

## CATHOLICISM

The Catholic Church, which most refer to as the Roman Catholic Church, is the largest branch of Christianity, with Protestantism and the Orthodox tradition being the other two branches. The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest branch of the Christian faith, dating to Jesus Christ, his apostles, and papal authority deemed to have begun with the apostle Peter. The Roman Catholic Church is comprised of followers of Jesus Christ who hold to Catholic beliefs and practices. “As the world's oldest and largest continuously functioning international institution, it has played a prominent role in the history and development of Western civilisation.”<sup>1</sup>

### Origin

The Catholic Church originated with the initial followers of Jesus in the first century. It was the only Church (Greek *ekklesia*, meaning ‘called out ones’) at that time. The word Catholic derives from the Romanized Greek *katholikos*, meaning *universal*, and was used in the second century to describe the church. By the fourth century, the name *Catholic Church* was starting to be used to set it apart from other groups calling themselves *the Church*. The last Roman emperor to rule over both the eastern and western sectors of the Roman Empire, Theodosius 1, used the term Roman Catholic Church when he established the state church of the Roman Empire in 380.<sup>2</sup>

As the number of followers of Jesus grew and spread to the known world of the time, organization and leadership were needed for the developing global body. Chief in the leadership structure that evolved was the priesthood. Since Jesus indicated he would build his church upon the profession Peter made (**Matthew 16:18**), Catholics identify Peter as the first Pope of the church, with all authority given to him and his successors to head the priesthood and lead the church.<sup>3</sup>

Offices of clergy in the Catholic Church are based on the designations given Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. Clergy perform these duties – teaching, pastoral, and sacerdotal (the power to impart grace through sacraments). The hierarchy of power encompasses the pope, bishops through whom cardinals are appointed, then priests with deacons under them.

In 1054, the Catholic Church the Great Schism of 1054 when the Catholic Church of the western half of the Roman Empire (Catholic Church) ceased communion with the church in the eastern half (Eastern Orthodox). The third branch of Christianity, Protestantism, developed from the Reformation in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

### Main Beliefs

The key beliefs of Catholicism can be summarized as follows:<sup>4</sup>

There is only one supreme being, called God. The Catholic God recognizes the Trinity, or three aspects of God – Father (God), Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit (the personification of goodness and sanctity, arising from both the Father and Son).

Main tenets of the faith are:

1. God is universal and loves everyone.
2. Jesus Christ came to save all the people.
3. Not formally belonging to the Catholic church is objectively sinful.
4. No one who is sinful makes it into heaven.

Jesus Christ is believed to be the founder of the Catholic Church and was the "messiah," the son aspect of the Trinity, who was sent to Earth and born to redeem those who sin against the true religion.

Salvation depends on faith, works, and sacraments. They further believe that salvation is lost when a responsible person commits a mortal sin. It can be regained through repentance and the sacrament of confession.

Catholics believe the authority of the church lies within the hierarchy of the church – the pope, bishops, cardinals, priests, and deacons.

The Judeo-Christian Bible, believed to be the inspired word of God, is the main religious document. Parts of the Bible are to be read as literal truth. Other parts are considered poetical expressions of faith, with church leaders defining which parts are which.

Catholics are expected to love God and keep His commandments, especially the Ten Commandments. Six other commandments or laws of the church are to be kept by Catholics:

1. Attend Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Fast and abstain on appointed days.
3. Confess sins once a year.
4. Receive Holy Communion at Easter.
5. Contribute to the support of the church.
6. Observe the laws of the church concerning marriage.

Persons of the church are not to be worshipped, but some are venerated and can be appealed to in prayers – the Pope, Mary, mother of Jesus, the Apostles, and Saints designated by the church (persons who lived exceptional, holy lives).

Catholic bishops and priests intercede with or bring grace from God to ordinary people in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, first Eucharist, penance (reconciliation), anointing of the sick, holy orders for ordained ministers (bishops, priests, and deacons), and marriage.

In Holy Communion, the elements of bread and wine become Christ's body and blood, physically present and consumed by believers ("transubstantiation").

Prayer is an important aspect of Catholic life. Five key prayers of Catholics include – blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. Prayers may be directed to God or to the saints, either individually or as a litany.

Catholics believe Purgatory is a state of being after death in which souls are cleansed by purifying punishments before they can enter heaven.

### Demographics

There are approximately 1.3 billion Catholics in the world with the following distribution, as determined by the Pew Research Center in 2010.<sup>5</sup>

<u>Region</u>	<u>Percent of Catholics</u>
Latin America-Caribbean	39
Europe	24
Sub-Saharan Africa	16
Asia-Pacific	12
North America	8
Middle East-North Africa	<1

The church consists of 24 particular churches and almost 3,500 dioceses and eparchies around the world.

As noted above, since the 20th century the majority of Catholics reside in the southern hemisphere, due to secularization in Europe, and increased persecution in the Middle East.

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This is an introduction on the subject of **Catholicism**. Here are a few other resources you may wish to explore:

<sup>1</sup> [Catholic Church - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The Scandal of the Catholic Priesthood \(gty.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Was Saint Peter the first pope? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[The Catholic Church - History, Beliefs & Traditions of Catholicism \(christianity.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Introduction to the Catholic Religion: Beliefs, Practices and History \(learnreligions.com\)](#)

[Roman Catholic Beliefs Compared With Protestant Beliefs \(learnreligions.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [The Global Catholic Population | Pew Research Center \(pewforum.org\)](#)