Disputed Claims

A field guide to the Christian family would be incomplete without a field guide to the stories told about it. Some of these stories are repeated in sermons, memes and earlier drafts of books like this one. For each, I give the claim, its earliest appearance as far as I could trace it, who has promoted it, the evidence, and a label from the scale in "Before You Begin": supported, partly supported, disputed, unsupported, contradicted or unresolved.

1. "There are 45,000 Christian denominations."

- **Earliest appearance:** The figure comes from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which estimated "over 45,000" in 2023 and about 47,000 in 2024.[Peyton Garland, "How Many Christian Denominations Are There Today?", Christianity.com, updated February 16, 2026. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/how-many-christian-denominations-are-there.html.][Gina A. Zurlo, "The Annual Statistical Table for World Christianity 2024: Fragmentation and Unity", Overseas Ministries Study Center, Princeton Theological Seminary, February 12, 2024. https://omsc.ptsem.edu/the-annual-statistical-table/.]
- **Who repeats it:** Catholic and Orthodox writers, to argue that Protestantism breeds division; skeptics, to argue that Christians cannot agree; and many preachers.
- **Evidence:** The count covers separately organized "denominations/rites,"[150] as I understand it including separate national bodies of the same family (Chapter 2; I could not confirm the center's exact definition), and it includes groups outside the historic creeds.[151] The number is real, but it does not mean 45,000 different belief systems.
- **Label:** *Partly supported.* The figure is a real estimate, but it is usually quoted in a way its definitions do not support.

2. "The Council of Nicaea, under Constantine, chose which books went into the Bible."

- **Earliest appearance:** Historian Tim O'Neill traces the story to "a quip made by Voltaire" in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), which drew on a ninth-century Byzantine text, the *Synodicon Vetus*.[152] It was popularized again by the novel *The Da Vinci Code*.[153]

[150] Lausanne Movement, "Christian Denominations (in What Is Polycentric Christianity?)", Lausanne Movement, citing World Christian Database, Status of Global Christianity, 2023, page modified April 22, 2024. https://lausanne.org/report/polycentric-christianity/christian-denominations.

[151] Peyton Garland, "How Many Christian Denominations Are There Today?", Christianity.com, updated February 16, 2026. https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/how-many-christian-denominations-are-there.html.

[152] Tim O'Neill, "The Great Myths 4: Constantine, Nicaea and the Bible", History for Atheists, May 5, 2017. https://historyforatheists.com/2017/05/the-great-myths-4-constantine-nicaea-and-the-bible/.

[153] Michael J. Kruger, "Ten Basic Facts About the NT Canon That Every Christian Should Memorize: #8, The NT Canon Was Not Decided at Nicea, Nor Any Other Church Council", Canon Fodder (michaeljkruger.com), June 4, 2013. https://www.michaeljkruger.com/ten-basic-facts-about-the-nt-canon-that-every-christian-should-memorize-8-the-nt-canon-was-not-decided-at-nicea-nor-any-other-church-council/.

- **Evidence:** The Council of Nicaea in 325 dealt with the deity of Christ and the date of Easter. New Testament scholar Michael Kruger writes, "The Council of Nicea had nothing to do with the formation of the New Testament canon."[154] The canon took shape over centuries through broad use in the churches.[155]
- **Label:** *Contradicted.*

3. "Easter is named after the pagan goddess Ishtar."

- **Earliest appearance:** The link between Easter and the goddess Astarte was popularized by Alexander Hislop, a Free Church of Scotland minister, in *The Two Babylons* (1853), who wrote that Easter "is nothing else than Astarte."[156]
- **Who repeats it:** Social media posts each spring, and some anti-Catholic writers who still rely on Hislop.
- **Evidence:** The English word comes from Old English. The only early source is the eighth-century monk Bede, who wrote that the month "Eosturmonath" was named for a goddess called Eostre, and scholars note that the goddess rests on just two sentences from Bede.[157] There is no evidence for a link to Ishtar. In most languages the feast is named from the Hebrew word for Passover (Pascha). An Australian fact-checking service rated the Ishtar claim false.[158]
- **Label:** *Contradicted.*

4. "Baptist churches can be traced in an unbroken line back to John the Baptist."

