

Dowley t 2006
introduction to the
history of christianity
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The origin of Christianity dates back to about 2000 years in Israel at a place called Judea by the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. The founder disciples included John, Peter, James and Mathew, as well as the Gospel writers Luke and Mark. It spread to other places including Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, Jordan and Asia Minor (Dowley, 2006). By the end of the 4th century, it had been adopted by many states as ' State Religion' for example Roman Empire, Aksumite Empire, Georgia and Armenia. Consequently, it became widespread in the whole of Europe during the Age of Exploration thus becoming the world's greatest religion.

As Christianity continued growing and expanding, it turned out to be the object of harassment by the Roman rulers. The worst persecutions were the attempt by Diocletian, the then Roman Emperor to put out Christianity. However, in 313 AD Constantine the Great gave a proclamation of tolerating all religions(Dowley, 2006).

During the middle period, the affairs of the church were guided by two influential cities, Constantinople (Istanbul) and Rome. However, many differences arose in the church and were constantly solved by councils. The Roman church under the leadership of the pope steadily deviated in practice and belief from the Constantinople church led by its Patriarch. The Roman church gained domination over the Western Europe whereas Constantinople Church had domination over the East. By 1054 AD, the two churches had broken off their relations.

Apart from the persecutions from the Roman Empire and divisions, the middle age church faced myriad of challenges both within and outside and

this threatened its survival (Dowley, 2006). The greatest challenge was the Gnostics who tried to assimilate the church into their own secret religious conviction. For example, the Greek Gnostic believer, Marcion in 137 AD removed some biblical texts from his own canon. This led to him being thrown out of the church and started a sect in 144 AD (Shelley, 2008).

The early church founders travelled and set up communities in the key regions and cities and this boosted their quest for spreading the Christian faith and expanding its influence (Shelley, 2008). Additionally, the use of Jewish Faith and beliefs became influential in spreading Christianity. Some of these beliefs were; Monotheism, Messianic Hope, synagogue worship. The use of military force during the period between the 11th and the 13th century, famously known as the crusades helped in conquering places held by Muslims (Walton, 2005). These methods employed by the church helped in expanding its domain especially in the Eastern Europe.

The Papacy monarchy rose at the end of the persecutions in 384 A. D when Siricius became the Pope (Walton, 2005). This was brought by the rise of Constantine the Great who began the building of the St. Peters Basilica on the Vatican Hill 320 A. D.

The Early church reached the peak of its political and religious power between 313 AD and the 14th century a point where the parting between the church and the state disappeared gradually. However, the development of the print press and the rising of reformations by the likes of Martin Luther

and John Wycliffe brought a downfall in the church dominance and power by the 17th century (Schaff, 2004).

The Reformation resulted in a sequence of war that ended in the 'Thirty Years War', from 1618 to 1648 A. D (Schaff, 2004). Consequently, the Peace of Westphalia treaties were signed bringing to an end the wars. This gave people a chance to choose their religion of choice, the options being Calvinism, Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism. In addition, it culminated the Pope's political power in Europe (Schaff, 2004). In reaction to this Pope Innocent X proclaimed the treaty null and void. This reduced the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe.

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