

CHURCH HISTORY

2. THE CHURCH TODAY



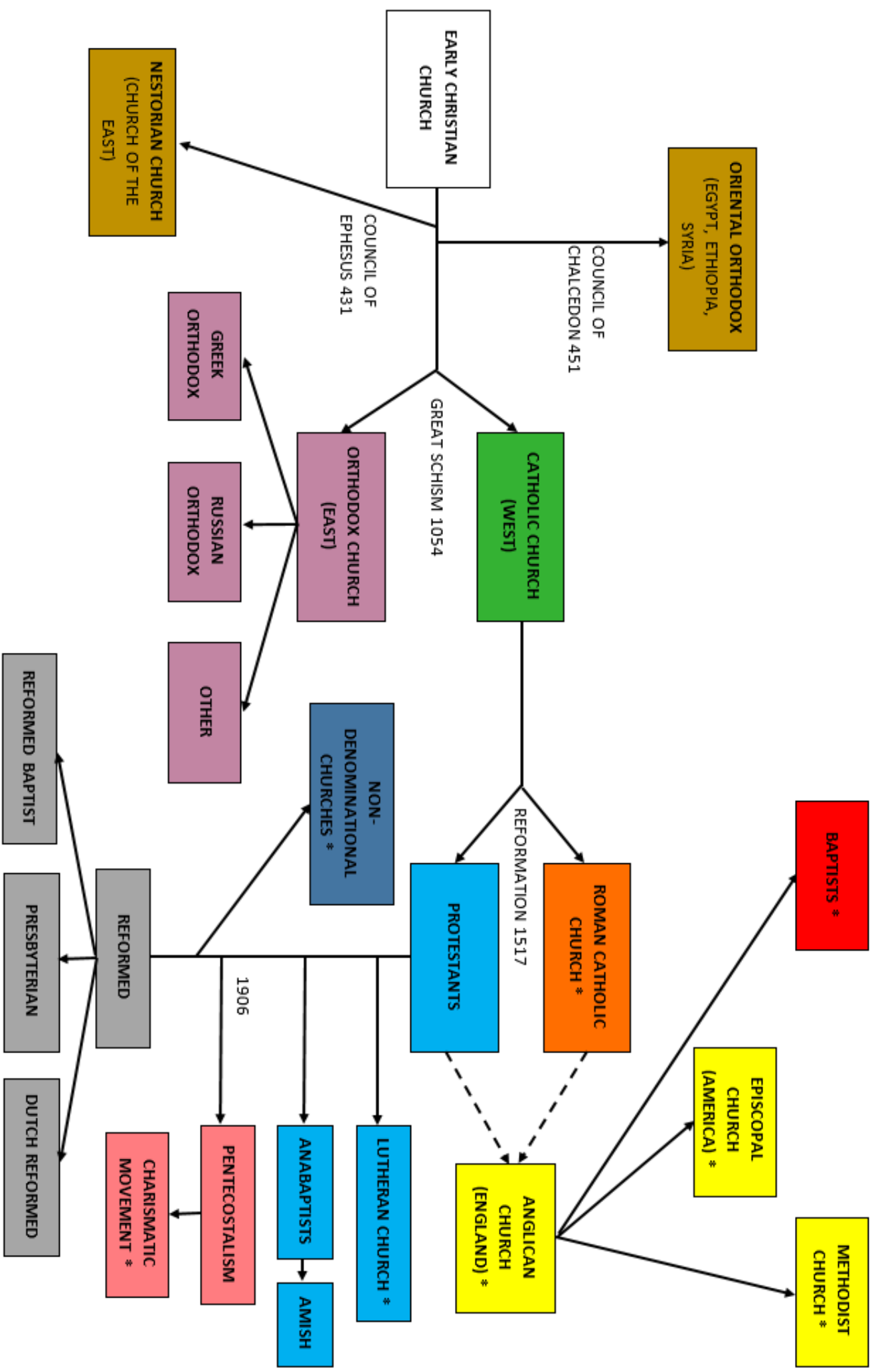
WHY BEGIN IN THE PRESENT?

