

The Abrahamic Religions:

An Introduction to World Religions

Christianity: Practices

Session Week 8

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Aim and Learning Outcomes – Week 8 Session

Aims

- This session aims to discuss about the Practices of Christianity.

Learning Outcomes

- Students have some understanding of
 - Practices of Christianity.

Christianity: Practices

Generally speaking, there are many different types practices within many Christian denominations.

- Every denominations has its own form of worship, and even between churches there may be variations. However, general features of Christian worship include:
- The idea that Sunday is holy day of the week
- The idea that when Christians meet together for worship this represents an act of worship on behalf of all people.
- Reading the Holy Bible, usually including from the Gospels
- A sermon, which may focus on the readings from the Holy Bible and explain their meaning for Christians today.
- Study of the Holy Bible
- Prayer and praise, the latter often involving the singing of psalms and hymns, Liturgy
- For many Christians at least, participation in the Holy Eucharist.

Christianity: Practices

- Christians assemble for communal worship on Sunday, the day of the resurrection, though other liturgical practices often occur outside this setting.
- Scripture readings are drawn from the Old and New Testaments, but especially the Gospels.
- There are a variety of congregational prayers, including thanksgiving, confession, and intercession, which occur throughout the service and take a variety of forms including recited, responsive, silent, or sung.
- Worship can be varied for special events like baptisms or weddings in the service or significant feast days.
- In the early church Christians and those yet to complete initiation would separate for the Eucharistic part of the worship.
- In many churches today, adults and children will separate for all or some of the service to receive age-appropriate teaching. Such children's worship is often called Sunday school.

Christianity: Practices - Prayer

- “Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquility, the root of a multitude of blessings, and their source.” St. John Chrysostom
- The basis of prayer is divine word which runs “Ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you”. (Mt. 7:7).
- Prayer is the part of Church worship or faith life. Worship is giving God the glory which is due to Him. “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.”
- Prayer usually takes the following forms:
 - Praising God’s greatness
 - Thanksgiving for God’s goodness and providence
 - Requesting God’s forgiveness or other acts of blessings
 - Approaching God on behalf of others (intercession).

Christianity: Sacraments

- Many Christian denominations have sacramental services, (especially, Eastern Christians (Oriental and Eastern Orthodox), Roman Catholics , Anglicans)
- Sacramental Theology is a sacred ordinance through which the faithful receive an invisible grace under the type of an external sign, visible or perceptible. Many denominations serve the faithful through the seven Sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, the Eucharist, Matrimony, Holy Order and Unction of the Sick)
- The celebration of the sacraments is the central point of Christian worship in the Church. These sacraments are called the “Mysteries” in Greek.
- As Saint John Chrysostom quoted by Ware properly put it, “It is called a mystery because what we believe is not the same as what we see, but we see one thing and believe another... When I hear the Body of Christ mentioned, I understand what is said in one sense and the unbeliever in another”(Ware, 1997:274)

The Sacrament of Confirmation and Anointing

- The Sacrament of Confirmation is also the Church's mystery through which the faithful are granted the gift of the Holy Spirit who can confirm the faithful alone in the new life given to the faithful through the Sacrament of Baptism (Acts 8: 14-17; 19: 5-6).
- This sacrament gives the faithful the power of growing in new life and keeps the faithful firm in the feature of truth (1 John 2: 20-21).
- The Sacrament of Anointing of the sick is one of the Church Sacraments through which the priest anoints the sick body requesting divine grace to heal both body and soul.
- It is not an ordinary way of healing sickness and the healing authority is not just administered through the oil but to the prayer. The Apostle James talks about the Sacrament of Unction (James 5:14-15). The sacrament of anointing the sick has two kinds of outward signs.

The Sacrament of Baptism

- The Sacrament of Baptism is to be the sign of commitment to Christ. It is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.
- As St Mark's Gospel says, since the beginning, baptism has been obligatory for all Christians because the Lord Himself has affirmed that baptism is necessary for salvation. In addition, Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to proclaim the Gospel to nations and to baptise them (Mt. 28:19).
- According to the Gospel of John, a human being must be baptised and be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, in order to enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3).
- These biblical evidences teach us that baptism is administered by order of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we believe that baptism is the main entrance of the Church.

The Sacrament of The Holy Eucharist

- The Holy Eucharist is the heart of the entire Christian life, with the Christian's initiation into the Church completed by the reception of the Holy Eucharist. In addition, all of the other the Church Mysteries (Sacraments) and work of the Church are oriented towards this sacrament. The Church properly uses the word '*Mystery*' for sacrament. It is in this transcendent mystery of God's love revealed in the Holy Eucharist for his people that the faithful (the Christian community) unite themselves with the heavenly Divine Liturgy by uniting themselves to sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Holy Cross and to His Resurrection.
- As the Lord Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (Mt 26:26-29), He is regard as the first celebrant of the Holy Eucharist. He gave His own flesh and blood. He commanded His apostles to continue the celebration in remembrance of Him and based on his percept, the apostles also continued to celebrate the Holy Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

- The Sacrament of Holy Orders is also one of the Church Sacraments through which the clergy receive power to administer the sacraments and celebrate other spiritual services.
- The Sacrament of Holy Orders is a sacred sign, accompanied by spiritual ceremonies.
- This sacrament has two types of visible signs;
 - The first sign is the laying on of hands. Bishop performs this sign (1 Tim. 5: 22).
 - The second sign is the prayers of consecration (Acts 6: 6; 14:23).
- According to the New Testament, the ordained clergy receive a divine gift appropriate to the service. As 2 Timothy 1:6 records, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”
- The Holy Spirit gives this invisible gift to the clergy to perform their duties.

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and Confession

- The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is also the sacred service through which a man and a woman are united and given the divine grace which blesses their marital union, makes it perfect and spiritual like the unity of Christ and Church, and gives them strength (Mt. 19:4-6).
- The purpose of this sacrament is to bless the matrimonial union. As Saint Paul describes, marriage is considered a '*Mystery*' (Ephesus 5:25-32).
- Confession and forgiveness are key parts of rites in Christians worship. Some time, they can be seen in social life. Yet the study on confession will concentrate on the doctrine of confession. This part will also consider the effect of context on the experience of confession. Confession in this part consists of dealing with an individual's sin.

Christianity: Practices - Symbols

- The cross, which is today one of the most widely recognised symbols in the world, was used as a Christian symbol from the earliest times.
- Among the symbols employed by the primitive Christians, that of the fish seems to have ranked first in importance.
- Christians from the very beginning adorned their tombs with paintings of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the saints, of scenes from the Holy Bible and allegorical groups.
- The catacombs are the cradle of all Christian art (Icon)
- Other major Christian symbols include the chi-rho monogram, the dove (symbolic of the Holy Spirit), the sacrificial lamb (symbolic of Christ's sacrifice), the vine (symbolising the necessary connectedness of the Christian with Christ) and many others.

Reflection

Briefly more explore your understanding about the core practices of Christianity?

Reference

- Dowley, Tim (1977) *The History of Christianity* (Lion Publishing plc.)
- Ware, Timothy (1982) *The Orthodox Way* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press)
- Ware, Timothy (1997) *The Orthodox Church*, 2nd Ed. (London & New York: Penguin)

Next Session

- We continue to discuss about Christianity: Denominations