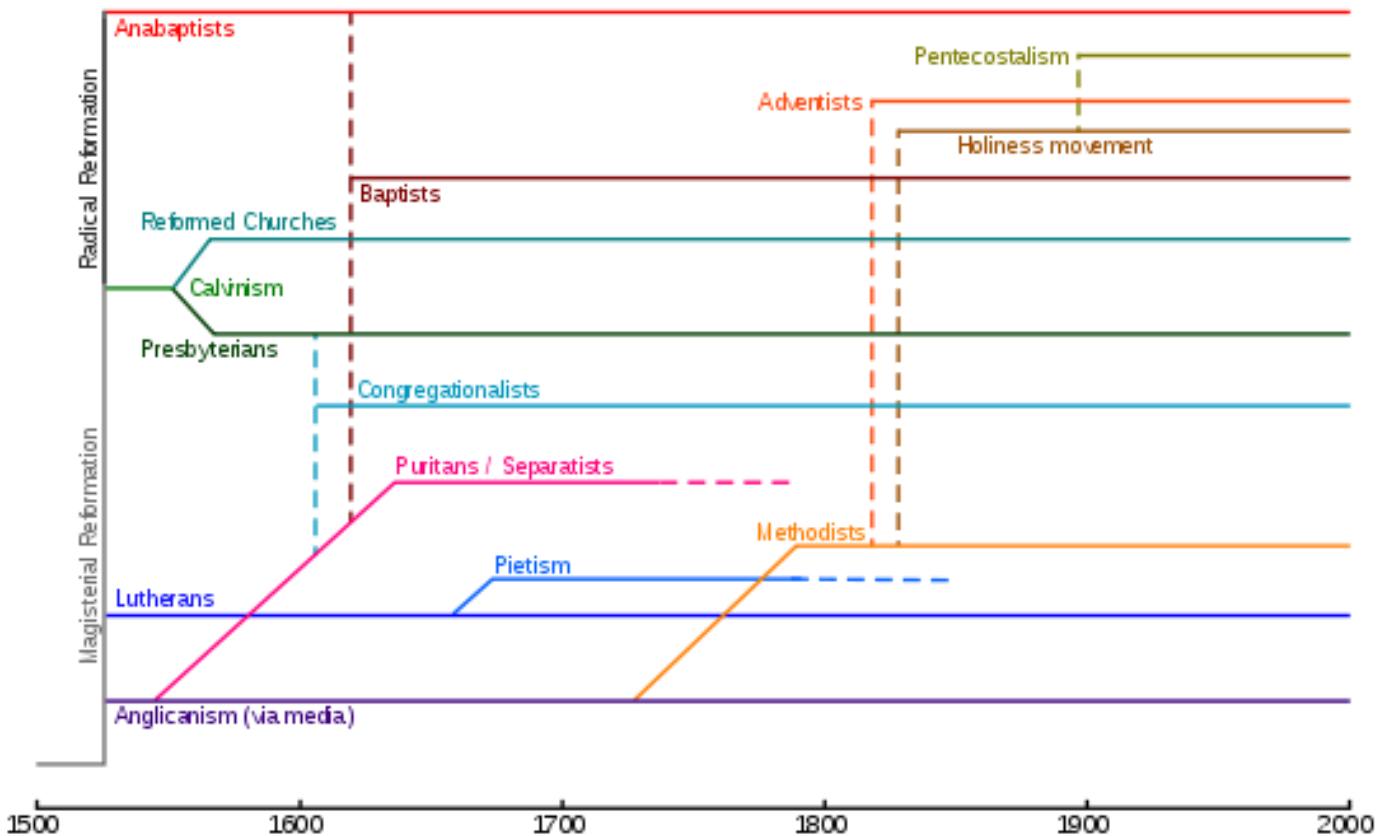
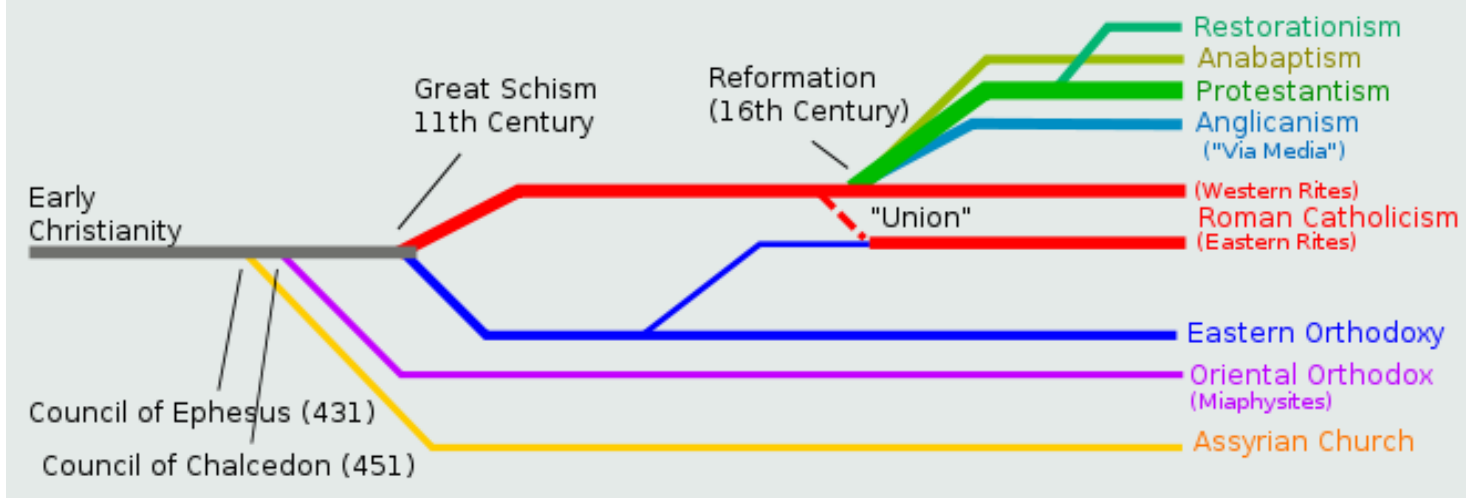