1. Church history is like a jigsaw puzzle. There are countless loose pieces that come together to form a complete picture. If we start by completing the border, the outline, first, it will be easier to see and understand where the individual pieces fit in the greater picture later in our course.
2. Understanding the differences and divisions between the different branches of Christianity will help us answer sceptics.
3. The history of the Church in South Africa has been largely shaped by Protestant theology
 - a. Dutch (1652) → Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk)
 - b. French Huguenots (1688-89) → Fleeing persecution by Roman Catholics
 - c. British (1806) → Presbyterian & Anglican
 - What does it mean to be Protestant?
 - What are the other major branches of Christianity and what do they believe?
4. To evaluate and determine the accuracy of historical claims made by many of the branches of Christianity.

WHY IS THE CHURCH SO DIVIDED?

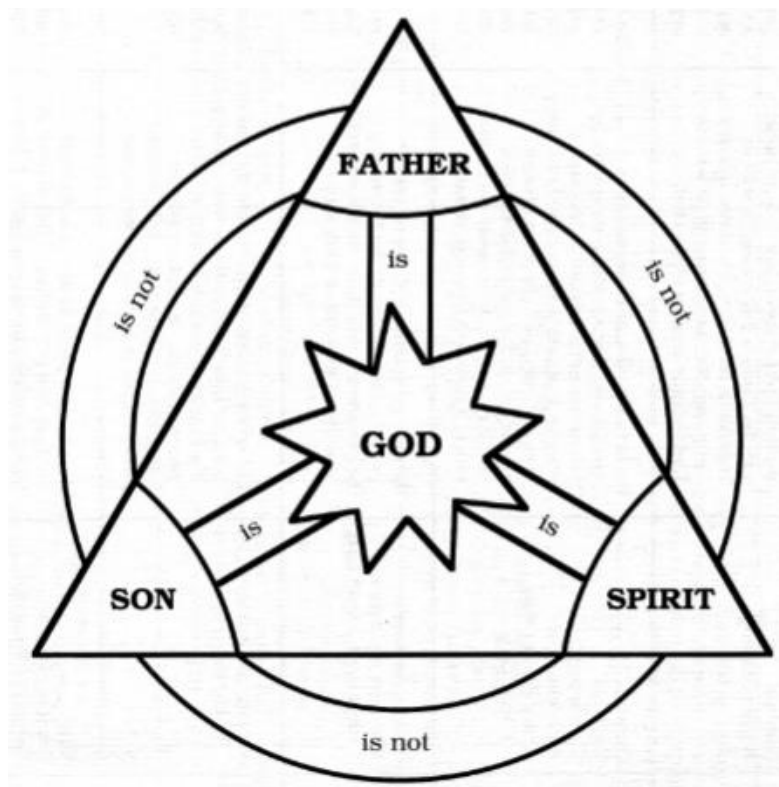
1. There are three major branches of Christianity:

○ Roman Catholicism	1.2 billion		Numbers are from polls, not from testing the fruit and genuineness of their faith. What effect would such a test have on these numbers?
○ Protestantism	900 million		
○ Eastern Orthodox	350 million		
2. Sceptics and especially Muslims like to throw around the 'fact' that there are 33 000 Christian denominations. However, this figure
 - Includes heretical groups (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Oneness Pentecostals, Unitarians, etc.)
 - Counts Independent churches (such as FBC) each as a separate denomination.We certainly are divided, the chart on page 2 is a simplified version to try and illustrate the situation, there are many denominations not listed.
3. Didn't Jesus promise that we would have unity in the Church?
 - John 17:20-21a *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one,"*
 - Did He mean absolute agreement and conformity?
 - Perhaps we are too impatient – If we compare our timeline to that of the Old Testament we would still only be in the book of Genesis.
4. 'Unity' is a complicated idea: Every group that calls for unity, for all the different branches of Christianity to lay aside their differences and focus on the things we all agree on, is essentially saying "If everyone would just agree with me we would have unity".
5. There are serious differences, and as Oss Guinness put it *"The differences make a difference"*. Words, definitions and doctrines matter. As we will see later, Martin Luther essentially went to theological war with the Catholic Church over ONE word: *ALONE*.
6. The focus of our study today and next week will be comparing the beliefs of the 3 major branches.



