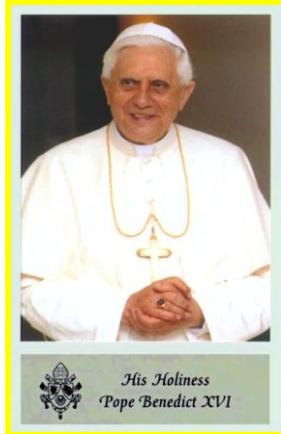


Catholics and Religion

The Catholic Church



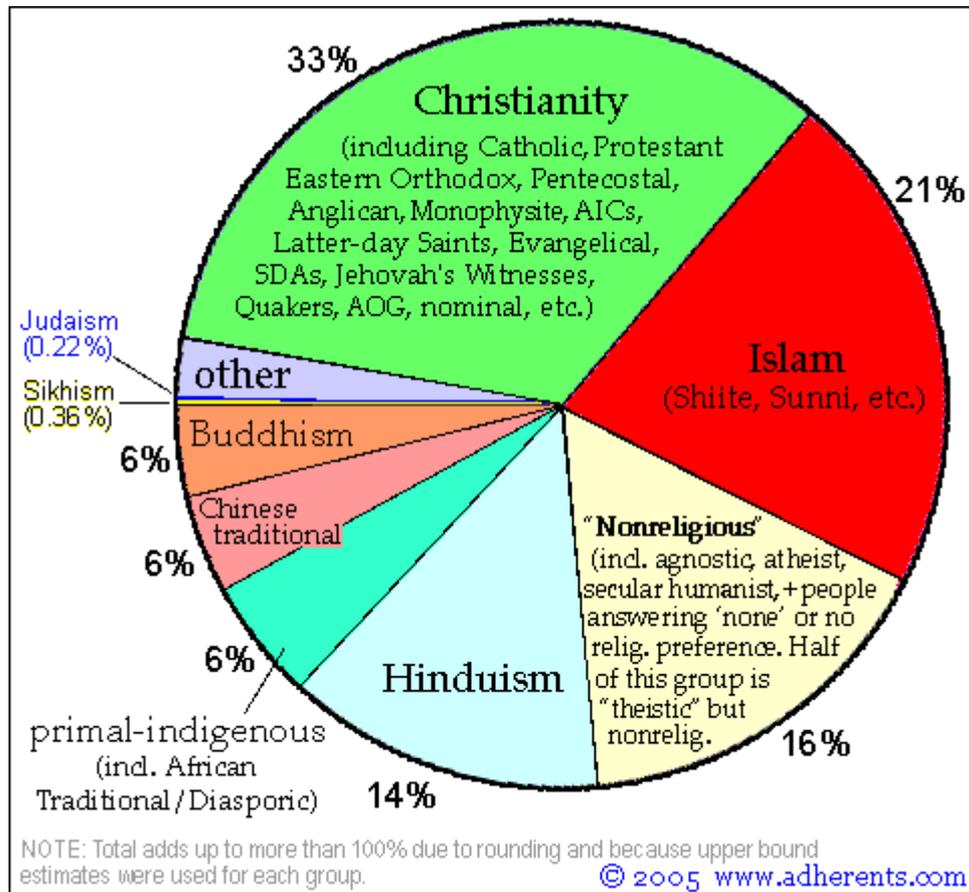
Introduction

The Catholic Church is the oldest institution in the western world. It can trace its history back almost 2000 years.

Today there are more than a billion Catholics in the world, spread across all five continents with particular concentrations in southern Europe, the United States, the Philippines and the countries of Central and South America. What binds this diverse group of people together is their faith in Jesus Christ and their obedience to the papacy.

Catholics believe that the Pope, based in Rome, is the successor to Saint Peter whom Christ appointed as the first head of His church. He therefore stands in what Catholicism calls the apostolic succession, an unbroken line back to Peter and has supreme authority. Popes can speak infallibly on matters of faith and morals but in practice do so rarely.