Major branches within Christianity



Corruption

Unrest due to the Great Schism of Western Christianity (1378–1416) excited wars between princes, uprisings among the peasants, and widespread concern over corruption in the church. The first of a series of disruptive and new perspectives came from John Wycliffe at Oxford University, then from Jan Hus at the University of Prague. The Catholic Church officially concluded this debate at the Council of Constance (1414–1417). The conclave condemned Jan Hus, who was executed by burning in spite of a promise of safe-conduct. Wycliffe was posthumously burned as a heretic.

The Council of Constance confirmed and strengthened the traditional medieval conception of church and empire. It did not address the national tensions, or the theological tensions which had been stirred up during the previous century. The council could not prevent schism and the Hussite Wars in Bohemia.

Martin Luther was shocked by the corruption of the clergy on a trip to Rome in 1510. Sixtus IV (1471–1484) was the first Pope to impose a license on brothels and a special tax on priests who kept a mistress. He also established the practice of selling indulgences to be applied to the dead, thereby establishing a virtually infinite source of revenue. Pope Alexander VI (1492–1503) was one of the most controversial of the Renaissance Popes. He fathered seven children, including Lucrezia and Cesare Borgia, by at least two mistresses. Fourteen years after his death, the corruption of the papacy that Pope Alexander VI exemplified – particularly the sale of indulgences – prompted Luther to nail a summary of his grievances on the door of a church in Wittenberg in Germany and launch the Protestant Reformation.