- **Earliest appearance:** This "successionist" view belongs to the nineteenth-century Landmark movement. "All Landmark Baptists believe in church succession, at least to some degree," and J. M. Carroll's booklet *The Trail of Blood* is described as "a defense of Landmarkism."[159]
- **Evidence:** The earliest Baptist churches that historians can document were founded by English Separatists in Amsterdam in 1609 and in London in 1612 (Chapter 11).[160] Earlier dissenting groups shared some Baptist convictions, but no documented chain of congregations connects them.

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[154] Michael J. Kruger, "Ten Basic Facts About the NT Canon That Every Christian Should Memorize: #8, The NT Canon Was Not Decided at Nicea, Nor Any Other Church Council", Canon Fodder (michaeljkruger.com), June 4, 2013. https://www.michaeljkruger.com/ten-basic-facts-about-the-nt-canon-that-every-christian-should-memorize-8-the-nt-canon-was-not-decided-at-nicea-nor-any-other-church-council/.

[155] Tim O'Neill, "The Great Myths 4: Constantine, Nicaea and the Bible", History for Atheists, May 5, 2017. https://historyforatheists.com/2017/05/the-great-myths-4-constantine-nicaea-and-the-bible/.

[156] AAP FactCheck, "No, Easter Wasn't Named After a Mesopotamian Goddess", Australian Associated Press, April 23, 2021. https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/no-easter-wasnt-named-after-a-mesopotamian-goddess/.

[157] AAP FactCheck, "No, Easter Wasn't Named After a Mesopotamian Goddess", Australian Associated Press, April 23, 2021. https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/no-easter-wasnt-named-after-a-mesopotamian-goddess/.

[158] AAP FactCheck, "No, Easter Wasn't Named After a Mesopotamian Goddess", Australian Associated Press, April 23, 2021. https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/no-easter-wasnt-named-after-a-mesopotamian-goddess/.

[159] Baptist Standard, "Historians Debate Reasons for Rise of Landmarkism in 19th Century", Baptist Standard, January 9, 2009. https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/historians-debate-reasons-for-rise-of-landmarkism-in-19th-century.

[160] Doug Weaver, "The Baptist Story", Baylor Magazine, November 24, 2008. https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2008/baptist-story.

- **Label:** *Unsupported.*

5. "Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the church door on October 31, 1517."

- **Earliest appearance:** The story "stems from" Philip Melanchthon, "who was not in Wittenberg in 1517," and who did not record it until after Luther's death.[161]
- **Evidence:** Luther certainly sent his theses to the archbishop of Mainz on October 31, 1517. Whether he also posted them on the door is debated. A Catholic historian, Erwin Iserloh, argued in 1961 that "the theses were not nailed; they were mailed."[162] Posting notices on the church door was the normal way of announcing a university debate, so it would not have been unusual.
- **Label:** *Disputed.*

6. "The pre-tribulation rapture was invented from a young woman's vision in 1830."

- **Earliest appearance:** The claim that the doctrine came from a vision of Margaret MacDonald in Port Glasgow, Scotland, in 1830 was promoted in the late twentieth century by the writer Dave MacPherson and others.[163]
- **Evidence:** Defenders of the pre-tribulation view, such as Thomas Ice, argue that MacDonald's words do not clearly describe a pre-tribulation rapture, and that John Nelson Darby "clearly held to an early form of the pre-trib rapture by January 1827," before her vision.[164] Ice is an advocate of the view, so readers should weigh his argument as such. Critics, in turn, note that a fully developed pre-tribulation teaching does not appear in the church fathers. Both sides agree that the doctrine was systematized in the nineteenth century.
- **Label:** *Disputed.* The specific claim that the doctrine came from MacDonald's vision is not established. The broader claim that the doctrine in its developed form dates from the nineteenth century is generally accepted.

7. "The Assemblies of God predicted the end of the world."