Demographics



1. Christianity: 2.1 billion
2. Islam: 1.3 billion
3. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 1.1 billion
4. Hinduism: 900 million
5. Chinese traditional religion: 394 million
6. Buddhism: 376 million
7. primal-indigenous: 300 million
8. African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million
9. Sikhism: 23 million
10. Juche: 19 million
11. Spiritism: 15 million
12. Judaism: 14 million
13. Baha'i: 7 million
14. Jainism: 4.2 million
15. Shinto: 4 million
16. Cao Dai: 4 million
17. Zoroastrianism: 2.6 million
18. Tenrikyo: 2 million
19. Neo-Paganism: 1 million
20. Unitarian-Universalism: 800 thousand
21. Rastafarianism: 600 thousand
22. Scientology: 500 thousand

The number of Catholic faithful rose from 757 million in 1978 to 1.07 billion at year-end 2002. By continent, the increase was 150% in Africa; 74% in Asia; 49% in Oceania; 45% in the Americas; and 5% in Europe.

Yet the percentage of Catholics as a share of world population dropped. In 1978, 17.99% of the world's inhabitants were Catholic; in 1990, the tally was 17.68%; and in 2002, 17.2%.

Half the world's Catholics are in the Americas (49.9%); 26.15% in Europe; 12.84% in Africa; 10.3% in Asia; and 0.78% in Oceania.

Source: Anuario Pontificio (Pontifical Yearbook)

Top 10 Nations with Most Catholics

Nation	Percent	Number of baptized Catholics
Brazil	86.50%	134,818,000
Mexico	95.30	86,305,000
USA	26.00	~61,000,000
Philippines	83.60	58,735,000
Italy	97.20%	55,599,000
France	82.10	47,773,000
Spain	94.20	36,956,000
Poland	95.40	36,835,000
Colombia	91.90	32,260,000
Argentina	90.70	31,546,000
Germany	34.80	28,403,000

Source: *1998 Catholic Almanac: Our Sunday Visitor: USA* (1997), pg. 333-367. Except U.S. figures, which are from general sources.

**Top 20 Nations with
Highest Percentage of Catholics**

Nation	Number of Catholics	Percent of population that are baptized Catholics
Vatican City	850	100.00%
San Marino	24,714	99.83
Saint Pierre and Miquelon	6,000	99.36
Wallis and Futuna Islands	15,000	99.02
Italy	55,599,000	97.20
Cape Verde	390,000	96.00
Poland	36,835,000	95.40
Mexico	86,305,000	95.30
Ireland	3,372,500	95.00
Guadeloupe	391,000	95.00
Spain	36,956,000	94.20
Luxembourg	386,000	94.00
Paraguay	4,531,000	93.80
Ecuador	10,729,000	93.60
El Salvador	5,399,000	93.50
Costa Rica	3,009,000	93.00
Honduras	5,517,000	92.70
Venezuela	19,922,000	92.00
Portugal	9,948,000	92.00

Source: 1998 Catholic Almanac: Our Sunday Visitor: USA (1997), pg. 333-367; Adherents.com.

The Catholic Church in Britain

In Britain, Catholics suffered a long period of persecution following Henry VIII's break with the papacy in the 1530s and were sometimes regarded as servants of a foreign power - particularly in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, orchestrated by Catholic figures in the hope of restoring a co-believer to the throne. By the start of the nineteenth century, however such 'anti-popery' prejudices started to die away and full civic rights were restored in 1829 with the Catholic Emancipation Act. The Catholic Hierarchy was restored in 1850 by Pope Pius IX.

In Britain the Catholic Church is broken down into England and Wales, Scotland, and all Ireland.

The Catholic Church of England and Wales

The basic administrative unit of the Catholic Church is the diocese - an area presided over by a bishop, sometimes with auxiliary bishops to help him. There are 22 dioceses in England and Wales. These are divided into parishes, the local communities of Catholics. There are also two dioceses covering the whole country for specific groups: the Bishopric of the Forces and the Apostolic Exarchate for Ukrainians.

There are also five Provinces in England and Wales: Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Southwark and Westminster.