Eastern churches

In the Eastern world, the largest body of believers in modern times is the Eastern Orthodox Church, sometimes imprecisely called "Greek Orthodox" because from the time of Christ through the Byzantine empire, Greek was the common language (Greek Orthodox actually refers to only one portion of the entire Orthodox Church). The Eastern Orthodox Church believes itself to be the continuation of the original Christian church established by Jesus Christ, and the Apostles. They consider themselves to be spiritually one body while administratively they are grouped into several autocephalous councils. They do not recognize any single bishop as universal church leader, but rather each bishop governs only his own diocese. The Patriarch of Constantinople is known as the Ecumenical Patriarch, and holds the title "first among equals" meaning only that

if a great council is called, the Patriarch sits as president of the council. He has no more power than any other bishop. Currently, the largest synod with the most members is the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches are organized in a similar manner, with six national autocephalous groups and two autonomous bodies. Although the region of modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea has had a strong body of believers since the infancy of Christianity, these regions only gained autocephaly in 1963 and 1994 respectively. Since these groups are relatively obscure in the West, literature on them has sometimes included the Assyrian Church of the East as a part of the Oriental Orthodox Communion, but the Assyrians have maintained theological, cultural, and ecclesiastical independence from all other Christian bodies since 431. It is administered in a hierarchical model not entirely unlike the Catholics, with the head of the church being the Patriarch Catholicos of the Assyrian Church of the East, since 1976 HH Mar Dinkha IV. Due to oppression, the church's headquarters is in Chicago, Illinois, rather than the Middle East, though some believers remain there. Even within this small group, there was another split to the Ancient Church of the East, and a rival Catholicos (Patriarch) in California.

Western churches

Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Protestantism are the three major divisions of Christianity in the Western world. However, Roman Catholics do not describe themselves as a denomination but rather as the original Holy and Universal Church; which all others branched off from, as do some Anglicans. The Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran churches are generally considered to be Protestant denominations, although strictly speaking, of these three, only the Lutherans took part in the official Protest after the decree of the Second Diet of Speyer mandated the burning of Luther's works and the end of the Protestant Reformation. Anglicanism was generally classified as Protestant, but since the "Tractarian" or Oxford Movement of the 19th century, led by John Henry Newman, Anglican writers emphasize a more catholic understanding of the church and characterize it as more properly understood as its own tradition—a *via media* ("middle way"), both Protestant and Catholic. The American province of the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church USA, describes itself as a modern *via media* church in this tradition. A case is sometimes also made to regard Lutheranism in a similar way, considering the catholic character of its foundational documents (the Augsburg Confession and other documents contained in the Book of Concord) and its existence prior to the Anglican, Anabaptist, and Reformed churches, from which nearly all other Protestant denominations derive.

One central tenet of Catholicism (whether Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and some other denominations), is its practice of Apostolic Succession. "Apostle" means "one who is sent out." Jesus commissioned the first twelve apostles (see Biblical Figures for the list of the Twelve), and they, in turn laid hands on subsequent church leaders to ordain (commission) them for ministry. In this manner, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans trace their ordained ministers all the way back to the original Twelve. Roman Catholics believe that the Pope has authority which can be traced directly to the apostle Peter whom they hold to be the original head of and first Pope of the Christian Church. There are smaller churches, such as the Old Catholic Church which rejected the definition of Papal Infallibility at the First Vatican Council, and Anglo-Catholics, Anglicans who believe that Anglicanism is a continuation of historical Catholicism and who incorporate many Catholic beliefs and practices. The Catholic Church refers to itself simply by the terms *Catholic* and *Catholicism* (which mean universal). The Catholic Church has traditionally rejected any notion that those outside its communion can be regarded as part of any true Catholic Christian faith.

Catholicism has a hierarchical structure in which supreme authority for matters of faith and practice are the exclusive domain of the Pope, who sits on the Throne of Peter, and the bishops when acting in union with him. Most Catholics are unaware of the existence of Old Catholicism which represents a relatively recent split from the Catholic Church and is particularly vocal in rejecting their use of the term *Catholic*. Each Protestant movement has developed freely, and many have split over theological issues. For instance, a number of movements grew out of spiritual revivals, like Methodism and Pentecostalism. Doctrinal issues and matters of conscience have also divided Protestants. The Anabaptist tradition, made up of the Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites, rejected the Roman Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of infant baptism; this tradition is also noted for its belief in pacifism. Many churches with roots in Restorationism reject being identified as Protestant or even as a denomination at all, as they use only the Bible not creeds, and model the church after what they feel is the first century church found in scripture; the Churches of Christ are one example; African Initiated Churches, like Kimbanguism, mostly fall within Protestantism, with varying degrees of syncretism. The measure of mutual acceptance between the denominations and movements varies, but is growing largely due to the ecumenical movement in the 20th century and overarching Christian bodies such as the World Council of Churches.

