**CHRISTIANITY**

* Over 2 billion Christians in the world—approx. 1 billion are Roman Catholic—approx. 50% of R.C. live in Central/South America.
* There are over 22,000 different Christian groups or sects. (Among these: Baptist, Methodist, Reformed, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox, Pentecostal, etc.)
* Main Belief: Jesus Christ is God’s son, their Savior. He was born and lived a human life in the Middle East about 2000 years ago. He was killed by the authorities, but rose from the dead and saves those who follow him from sin, allowing them to live with God forever.
* Jesus=a teacher, a preacher—grew up in Galilee (now part of Israel).—had come to teach the true meaning of the religious teachings of the Jews.
* Two of the most important teachings of Jesus:
  1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.
  2. Love your neighbor as yourself.
* Jesus=born somewhere around 6 B.C.E.—d. around 32 C.E.—into a Jewish family.
* Ministry began when he was about 30 years old: preach and teach.
* Jesus angered authorities because he claimed to do things that only God could do (forgive).—seen as a threat to the community—sentenced to death by crucifixion—three days later, rose from dead. Is alive today (Holy Spirit).
* Title “Christ”=from Greek “Christos”—Messiah—“Anointed One.”
* Jesus taught in four ways:
  1. by speaking to people
  2. by using stories (parables=a story that has layers of meanings; mostly taken from everyday situations that the people living at the time would have been able to relate to)
  3. by performing miracles=signs/demonstrations of the power of God. (healings, dealing with natural elements)
  4. through the example of his life, death and resurrection
* Christians believe there is, and only ever has been one God=monotheistic. However, refer to God in three ways: Father (Creator); Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit (the power of God that people feel and experience in their lives)=Divinity of Jesus.
* Trinity=the three in one=expresses the principal ways God and human beings interact with each other.
* Christianity developed in Galilee, In Israel 2000 years ago as a result of people’s faith in Jesus rising from the dead. For Christians, it is who Jesus is that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, not just what he taught.
* Little is known of the first 30 years of Jesus’ life. Most of the information given in the Christian Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John) focuses on what he said and did in the last three years before he was crucified.
* For Christians, the most special events of Jesus’ life were:

1. birth
2. death
3. resurrection (rising from the dead)

* First followers of Jesus were Jews who had heard him teach. Then Gentiles (non-Jews) came to follow.
* Statements of belief=Creeds
* **Jesus’ followers thought that, after the crucifixion, the end of the world would soon come, fulfilling Jewish prophecies. When it did not, they began to write and teach Jesus’ message.**
* Christian Bible—Old Testament (scriptures handed down from the Jewish religion) and New Testament—written in the first century after Jesus’ death.
* “Testament” means promise=Christians believe that God’s promises to human beings are contained in the Bible.
* New Testament=Gospels, other books, a number of letters to Christians (St. Paul), Acts of the Apostles, Revelation.
* Gospels=Good News=tells the life of Jesus=written between 30-60 years after Jesus died—reflect the teaching and beliefs of the first disciples.
* Paul=a tentmaker from Tarsus in present-day Turkey—a learned Jew—originally called Saul—persecutor of early Christians—had a vision of Jesus—conversion—spent rest of life writing, teaching and preaching about Jesus.—0d. around 65 C.E. at Rome.
* Entry into Christianity was by baptism.
* To be a Christian is to believe Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. Reflected in a Christian’s words, actions, morality and charity—in the way they love and treat one another.
* Christians use the word “church” in four main ways:

1. the building in which Christians meet to worship
2. the people who worship in that building—the congregation
3. the members of a branch of Christianity (Roman Catholic of Methodist for example)
4. Christians throughout the world—all followers of Jesus Christ.

* Four main branches of Christianity (spread across the world):
  1. Roman Catholic
  2. Orthodox
  3. Protestant
  4. Pentecostal
* All branches:

1. believe in Jesus Christ
2. accept the basic creeds of Christianity agreed upon hundreds of years ago.

3. differ in areas of worship, authority, and how they reflect the culture/environment of the follower.—interpretation.

* Roman Catholic and Orthodox=oldest of the Christian Churches.
* Roman Catholic=headquarters in Rome=Pope (descendent of St. Peter—Jesus’ chief disciple) is head of the Church.
* Priests=unmarried—“married” to the Church.
* Orthodox=”true worship”—have four Patriarchs as their head priests. Priests can be married. Orthodox Churches:
  1. Syrian Orthodox
  2. Russian Orthodox
  3. Greek Orthodox
* Protestant Churches—trace origins to 16th century—arose a great “protest” about abuses in the Roman Catholic Church—Martin Luther, John Calvin.
* Christians celebrate their faith not only by going to church, reading the Bible, and marking the main events of the Christian year in festivals and fasts. They also express their beliefs through bringing up their children in the faith and marrying in church. Some Christians are ordained as priests or ministers.
* The Important seven Sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church:
  1. Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist
  2. Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick
  3. Sacraments of Service: Holy Orders (ordination), Marriage
* Sacraments=outward signs that God is with the believer.
* Holy Days in the Christian calendar commemorate the events in the life of Jesus and the beginning of Christian faith. Main festivals:
  1. Easter—Christians remember the events surrounding the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Comes after Lent.
  2. Christmas—celebrates the birth of Jesus—Comes after Advent.
* Christianity=a community religion. Christians join together to worship God and pray to him. There are Christians who go to church regularly, others who go occasionally at festival times, and others who never go.
* Bible=the Christian handbook for life: contains examples of how one should live one’s life and there are rules and guidance—a collection of human experiences; stories of individuals doing/not doing God’s will.
* Christianity has had to change for more than 2000 years while still remaining true to its basic teaching: Christians have to apply the teaching of Jesus to situations that were unknown or not thought of centuries ago. They can and do, on occasion, arrive at different conclusions:
* Some of the modern issues that Christianity has to deal with:
  1. Forgiveness
  2. Charity
  3. Women priests
  4. homosexuality
  5. abortion
  6. contraception
  7. euthanasia
  8. creationism
  9. fundamentalism
  10. human suffering
* Christian symbol is the cross—symbol of the crucifixion of Christ and the way to salvation is through the cross and all it represents (suffering, giving up of oneself, etc.)