- **Earliest appearance:** This came up in the voice-recorded question that started this book, and in the earlier draft I was given to check.
- **Evidence:** See Chapter 22. The denomination teaches imminence, which rules out date-setting, and it disciplined an end-times movement in 1949.[General Council of the Assemblies of God, "The Rapture of the Church (position paper, adopted by the General Presbytery, August 14, 1979)", 1979. https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Beliefs/Position-Papers/pp_4182_rapture.pdf.][General

[161] Scott H. Hendrix, "Legends About Luther", Christian History 34, 1992. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/legends-about-luther.

[162] Scott H. Hendrix, "Legends About Luther", Christian History 34, 1992. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/legends-about-luther.

[163] Thomas Ice, "Myths of the Origin of Pretribulationism (Part 2)", Pre-Trib Research Center, July 2, 2018. an advocate of the pre-tribulation view. https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/popup/text/print/285.

[164] Thomas Ice, "Myths of the Origin of Pretribulationism (Part 2)", Pre-Trib Research Center, July 2, 2018. an advocate of the pre-tribulation view. https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-thomas-ice/popup/text/print/285.

Council of the Assemblies of God, "Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council, Seattle, Washington, September 9-14, 1949", 1949. pages 26-27, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center digital archive. https://archives.ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Minutes%20General%20Council/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949.pdf.]

- **Label:** *Unsupported.*

8. "Snake handling is an Assemblies of God practice."

- **Evidence:** Snake handling grew up in Holiness-Pentecostal churches in the Appalachian mountains in the early twentieth century, not in the Assemblies of God. Tradition traces it to George Went Hensley, a preacher near Cleveland, Tennessee, around 1909. It spread for a time in the Church of God based in Cleveland, but "by the end of the 1920s the denomination had renounced the practice."[165] The Assemblies of God's Statement of Fundamental Truths does not mention it.[166]
- **Label:** *Contradicted.*

9. "The Catholic Church added seven books to the Bible at the Council of Trent."

- **Evidence:** The Council of Trent (1545-1563) did formally define the Catholic canon, including the deuterocanonical books, against the Reformers who set them apart. But Catholic Answers points to earlier lists that included them, from a synod at Rome in 382, the regional councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397 and 419), and the Council of Florence (1438-1445).[167] Whether those earlier lists settled the question for the whole church is still debated between Catholics and Protestants. Protestants and Catholics still disagree about whether these books are inspired Scripture.
- **Label:** *Contradicted* as to "added." *Supported* that Trent was the first general council to make the canon a binding definition for Catholics. [Not verified from a primary source]

10. "Jim Bakker's end-times ministry represented the Assemblies of God."

- **Evidence:** The Assemblies of God defrocked Bakker after the 1987 scandal.[168] His later ministry, which "emphasized end-times preparation and included selling survival food and supplies," was his own.[169]
- **Label:** *Contradicted.*

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[165] Brad E. Kelle, "Snake Handlers", New Georgia Encyclopedia, April 7, 2006, last edited July 8, 2013. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/snake-handlers/.

[166] General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths", web page, copyright 1995-2026, read November 18, 2026. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

[167] Catholic Answers Staff, "Did the Church Add the Deuterocanonical Books to the Bible at the Council of Trent?", Catholic Answers, February 23, 2019. https://www.catholic.com/qa/did-the-church-add-the-deuterocanonical-books-to-the-bible-at-the-council-of-trent.

[168] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of these claims had you heard before? Where did you hear it?
2. Why do rumors about other churches spread so easily?
3. Read Proverbs 18:17. How does this proverb apply to claims about church history?

[169] Jessica Mouser, "Controversial Televangelist Jim Bakker Passes Away at Age 86", ChurchLeaders, October 6, 2026. https://churchleaders.com/news/2223635-jim-bakker-passes-away.html/2.

Chapter 25: What This Means for Us

What the evidence shows

This book set out to answer a simple question: where did the many branches of the Christian family come from, what does each believe, and how does each see the end times? Here is what the sources support.