Major Branches

Christianity has denominational families (or movements) and also has individual denominations (or communions). Within these denominational families and movements are (often further denominational families and) various individual denominations or communions. The difference between a denomination and a denominational family is sometimes unclear to outsiders. Some denominational families can be considered major branches.

Christianity is composed of, but not limited to, five major branches of Churches: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant; some groupings include Anglicans amongst Protestants. The Assyrian Church of the East is also a distinct Christian body, but is much smaller in adherents and geographic scope. Each of these five branches has important subdivisions. Because the Protestant

subdivisions do not maintain a common theology or earthly leadership, they are far more distinct than the subdivisions of the other four groupings.

Denomination typically refers to one of the many Christian groupings including each of the multitude of Protestant subdivisions. Denominationalism is an ideology which views some or all Christian groups as being, in some sense, versions of the same thing regardless of their distinguishing labels. Not all churches teach this. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches do not use this term as its implication of interchangeability does not agree with their theological teachings. There are some groups which practically all others would view as apostate or heretical, and not legitimate versions of Christianity.

There were some movements considered heresies by the early church which do not exist today and are not generally referred to as denominations. Examples include the Gnostics (who had believed in an esoteric dualism called gnosis), the Ebionites (who denied the divinity of Jesus), and the Arians (who believed Jesus said "My Father is greater than I"). The greatest divisions in Christianity today, however, are between Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and various denominations formed during and after the Protestant Reformation. There also exists in Protestantism and Orthodoxy various degrees of unity and division. Comparisons between denominational churches must be approached with caution. For example, in some churches, congregations are part of a larger church organization, while in other groups, each congregation is an independent autonomous organization. This issue is further complicated by the existence of groups of congregations with a common heritage that are officially nondenominational and have no centralized authority or records, but which are identified as denominations by non-adherents. Study of such churches in denominational terms is therefore a more complex proposition.

Numerical comparisons are also problematic. Some groups count membership based on adult believers and baptized children of believers, while others only count adult baptized believers. Others may count membership based on those adult believers who have formally affiliated themselves with the congregation. In addition, there may be political motives of advocates or opponents of a particular group to inflate or deflate membership numbers through propaganda or outright deception.

Baptists are a group of Christian denominations, churches, and individuals who subscribe to a theology of believer's baptism (as opposed to infant baptism), salvation through faith alone, Scripture alone as the rule of faith and practice, and the autonomy of the local church. They generally practice baptism by immersion (as opposed to affusion or sprinkling) and disavow authoritative creeds. Baptist churches are Protestant, and some churches or individuals further identify with evangelicalism or fundamentalism. Baptists recognize two ministerial offices, pastor-elders and deacons, but not bishops. Diverse from their beginning, those identifying as Baptists today differ widely from one another in what they believe, how they worship, their attitudes toward other Christians, and their understanding of what is important in Christian discipleship.

Historians trace the earliest Baptist church back to 1609 in Amsterdam, with English Separatist John Smyth as its pastor. In accordance with his reading of the New Testament, he rejected baptism of infants and instituted baptism only of believing adults. Baptist practice spread to England. Here, the General Baptists considered Christ's atonement to extend to all people, while the Particular Baptists believed that it extended only to the elect. In 1639, Roger Williams established the first Baptist congregation in the American colonies. In the mid-1700s, the Great Awakening increased Baptist growth.^[4] Baptist missionaries have spread the church to every continent.

