
Popularity And Spread Factors Of Christianity

Christianity dominates as the most spread faith, with one-third of the overall world's population. It is an offshoot of early Judaism. It constitutes of three constituencies, the Catholic Church, Oriental Orthodox churches, and Protestants. It centers its belief in the teachings and the public life of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus was a reincarnation of God. The term Christianity is a derivation of the followers of Christ. Therefore, Jesus can be considered as the pioneer of this faith. Jesus can also be one of the most influential persons in human history. The religion was however founded by Jesus's followers days after his death. Christians base their teaching on the bible, Christian's sacred book, primarily on the New Testament. The Scripture, however, indefinitely describes the origin and the spreading of the religion. This paper explores the origin of Christianity religion.

Christianity basis can be traced back from the first century when the Holy Spirit descended to the eleven disciples of Jesus. Jesus was a Jew, born between 4 BCE and 1 BCE in Bethlehem, Jerusalem. It was during the era of King Herod the Great. Thirty years later, Jesus started his ministry. He first chose twelve disciples who would assist him and flourish the gospel after him. He then went with his disciples around Palestine preaching. Most Jews referred to him as their king, while some called him the messiah. During the reign, he encountered a lot of challenges from some Jews and other Romans. Jesus's reign lasted for about three years. He was then arrested and accused of treason and crucified. According to Christianity traditions, Jesus resurrected three days after his death. He then ascended to heaven forty days later. The resurrection and ascension was an affirmation that he was the messiah foretold decades BCE. On the day of Pentecost, ten days after his ascension, the Holy Spirit descended to the eleven apostles. One of Jesus's helpers had committed suicide after betraying him. The eleven disciples became the first Christians.

The Holy Spirit empowered them to continue disseminating the gospel even outside Palestine. In that same century, 1st century CE, about three thousand Jews converted to Christianity. In 37 AD, Paul, previously Saul, was transformed into Christianity. Paul was a tentmaker and a persecutor of Christians before the transformation. According to history, Paul converted while he was on the way to Damascus, where he was going to persecute more believers. Paul's conversion led to a significant move on the spreading of Christianity. Immediately after conversion, Paul began his missionary work in synagogues, Damascus. Non-Christians felt betrayed and started plotting against him. As a result, Paul fled to the Arabian Desert for three years. He returned Jerusalem at around 40 AD but faced more threats which led him to run to his home town. Between 41 AD and 44 AD, Paul was preaching in Tarsus and surroundings. Paul viewed gentiles equal to Jews, and they also deserved the opportunity to join Jewish Christianity. During this period, a lot of gentiles converted to Christianity.

At around 48 AD, Paul set off for his first missionary journey at Antioch, Syria to Paphos, Cyprus. While in Cyprus, Paul performed a miracle, cure of a sorcerer with temporary blindness. The miracle led to the conversion of a large number of non-Christian. Series Paulus, a Roman proconsul, was among those who converted. They then set to Perga, Pamphylia then to Pisidian Antioch. Their determination at Antioch stirred Jewish leaders to obstruct them and later expel them from the region. After dismissal, Paul and Barnabas went to Galatia. They

preached and converted non-believers in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. At Lystra, he performed another miracle, healing of a disabled man. The miracle led to some Jews from Antioch and Iconium, cause his stoning. However, Paul recovered and returned to Syria via Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. The journey of about two years led to the prompt spread of Christianity in Rome.

At about 51 AD, after the Jerusalem council meeting, Paul started his second missionary journey. The journey took about two years. He first revisited areas of his first journey before proceeding to the coastal city of Troas, on the Aegean Sea. From Troas, Paul moved to Samothrace Island then to the Greek coast. He then made his way to Philip. At Philip, a merchant, Lydia, and her household were converted and baptized. Lydia was the first Christian convert in Europe. After a while, Paul and his companions took the gospel to Macedonia and neighborhoods. Paul and Silas, Paul's companion, were arrested while at Philip after Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl. They were later released, and they traveled Athens past Thessalonica and Berea. They also spent time in Corinth, Caesarea in Palestine and Jerusalem before returning to Syrian Antioch. The journey was successful with lots of converts, among them their jailer and his households.

After a brief stay in Antioch, Paul departed for the third journey. He first revisited churches he had found before visiting Ephesus where he spent two years evangelizing. Paul then went to Macedonia before reaching Corinth. After three months in Corinth, he retraced his way back to Macedonia through Berea, Thessalonica, and Philip. In Philip, Paul performed a miracle, raising of Eutychus from dead. The miracle set great encouragement to Christians in Troas and attracted more converts. Paul left Greece after discovering some Jewish leaders were planning to kill him. From Greece, he traveled back to Syria and then to Jerusalem. The main aim of this journey was to empower churches he had planted on his previous missionary journeys.

Between 71 AD and 115 AD, evangelist Mark introduced Christianity in Africa, Alexandria, Egypt. Mark is the founder of Coptic Christianity. It spread slowly to northern Africa, reaching to the Ethiopian empire and other parts along the red sea. Most African empires did not embrace Christianity. Therefore, it was practiced in secret. At around 327 AD, Christianity was legalized and declared as an official religion of Axum kingdom by King Edna. Axum became the first African kingdom to embrace Christianity. It also became the home of Ethiopian Coptic Christianity. At around 180 AD, a school of Christian theology was established at Alexandria. After, at about 189 AD, Vittore I became the first African elected pope. Christianity, therefore, gained more fame in African empires.