WHAT WE ALL AGREE ON:

- The Trinity & God's attributes
- The centrality of Jesus Christ – His life, death, resurrection and ascension.
- The resurrection of believers to eternal life.
- God's victory in history and the new creation.
- The conclusions of the first 6 Ecumenical Councils (All to do with who Jesus is)



SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM THEN?



While the Roman Empire was at times physically divided into East and West, there was a language division as well. The Roman language of Latin, while the official language of the Empire, never really caught on in its Eastern parts. Why? **Hellenism**. Recall the map of Alexander the Great's Empire: He conquered all the Eastern territories on his way to India, but he never travelled Westward.

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament, with a few chapters in Aramaic) and Greek (New Testament). The ability to read Hebrew quickly became rare in the Church: Only *two* Early Church Fathers could read both Hebrew and Greek: Origen (East) & Jerome (West), which is why their writings became very influential, as we will discuss later in the course.

Even though it is not a Biblical language, the 'Western Church' did its theological writing, thinking and teaching in Latin. If you think of where Latin is most often used today it is in legal applications. The Roman Empire gave us Law. It is still one of the foundations of South African law to this day.

The 'Eastern Church' did its theological writing, thinking and teaching in Greek. Greek culture was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc.) and concepts and ideas derived from philosophy served as a foundation for much of their theological discourse.

From early on then one can see how misunderstandings could take place, because it was not enough to translate words from one language to another, the *concept* of what the word had to be translated. As time went on, the use of different languages became a barrier that prevented clear communication between the two churches and would contribute to the *Great Schism* (separation, breaking) in 1054.

Latin continued to be the theological language of the Western (Catholic) Church until the Reformation and the official language of the Roman Catholic Church to this day. Greek is still the official language of the Eastern (Orthodox) Church. Protestant Churches followed the Reformation push for Christians to have access to the Bible (and church services) in their own language.

NOTES ON THE CHART

- We start with the Early Church, also known as the *Catholic* Church. The word 'Catholic' simply means universal, in other words the one church that has gone into the world to preach the Gospel. The idea of it being associated with the *Roman* Catholic Church is a much later development.
- In the 5th Century there were two *schisms*, i.e. churches separating due to doctrinal differences that were seen as non-negotiable.
 - The Nestorian Churches disagreed with the conclusions reached by the Council of Ephesus in 431. We believe that they are in serious error with regards to who Jesus Christ is, as we will see later in the course (It is named after Nestorius, who may not have actually believed what is attributed to him).
 - The Oriental Orthodox Churches disagreed with the conclusions reached by the council of Chalcedon in 451. As time passed it seems that in this case the disagreement had more to do with the way the Council worded its conclusions than with actual doctrinal disagreement.
- The Great Schism of 1054, as we will see below, was the result of centuries' worth of misunderstandings, internal strife and competition added to what became irreconcilable doctrinal differences. It was finally made official when the Bishop representing the Pope at a meeting *excommunicated* the leaders of the Eastern church, who then in turn excommunicated the leaders of the Western church. To excommunicate someone was to formally declare that they are no longer part of the Church, they are outside the faith, and thus in very real danger of going to Hell.
- The Catholic Church became known as the *Western* Church and Eastern Orthodoxy as the *Eastern* Church.
- Over time the Eastern Orthodox divided into different 'denominations' based the countries the churches were in (Greece, Russia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, etc.). Their doctrines remained the same regardless.
- In 1517, Martin Luther set in motion the Reformation, though like the Great Schism it had been the result of rising internal conflict and disagreements regarding what the Scriptures teach and who should have access to them (John Wycliffe, called 'The Morningstar of the Reformation' lived 150 years before Luther!)
- It is after the Reformation that I think one can truly begin to speak of the *Roman* Catholic Church as we would eventually know today.