Some additional distinctive Baptist principles held by many Baptists include the following:

- The supremacy of the canonical Scriptures as a norm of faith and practice. For something to become a matter of faith and practice, it is not sufficient for it to be merely *consistent with* and not contrary to scriptural principles. It must be something *explicitly* ordained through command or example in the Bible. For instance, this is why Baptists do not practice infant baptism—they say the Bible neither commands nor exemplifies infant baptism as a Christian practice, even though nowhere does the Bible forbid it. More than any other Baptist principle, this one when applied to infant baptism is said to separate Baptists from other evangelical Christians.
- Similarly prominent is their insistence on regenerate ("saved") members who have received Believers' Baptism. To Baptists, the "church universal" is the entire body of those who have personally become partakers of the salvation of Christ.
- Baptists believe that faith is a matter between God and the individual (religious freedom). To them it means the advocacy of absolute liberty of conscience.
- Insistence on immersion as the only mode of baptism. Baptists do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. Therefore, they do not consider it to be a sacrament, since it imparts no saving grace.

The following acrostic, spelling BAPTIST, represents a useful summary of Baptists' distinguishing beliefs:

- **B**iblical authority (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- **A**utonomy of the local church (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-3)
- **P**riesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5-9; 1 Timothy 5)
- **T**wo ordinances (believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper) (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 11:23-32)
- **I**ndividual soul liberty (Romans 14:5-12)
- **S**eparation of Church and State (Matthew 22:15-22)
- **T**wo offices of the church (pastor-elder and deacon) (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1-2)

Most Baptist traditions believe in the "Four Freedoms" articulated by Baptist historian Walter B. Shurden:

- **Soul freedom:** the soul is competent before God, and capable of making decisions in matters of faith without coercion or compulsion by any larger religious or civil body
- **Church freedom:** freedom of the local church from outside interference, whether government or civilian (subject only to the law where it does not interfere with the religious teachings and practices of the church)
- **Bible freedom:** the individual is free to interpret the Bible for himself or herself, using the best tools of scholarship and biblical study available to the individual
- **Religious freedom:** the individual is free to choose whether to practice their religion, another religion, or no religion; Separation of church and state is often called the "civil corollary" of religious freedom

Largest denominations in the world

Catholicism - 1.2 billion

Catholic Church - 1,147 million

- Roman Catholic Church (Latin Rite) - 1,129.9 million
- Eastern Catholic Churches (Eastern Rite) - 17.1 million

Protestantism - 670 million

Historical Protestantism - 350 million

- **Baptist churches** - 105 million
 - Southern Baptist Convention - 16.3 million
 - National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. - 7.5 million
 - National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. - 5 million
 - Nigerian Baptist Convention - 3 million
 - Progressive National Baptist Convention - 2.5 million
 - American Baptist Churches USA - 1.4 million
 - Brazilian Baptist Convention - 1.4 million
 - Baptist Bible Fellowship International - 1.2 million
 - Myanmar Baptist Convention - 1.1 million
 - Baptist Community of the Congo River - 1 million
 - National Baptist Convention, Brazil - 1 million
 - National Primitive Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. - 1 million
 - National Missionary Baptist Convention of America - 1 million
 - Samavesam of Telugu Baptist Churches - 0.8 million
 - Baptist Convention of Kenya - 0.7 million
 - Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia - 0.6 million
- **Methodism** - 75 million
 - United Methodist Church - 12 million
 - African Methodist Episcopal Church - 3 million
 - Methodist Church Nigeria - 2 million
 - African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church - 1.5 million
 - Church of the Nazarene - 1.9 million
 - Methodist Church of Southern Africa - 1.7 million
 - Korean Methodist Church - 1.5 million
 - United Methodist Church of Ivory Coast
 - Christian Methodist Episcopal Church - 0.9 million
 - Methodist Church Ghana - 0.8 million
 - Free Methodist Church - 0.7 million
 - Methodist Church in India - 0.6 million
- **Lutheranism** - 87 million
 - Evangelical Church in Germany - 26.9 million
 - Church of Sweden - 6.9 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - 4.8 million
 - Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus - 4.7 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania - 4.6 million
 - Danish National Church - 4.5 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland - 4.3 million
 - Batak Christian Protestant Church - 4 million
 - Church of Norway - 3.9 million
 - Malagasy Lutheran Church - 3 million
 - Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod - 2 million
 - The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria - 1.7 million
 - United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India - 1.5 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea - 0.9 million
 - Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church - 0.8 million
 - Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil - 0.7 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia - 0.6 million
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa - 0.6 million