Year	Estimated Catholic Population in England and Wales	Sunday Mass Attendance
2003	4,105,635	958,541

Source: Catholic Directory of England and Wales

Today there are estimated to be just over four million Catholics in England and Wales - or 10% of the population - but of these only about one million attend church regularly.

How the Catholic Church differs from other denominations



For almost a thousand years, Catholicism and Christianity were as one. The break between the Church of Rome and other Christian faiths began with the split with Orthodox Christians in 1054AD over questions of doctrine and the absolute authority and behaviour of the popes. For similar reasons in the sixteenth century, the Protestant churches also went their own way.

Catholics share with other Christians a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man who came to earth to redeem humanity's sins through His death and resurrection. They follow His teachings as set out in the New Testament and place their trust in God's promise of eternal life with Him. Catholicism, however, is distinct from other Christian churches in both its organisation and its teaching.

Doctrines

Catholic doctrine is based on the scriptures and on the church's own traditions. It believes that its doctrines were revealed to the apostles and have been preserved in the continuous tradition ever since. There are several doctrinal issues where the Catholic Church has a distinct position:

- in its devotion to Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, who Catholics believe gave birth to Jesus without having sex first and who was raised body and soul into heaven where she occupies a special place interceding between God and His people
- in its belief in transubstantiation, that during the celebration of the mass when the priest repeats Christ's words from the Last Supper the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood, though no change takes place in their outward appearance
- in its opposition, as stated in the 1968 papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, and reiterated on numerous occasions by Pope John Paul II, to artificial methods of contraception which, it says, interfere with the transmission of human life and the sacred purpose of sex
- in its unflinching condemnation of abortion as the destruction of human life which, it believes, begins at the moment of conception

The Sacraments

Catholicism is a faith that revolves around the seven sacraments - Baptism, Reconciliation (Confession), Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and the Sacrament of the Sick (Extreme Unction or the Last Rites). The importance of receiving Christ's body and blood at Communion as the bread of life is central.

The Catholic Church and Truth

LUMEN GENTIUM = DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH (SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI ON NOVEMBER 21, 1964)

Paragraph 14 deals with the Catholic Faithful

This holy Council first of all turns its attention to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself on scripture and tradition, it teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body, which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church, which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it.

Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who--by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion--are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but "in body" not "in heart." [12] All children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be the more severely judged. [13]

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church, are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own.

Paragraph 15 deals with other Christian denominations

Paragraph 16 with other non-Christian religions and those who have not found God

About those who have not found God it says:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience--those too many achieve eternal salvation. [19] Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel [20] and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.

In summary Lumen Gentium tells us

- The Catholic Church possesses the wholeness and fullness of truth
- Other Christian denominations, Faiths and individuals participate in this truth, some more than others

Why Do Catholic Go to Mass?

As early as the third and fourth centuries laws were made by the Church confirming the customs of assisting at Mass and resting from labour on Sundays and certain holy days.

Various special Holy Days of Obligation were instituted in order to recall principal mysteries or truths, to give emphasis to the important events in the lives of Christ and of his Blessed Mother, and to bring to mind the virtues and the rewards of the saints.

Canon 1247

On Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation, the faithful are obliged to assist at Mass. They are also to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body.

Canon 1248

§1 The obligation of assisting at Mass is satisfied wherever Mass is celebrated in a catholic rite either on a holy day itself or on the evening of the previous day.

§2 If it is impossible to assist at a eucharistic celebration, either because no sacred minister is available or for some other grave reason, the faithful are strongly recommended to take part in a liturgy of the Word, if there be such in the parish church or some other sacred place, which is celebrated in accordance with the provisions laid down by the diocesan Bishop; or to spend an appropriate time in prayer, whether personally or as a family or, as occasion presents, in a group of families.

Commentary

Weekly Sunday Mass and Holy Days are obligatory for all Catholics. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a “dispensation” from attendance at Mass on these days. There are instead some factors that might excuse Mass attendance such as:

- personal illness or serious infirmity
- need to take care of someone suffering from same
- significant travel,
- certain jobs affecting public safety or welfare.