1. **The branches share a common trunk.** Every branch in Parts Two through Five confesses the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and the gospel Paul summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (Chapter 1).
2. **The big divisions are few.** Behind the headline figure of 45,000 denominations stand a handful of great families: the Church of the East, the Oriental Orthodox, the Eastern Orthodox, the Catholic Church, and the Protestant families, with the Pentecostal and charismatic movement now cutting across them all (Chapters 2-19).
3. **Most divisions were about real questions.** Who has authority, how we are made right with God, what baptism and the Lord's Supper mean, and how the church should be governed.
4. **End-times views differ, but the hope is shared.** The four millennial views divide the branches, but all confess that Christ will return (Chapter 20).
5. **Date-setting has always failed.** Every specific date in this book's record failed, and none of them came from the official teaching of a major denomination (Chapter 21).
6. **The Assemblies of God has not set a date.** Its official teaching of imminence rules date-setting out, and the earlier draft's claims about its position were wrong (Chapter 22).

Where the evidence is weaker

- **Membership numbers** are reported by each church in its own way, and different research centers reach different totals. I have given sources and dates for each, but no total in this book should be read as exact.
- **Some histories rest on a church's own account.** Where I used an official history, I said so. Official histories are good evidence of what a church believes about itself, but they are not neutral.
- **Some sources were not available to me.** Several government and news sites blocked automated reading, and I could not read every book in the field. Where a claim could not be confirmed, I marked it [Not verified] or left it out.

A closing word

Jesus prayed for His followers:

> **John 17:21** that they all may be one, even as You, Father, ***are*** in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The divisions in this book are real, and some of them matter a great deal. But the more I studied, the more I saw how much the branches share, and how often what passes for knowledge about other Christians is rumor. My hope is that this field guide helps you understand your own church better, speak more fairly about others, and keep your eyes on the One whose return all of us await.

Appendix A: Chronology

Dates are those given and sourced in the chapters. Where a date is a tradition rather than a documented event, the chapter says so.

Year	Event	Chapter
about AD 30	The apostolic church begins in Jerusalem	1
325	Council of Nicaea affirms the full deity of Christ	1, 24
431	Council of Ephesus; the Church of the East goes its own way	3
451	Council of Chalcedon; the Oriental Orthodox churches separate	3
635	Church of the East missionary Alopen reaches China	6
1054	Final break between Rome and Constantinople	3
1457	Unity of the Brethren (Moravians) founded in Bohemia	13
1517	Luther's Ninety-five Theses	7, 24
1525	First adult baptisms near Zurich; Anabaptist movement begins	10
1527	Schleitheim articles	10
1530	Augsburg Confession	7
1534	English Act of Supremacy	9
1536	Calvin's *Institutes* first published	8
1549	First *Book of Common Prayer* required in England	9
1560	Scots Confession ratified by Parliament	8
1571	Thirty-Nine Articles made the Church of England's doctrinal standard	9
1609	First Baptist church organized in Amsterdam	11
1612	First Baptist church on English soil	11
about 1639	First Baptist church in America, Providence	11
1652	George Fox at Pendle Hill; Quaker movement begins	12
1693	Amish division under Jakob Ammann	10
1727	Moravian renewal at Herrnhut	13
1738	Conversions of Charles and John Wesley	13
1784	Methodist Episcopal Church organized in America	13

Year	Event	Chapter
1801	Cane Ridge camp meeting	15
1832	Stone and Campbell movements unite	15
1844	October 22: the Millerite date passes; the Great Disappointment	16, 21
1854	Immaculate Conception defined	4
1863	General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists formed	16
1865	William Booth begins the Christian Mission (Salvation Army from 1878)	14
1870	Papal infallibility defined at the First Vatican Council	4
1901	January 1: Agnes Ozman speaks in tongues in Topeka	17
1906	Azusa Street revival begins	17
1907-1908	Church of the Nazarene formed by mergers	14
1914	Assemblies of God founded at Hot Springs, Arkansas	18
1916	Assemblies of God adopts its Statement of Fundamental Truths; Oneness ministers leave	17, 18
1949	Assemblies of God General Council disapproves the New Order of the Latter Rain	22
1950	Assumption of Mary defined	4
1957	United Church of Christ formed	12
1965	Rome and Constantinople lift the excommunications of 1054	3
1979	Assemblies of God position paper on the rapture	18, 22
1987-1988	Bakker defrocked; Swaggart dismissed by the Assemblies of God	18
1988	Whisenant's failed rapture dates	21
1994	Catholic-Assyrian Common Christological Declaration	6
2011	Camping's failed dates, May 21 and October 21	21
2018	Russian Orthodox Church breaks communion with Constantinople over Ukraine	5
2019-2023	7,659 United Methodist congregations leave; Global Methodist Church launched 2022	13