- Those who chose to break away from the Catholic Church later came to be known as ‘Protestants’.
- The term Protestant is almost meaningless today, given the sheer amount of denominations that claim that title. It is almost as if being Protestant just means you are not Roman Catholic or Orthodox. It is much more than that as we will discuss shortly.
- The Anglican Church (or The Church of England) came into being in 1534, when King Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church, declaring himself the Head of the Church. It started out as a carbon copy of Roman Catholicism but was heavily influenced by leaders who had adopted the principles of the Reformation.
- Anglican Churches include features of both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, and churches tend to focus more on one of the two.
- The Lutheran Church was named after Martin Luther but was really built on the doctrine of his successor, Philip Melancthon. It is important to note that Luther never wanted to establish a new church, even less one that bore his name! He was hoping to bring reform to the Catholic Church.
- Reformed Churches are characterised by 3 C’s that describe their theological foundation: Creeds, Covenants & Calvinism (a system built upon the teachings of the Reformer John Calvin, but also Augustine of Hippo and as they would argue the Apostle Paul).
- It is important to note that the Charismatic and/or Pentecostal (there are some slight differences in the two terms) movement is a *recent* phenomenon. Modern charismatic beliefs and practices are unknown for most of the history of the Church. The early Pentecostals even called themselves *Restorationists*, seemingly admitting this fact. It was not until the *Azusa Street Revival* in 1906 that this movement began in earnest.
- Today, the Charismatic movement is by far the fastest growing Christian movement. The * next to some of the Church names in the chart indicate that there are indeed some Churches in those denominations that adhere to Charismatic teaching and practice. We will be discussing the gifts of the Spirit and what happened in the book of Acts in more detail in a future lesson.
- Baptists are part of the Protestant tradition.

KEY BELIEFS & DOCTRINES

- As can be seen from the chart, when the Reformers split from the Roman Church the Eastern Orthodox Church had been on its own path for almost 500 years after the Great Schism.
- One should not be surprised therefore that Protestants and Roman Catholics have more in common with each other theologically than either have in common with Eastern Orthodoxy, even though on the surface Roman Catholics and the Orthodox share many common practices and beliefs.
- One writer put it this way: “Protestants and Roman Catholics ask the same theological questions but give different answers. In Eastern Orthodoxy, both the questions they ask *and* the answers they give are different”.
- Eastern Orthodoxy is very difficult to understand because we approach theology through the perspective of the Western Church tradition (which I believe to be correct over against the Eastern tradition) and because there is a great focus on the philosophical and on *mystery* – Many of their doctrines are not explained in the detail one would find from Western theologians.

PROTESTANT DISTINCTIVES

- True and faithful Protestantism holds to what are often called the *5 Solas of the Reformation*. It is a list in Latin of the five key points that drove the Reformation and summarised the core beliefs of the Reformers. Even though it was only formally compiled many years later one can clearly see these doctrines present in the works of the Reformers. They are:

<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	→	Scripture Alone (Rom 15:4, 2 Tim 3:16)	
<i>Sola Gratia</i>	→	Grace Alone (Eph 2:8-9)	
<i>Sola Fide</i>	→	Faith Alone (Eph 2:8-9, Rom 1:16-17)	→ The ALONE that awoke Martin Luther
<i>Solus Christus</i>	→	Christ Alone (John 14:6, Acts 4:12)	
<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i>	→	Glory of God Alone (John 17:1-5, 1 Corinthians 10:31)	

- Salvation is *by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ Alone, to the glory of God alone and Scripture alone* is our final and ultimate authority on matters of faith and practice.
- Are good works essential for salvation? YES, they are the fruits and proof of a life lived in faith.
NO, they do not justify us at all. We can do nothing to earn salvation. (Think of the thief on the cross next to Jesus).
- No Priests required, because we are all priests