- **Reformed churches** - 75 million
 - Presbyterianism - 40 million
 - Presbyterian Church of East Africa - 4 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Africa - 3.4 million
 - Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) - 3.0 million
 - United Church of Canada - 2.5 million
 - Church of Christ in Congo–Presbyterian Community of Congo - 2.5 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Korea - 2.4 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Cameroon - 1.8 million
 - Church of Scotland - 1.1 million
 - Presbyterian Church of the Sudan - 1 million
 - Presbyterian Church in Cameroon - 0.7 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Brazil - 0,7 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Ghana - 0.6 million
 - Presbyterian Church of Nigeria - 0.5 million
 - Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa - 0.5 million
 - Presbyterian Church in America - 0.3 million
 - Continental Reformed churches - 30 million
 - Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar - 3.5 million
 - United Church of Zambia - 3.0 million
 - Protestant Church in the Netherlands - 2.5 million
 - Swiss Reformed Church - 2.4 million
 - Evangelical Church of Cameroon - 2 million
 - Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor - 2 million
 - Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa - 0.7 million
 - United Church in Papua New Guinea - 0.6 million
 - United Church of Christ in the Philippines - 0.6 million
 - Protestant Church in Western Indonesia - 0.6 million
 - Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua - 0.6 million
 - Protestant Church in the Moluccas - 0.6 million
 - Reformed Church in Hungary - 0.6 million
 - Reformed Church in Romania - 0.6 million
 - Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa - 0.5 million
 - Congregationalism - 5 million
 - United Church of Christ - 1.2 million
 - Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola - 0.9 million
 - United Congregational Church of Southern Africa - 0.5 million
- **Anabaptism and Free churches** - 5 million
 - Schwarzenau Brethren/German Baptist groups - 1.5 million
 - Mennonites - 1.5 million
 - Plymouth Brethren - 1 million
 - Moravians - 0.7 million
 - Amish - 0.2 million
 - Hutterites - 0.2 million
- **Quakers** - 0.4 million
- **Waldensians** - 0.05 million
- Modern Protestantism - 588 million
 - **Pentecostalism** - 130 million
 - Assemblies of God - 60 million
 - New Apostolic Church - 11 million
 - International Circle of Faith - 11 million
 - The Pentecostal Mission - 10 million
 - Church of God (Cleveland) - 9 million
 - International Church of the Foursquare Gospel - 8 million
 - Church of God in Christ - 6 million
 - Apostolic Church - 5.5 million
 - Christian Congregation of Brazil - 2.5 million
 - Universal Church of the Kingdom of God - 2 million
 - Church of God of Prophecy - 1 million
 - God is Love Pentecostal Church - 0.8 million
 - Indian Pentecostal Church of God - NA
 - **Non-denominational evangelicalism** - 80 million
 - Calvary Chapel - 25 million
 - Born Again Movement - 20 million
 - Association of Vineyard Churches - 15 million
 - New Life Fellowship - 10 million
 - True Jesus Church - 2.5 million

- Charismatic Episcopal Church - NA
- **African initiated churches** - 40 million
 - Zion Christian Church - 15 million
 - Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim - 10 million
 - Kimbanguist Church - 5.5 million
 - Church of the Lord (Aladura) - 3.6 million
 - Council of African Instituted Churches - 3 million
 - Church of Christ Light of the Holy Spirit - 1.4 million
 - African Church of the Holy Spirit - 0.7 million
 - African Israel Niniveh Church
- **Seventh-day Adventist Church** - 17 million
- **Restoration Movement** - 7 million
 - Churches of Christ - 5 million
 - Christian Churches and Churches of Christ - 1.1 million
 - Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) - 0.7 million