Christianity had significantly spread in Rome and outside Rome by the third century. At around 206 AD, king Abgar IX converted Edessa to Christian city. It became the first city in the world where Christianity was allowed. However, the spreading of Christianity was undermined by the sporadic and empire-wide persecution it faced during the reign of emperors Nero, Decius and Emperor Diocletian through series of the proclamation. At around 312 AD, a Roman emperor, Constantine was converted. His conversion marked a new turning point in the growth of the religion. Emperor Constantine allowed Christians to take part in civic life as other Roman citizens. He built churches and permitted Christians to receive donations. The wealth acquired allowed Christians to build more churches and other Christian governed institutes such as hospitals, schools, among others. By mid-300 AD, approximately twenty-five percent of the total Roman population was Christian.

Christianity continued to gain fame even after the death of Constantine. His sons were more positive in affirming Christianity. However, Christianity faced another challenge when Julian took over the throne. Emperor Julian supported paganism. Although paganism was almost dilapidated, Julian tried to revive it through restoring temples. He also appointed pagans in high public offices contrary to Constantine. Later, through the edict of Thessalonica, in 380 AD, emperor Theodosius made Christianity an official state religion of the Roman Empire and illegalized paganism. The decree commanded every citizen to convert to Christianity. Although pagans were persecuted, they were not brutally tortured as Christians. One year later, Theodosius issued another edict that required Christians to worship one God as per Nicene Creed. The decree was meant to unite Christians.

Due to factors such as geographical separation, linguistic differences, political factors, doctrinal differences, among others, Christianity split into two, the orthodox churches and the catholic churches. The division began between the fourth and fifth century after the total decline of the Roman Empire due to the barbarian invasion. During this period, Roman popes played not only the religious roles but also political roles. Later, at around 526 AD, the schism was healed. The tension between the two groups was felt again between the tenth and eleventh century, which led to permanent division. Between the 8th and 10th century, distinctive theologies and controversies developed. The most noted debate is filioque controversy. It relates to the procession of the Holy Spirit in the trinity. The deliberation and the papal power were the two main reasons that led to the great schism of 1054 AD. Years later, pope urban II reunited the two groups of Christianity.

Christians faced a significant challenge from the Muslim forces at around the sixth century. The Islamic leader, Muhammad is believed to have had a vision that demanded him to destroy all religions that practiced polytheism and idolatry. Muhammad viewed Christianity as pantheist in that; it worshipped both God and Jesus, and so, it was to be destroyed. The Muslim forces first attacked Damascus in AD 635. They then went to Jerusalem at 637 AD. The troops then conquered byzantine in 639 AD and Alexandria in 642 AD. By 653 AD, Islam had defeated Persia, Syria, and Palestine. In 732 AD, the forces were defeated by Charles the hammer of Frank. By then it had cast its destruction on Christians in Asia Minor, North Africa, Carthage, Spain, Portugal, and Gaul. Unlike Christianity, Islam had simple rule and doctrines. Its simplicity attracted more converts. The consecutive invasions that the Roman Empire had experienced also empowered the spreading of Islam. More so, factors, such as doctrinal differences and clerical formation, which were affecting the unity of Christianity, had led to some Christians embrace Islam religion.

The great Christianity schism healed when Byzantine pleaded for help against Islam in a series of crusades from 10th to 13th century. The struggles were religious wars between Christians and Muslims. Christians had initiated the wars intending to recapture the holy lands which were occupied by the Muslims. Jerusalem was considered as a sacred land as it was the birthplace of Christianity religion. The Islam forces had conquered the areas from the 6th century after the byzantine-Persian wars. The crusades started at around 1096 AD. In about three years of struggle, Christians had recaptured the holy land of Jerusalem. Fifty years later, the fight broke again, and the Islam forces won. The crusades' impacts on the religion were first felt a few years after, at around 1555 AD. Peace treaties were reached years later ending the campaigns with the Muslim retaining the holy land.

The distinctive theologies about Christianity believe, and the church clerical formation continued

to develop after crusades. In the 15th century, Martin Luther, a German Augustinian monk, initiated a protestant reformation. It was meant to reorganize the Christianity religion. Martin Luther believed that the Catholic Church was corrupt. Therefore, there was need to reform it. It was against the religious authority and traditions. He wrote ninety-five theses criticizing various corruptions in the church. Luther's reformation is the greatest and the most significant in church history. The reform led to his excommunication from the Catholic Church in 1521 AD and the rise of Lutheranism. Protestant reformation marked the beginning of new Christian church history and the rise of different denominations.

In summary, Christianity started as a small sect of religion but later grew to an international religion. Christian missionaries and leaders were determined in spreading the gospel despite many challenges. They managed to attract more converts, leading to the rapid growth of the Christian faith. The following factors greatly facilitated the rapid growth and spreading of Christianity. Firstly, the Roman Empire had an advanced infrastructure. As a result, missionaries were able to travel around, spreading the gospel and planting churches. Secondly, the Roman Empire had two primary languages, the Latin and Greek. Hence, transmitting Christianity gospel was easy without language barrier. Besides, in sixteenth-century after reformation; the scripture was translation of the scripture into other local language was done, enabling a smooth spread of the gospel. Freedom of movement was also another significant factor in the spreading of Christianity. The roman citizens were allowed to move from one place to the other freely. Therefore, the missionaries were able to plant churches in different areas. Although Christianity split into many separate branches, during the reformation period, Christians share common beliefs. They believe in one supernatural God who exists in three different forms, God the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Christians allude to Jesus as a divine son of God. Christianity believers hope that the will live eternally with God when the universe wane.