The Church chooses to make the Mass obligatory on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation because it is a community of worship and the Mass is the community's central act of worship. In the Mass through the ministry of the priest, Christ the Lord becomes substantially present and offers himself under the appearances of bread and wine and gives himself as spiritual nourishment to the faithful who are associated with him in his offering - Canon 899. All the faithful as members of Christ unite with him in the re-enactment of his redeeming sacrifice in adoration of God and prayer for the continuing growth of his kingdom.

In keeping with the ancient practice of reckoning a day from sunset to sunset, the Mass obligation on Sundays and Holy Days may be fulfilled by assisting at the Mass of the previous evening. Attendance at Mass on the Vigil, however, should not cause Catholics to forget about the sacred nature of Sunday as a day of worship, joy in the risen Lord and Christian relaxation.

Allowing Sunday to lose its significance as a special day in our culture is not a healthy development. It is a surrender to creeping atheistic humanism which recognizes neither God nor man's obligation to worship him in public and private. The effect on the Christian is tragic also for it tempts one to divide our life between in-church and out-of-church segments whereas every aspect of our life should be Christ like and, therefore, God-oriented.

It should be noted that God himself as Creator is represented as resting on one day of "his week" (Genesis 2:3).

Pope Leo XIII said "Rest, combined with religious observances, disposes thoughts to things heavenly and to worship which he so strictly owes to the Eternal Godhead. It is this, above all, which is the reason and the motive of Sunday rest."

As of Advent 2006 the Holy Days of Obligation in England and Wales are:

- ❖ Every Sunday
- ❖ The Nativity (25 December)
- ❖ Saints Peter & St Paul (29 June)
- ❖ The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15 August)
- ❖ All Saints (1 November)

The following celebrations have been transferred to the nearest Sunday:

- ❖ The Epiphany (6th January)
- ❖ The Ascension (Thursday after the 6th Sunday of Easter)
- ❖ Corpus Christi (Thursday after Trinity Sunday)

But it would be very sad if we attended weekly Mass just because we had to. So why do **WE** attend Mass?

- Because it is central to our lives
- Mass is an action; something we do together; we are not spectators at it, we are or should be deeply involved in it
- At Mass we re-enact what Jesus did at the supper he had with his Disciples on the night before he died Cf. Luke 22:14-20:

¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

- The Mass is a sacred action
- Over the weeks, months, and years we try to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Mass and obtain an ever increasing insight into its significance and meaning for their own lives

Background

In the terms of the Old Testament or Covenant, the Jews were commanded by God to set apart one day of the week for prayer and rest. The Mosaic Law established this day as the Sabbath in commemoration of the completion of God's initial work of creation. In the Genesis account, God was represented as "resting" after the work of the six days was finished (Gen 2:4). The Sabbath was thus a day for praise and thanksgiving to God for the works of creation. The Jews, therefore, spent the day in prayer and refrained from manual labour.

Exodus 16:23 - *Tomorrow is to be a day of rest*

Exodus 20:8 - *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy*

Deuteronomy 5:12 - *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you*

Nehemiah 13:22 - *Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.*

Isaiah 58:13 - *If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words*

Jeremiah 17:22 - *Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers*

Jeremiah 17:24 - *But if you are careful to obey me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it*

Jeremiah 17:27 - *Keep the Sabbath day holy*

Ezekiel 20:20 - *Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God*

Ezekiel 22:26 - *Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them*

Ezekiel 44:24 - *In any dispute, the priests are to serve as judges and decide it according to my ordinances. They are to keep my laws and my decrees for all my appointed feasts, and they are to keep my Sabbaths holy.*

With the coming of the New Covenant to supersede the Old, the "new creation" (Cf. 2 Cor 5:17) established in Church assumed even greater importance than the original creation. In view of this, the Apostolic Church chose Sunday (*the Day of the Lord's Resurrection and hence His "day of rest"*) to replace Saturday in importance as the special day of worship and rest among Christians. Strictly speaking, it is not correct to say that the Church changed the Sabbath to Sunday. For a time Early Church observed both, but as more and more non-Jews were converted to Christianity, the Sabbath became obsolete as a Christian holy day.

Prayer of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you.

Amen