Appendix B: The Branches Compared

This chart is a simplified summary. Each chapter gives the details and the sources.

Family	Final authority	Baptism	Lord's Supper	Church government	Usual end-times view
Catholic	Scripture and Tradition, interpreted by the Magisterium	Infants, by any mode	Transubstantiation; seven sacraments	Pope and bishops	Amillennial
Eastern Orthodox	Scripture and Holy Tradition	Infants, by immersion	Real change, not defined philosophically	Bishops in self-governing churches	Amillennial
Oriental Orthodox	Scripture and Tradition	Infants	Real presence	Bishops and patriarchs	Amillennial
Lutheran	Scripture alone	Infants	Real presence "in, with and under"	Bishops or synods	Amillennial
Reformed / Presbyterian	Scripture alone	Infants	Spiritual presence	Elders (presbyteries)	Amillennial or postmillennial
Anglican	Scripture, read with the creeds and tradition	Infants	Varies; real presence common	Bishops	Amillennial
Anabaptist	Scripture alone	Believers	Memorial	Congregational	Varies
Baptist	Scripture alone	Believers, by immersion	Memorial (ordinance)	Congregational	Varies; many premillennial
Methodist	Scripture, with tradition, reason, experience	Infants and believers	Real spiritual presence	Bishops and conferences	Varies
Holiness	Scripture alone	Varies; the Salvation Army does not baptize	Varies; the Salvation Army does not observe it	Varies	Varies
Restoration	Scripture alone, no creeds	Believers, by immersion	Every Sunday, memorial	Congregational, elders	Varies
Seventh-day Adventist	Scripture	Believers, by immersion	Memorial, with foot washing	Conferences	Premillennial (heaven during the thousand years)
Pentecostal (e.g., Assemblies of God)	Scripture alone	Believers, by immersion	Memorial (ordinance)	Cooperative fellowship	Premillennial, pre-tribulation

Appendix C: Claims and Evidence

This table lists the main claims checked for this book, with the evidence label and where the evidence is given. "Earlier draft" means the draft I was given to check, described in "Before You Begin."

Claim	Label	Evidence (chapter and key source)
There are 45,000 Christian denominations	Partly supported	Ch. 2, 24: Gordon-Conwell estimates; definitions differ
The Assemblies of God takes no mandatory position on rapture timing (earlier draft)	Contradicted	Ch. 22: Fundamental Truths 13-14; 1979 position paper
The word "rapture" was removed from the AG statement in 1927 (earlier draft)	Unsupported	Ch. 22: current Truth 14 uses the word
The World Assemblies of God Fellowship has about 70 million adherents (earlier draft)	Unresolved	Ch. 18, 22: not on the fellowship's own page
The Assemblies of God has set a date for the end	Unsupported	Ch. 22: official teaching of imminence; 1949 resolution
The AG defrocked Jim Bakker and dismissed Jimmy Swaggart	Supported	Ch. 18: ChurchLeaders 2026; Christianity Today 1988
Nicaea chose the books of the Bible	Contradicted	Ch. 24: Kruger 2013; O'Neill 2017
Easter is named after Ishtar	Contradicted	Ch. 24: AAP FactCheck 2021
Baptist churches descend in an unbroken line from John the Baptist	Unsupported	Ch. 11, 24: Weaver 2008; Baptist Standard 2009
Luther nailed the theses to the door	Disputed	Ch. 24: Hendrix 1992
The pre-tribulation rapture came from Margaret MacDonald's 1830 vision	Disputed	Ch. 24: Ice 2018 (advocate)
Snake handling is an Assemblies of God practice	Contradicted	Ch. 24: New Georgia Encyclopedia; AG Fundamental Truths
Catholics added seven books at Trent	Contradicted as to "added"	Ch. 24: Catholic Answers 2019
The 1054 excommunications were lifted in 1965	Supported	Ch. 3: Joint Declaration, December 7, 1965
Miller's followers set October 22, 1844	Supported	Ch. 16, 21: Adventist official history
The Assemblies of God was founded in Hot Springs in 1914	Supported	Ch. 18: Britannica
Most Christians now live outside Europe and North America	Supported	Ch. 19: Pew 2025 regional figures
Armenia became the first Christian nation in 301	Disputed (date)	Ch. 6
The apostle Thomas founded the church in India	Unresolved	Ch. 6