Eastern Orthodoxy - 210 million

- **Autocephalous churches**
 - Russian Orthodox Church - 125 million
 - Romanian Orthodox Church - 18 million
 - Serbian Orthodox Church - 15 million
 - Church of Greece - 11 million
 - Bulgarian Orthodox Church - 10 million
 - Georgian Orthodox Church - 5 million
 - Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople - 3.5 million
 - Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch - 2.5 million
 - Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria - 1.5 million
 - Orthodox Church in America - 1.2 million
 - Polish Orthodox Church - 1 million
 - Albanian Orthodox Church - 0.8 million
 - Cypriot Orthodox Church - 0.7 million
 - Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem - 0.14 million
 - Czech and Slovak Orthodox Church - 0.07 million
- **Autonomous churches**
 - Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) - 7.2 million
 - Moldovan Orthodox Church - 3.2 million
 - Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia - 1.25 million
 - Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia - 0.62 million
 - Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric - 0.34 million
 - Estonian Orthodox Church - 0.3 million
 - Patriarchal Exarchate in Western Europe - 0.15 million
 - Finnish Orthodox Church - 0.08 million
 - Chinese Orthodox Church - 0.03 million
 - Japanese Orthodox Church - 0.02 million
 - Latvian Orthodox Church - 0.02 million
- **Non-universally recognized churches**
 - Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) - 5.5 million
 - Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church - 2.4 million
 - Macedonian Orthodox Church - 2 million
 - Orthodox Church of Greece (Holy Synod in Resistance) - 0.75 million
 - Old Calendar Romanian Orthodox Church - 0.50 million
 - Old Calendar Bulgarian Orthodox Church - 0.45 million
 - Croatian Orthodox Church - 0.36 million
 - Montenegrin Orthodox Church - 0.05 million
 - Orthodox Church in Italy - 0.12 million
- **Other separated Orthodox groups**
 - Old Believers - 1.8 million
 - Greek Old Calendarists - 0.86 million
 - Russian True Orthodox Church - 0.85 million

Oriental Orthodoxy - 75 million

- **Autocephalous churches in communion**
 - Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church - 45 million
 - Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria - 15.5 million
 - Syriac Orthodox Church - 10 million
 - Armenian Orthodox Church - 8 million
 - Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church - 2.5 million
 - Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church - 2 million
 - Armenian Orthodox Church of Cilicia - 1.5 million

- **Autonomous churches in communion**
 - Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church - 1.2 million
 - Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople - 0.42 million
 - Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem - 0.34 million
 - French Coptic Orthodox Church - 0.01 million
 - British Orthodox Church - 0.01 million
- **Churches not in communion**
 - Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church - 1.1 million
 - Malabar Independent Syrian Church - 0.06 million

Anglicanism - 82 million

- **Anglican Communion** - 80 million
 - Church of Nigeria - 18 million
 - Church of England - 13.4 million
 - Church of Uganda - 8.8 million
 - Church of South India - 3.8 million
 - Anglican Church of Australia - 3.7 million
 - Episcopal Church in the Philippines - 3.0 million
 - Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia - 2.5 million
 - Anglican Church of Tanzania - 2.5 million
 - Anglican Church of Southern Africa - 2.4 million
 - Episcopal Church of the United States - 2.2 million
 - Anglican Church of Canada - 2.0 million
 - Anglican Church of Kenya - 1.5 million
 - Church of North India - 1.3 million
 - Church of the Province of Rwanda - 1 million
 - Church of Pakistan - 0.8 million
 - Anglican Church of Burundi - 0.8 million
 - Church of the Province of Central Africa - 0.6 million
 - Church of Christ in Congo–Anglican Community of Congo - 0.5 million
 - Scottish Episcopal Church - 0.4 million
 - Church of Ireland - 0.4 million
- **Continuing Anglican movement** - 1.5 million
 - Traditional Anglican Communion - 0.5 million