Appendix D: Visuals and Credits

All charts and family trees in this book were drawn by the author for this book from the data in the chapters and are part of the book's copyright. No photographs are used.

Visual	Creator and date	Data source	Placement
The oldest branches of the Christian family tree	Andrew Dominguez, 2026	Chapter 3 sources (Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon; East-West Schism)	Chapter 3
Reported size of selected Christian bodies	Andrew Dominguez, 2026	Membership table, Chapter 2	Chapter 2
The Western branches of the Christian family tree after 1517	Andrew Dominguez, 2026	Dates in Chapters 7-19	Part Three opening
Cover art (vine and branches)	Andrew Dominguez, 2026	Original drawing	Cover

Church emblems and logos. Many denominations use registered logos, such as the Assemblies of God emblem, the United Methodist cross and flame and the Anglican Communion's compass rose design. These are trademarks and are not reproduced in this book. Where a chapter mentions an emblem, it describes it in words. Symbols that are old enough to be in the public domain, such as Luther's seal, are also described rather than pictured, so that the book can be printed and shared freely.

Alt text. For readers using screen readers, the website edition gives each chart a text description. The family trees read top to bottom, from the oldest branch to the newest; the bar chart lists each body with its reported size and year, as in the table in Chapter 2.

Appendix E: Glossary

Amillennialism. The view that the thousand years of Revelation 20 symbolize the present reign of Christ.

Anabaptist. "Rebaptizer"; Reformation-era believers who baptized only those who confessed faith.

Autocephaly. Self-governing status for a national Orthodox church.

Catechism. A summary of a church's teaching, often in question-and-answer form.

Charismatic. A Christian outside the classical Pentecostal denominations who seeks and practices the gifts of the Spirit.

Confession of faith. A written statement of what a church believes, such as the Augsburg Confession.

Deuterocanonical books. Seven Old Testament books (and parts of others) that Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include and Protestants call the Apocrypha.

Dispensationalism. A system of interpretation that distinguishes God's dealings with Israel from His purposes for the church; usually premillennial and pre-tribulation.

Ecumenical council. A gathering of bishops whose decisions are received by the whole church, such as Nicaea (325) or Chalcedon (451).

Filioque. Latin, "and from the Son"; a phrase added to the Nicene Creed in the West about the procession of the Holy Spirit.

Imminence. The teaching that Christ's coming for His church could happen at any moment, with no event required first.

Magisterium. The teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops in the Catholic Church.

Millenarianism (chiliasm). Belief in a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ.

Ordinance. An act Christ commanded, such as baptism or the Lord's Supper, understood as obedience and witness rather than a means of grace.

Postmillennialism. The view that Christ returns after a long era of gospel success.

Premillennialism. The view that Christ returns before a literal thousand-year reign on earth.

Rapture. The catching up of believers to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Sacrament. A rite through which, many churches teach, God gives grace.

Transubstantiation. The Catholic teaching that the substance of the bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Christ.

Tribulation. A period of great distress before Christ's return; in dispensational teaching, a future seven-year period.

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