

F. = founded

# Christian denominations in England

Author: X. Lachazette, Université du Maine, Le Mans

In the 2001 Census, 35.2 million English people, out of a population of 49.1 million, identified themselves as “Christians” (= 71.7%)

## 1) ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

- Suppressed between 1533 (Act of Supremacy) & 1829 (when the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed)
- F. by the Howards (Dukes of Norfolk)
- Modern hierarchy f. in 1850
- No female priests
- Westminster Cathedral in London is its most important church
- Famous figures: writers Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, G. K. Chesterton
- Roughly 10% of the population?

4 or 5 million (?)

## 2) CHURCH OF ENGLAND (“C of E”) = ANGLICAN CHURCH = ESTABLISHED CHURCH

F. in 1532 by Henry VIII & Thomas Cranmer (first Archbishop of Canterbury), the man behind the 39 Articles of Religion & the Book of Common Prayer (1549) – partly replaced since 1980 by *The Alternative Service Book*

- ### High church = Anglo-Catholics = Oxford Movement of the 1830s & Tractarians (roughly 10% of C of E?)
- F. in the early 17<sup>th</sup> c. by Archbishop William Laud (under Stuart kings), later on by H. Newman, Dr. Pusey, J. Keble (Cf. *Tracts for the Times*, 1832)
  - Restore the **emphasis on the Virgin Mary & the beauty of old rituals** (incense, vestments, liturgy) → High Mass (≠ Low Mass) is performed with music, chant, incense, the assistance of a deacon & a subdeacon, & full ceremonial
  - Does not recognize the supremacy of the Roman Catholic pope

- ### Low church = Evangelists (roughly 80% of C of E?)
- F. in the late 18<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Demands a more social outlook & humanitarian activities
  - Stress on Bible reading & preaching
  - Sobriety & less formal services
  - Stress on personal faith as the means of salvation

- ### Broad church (roughly 10% of C of E?)
- F. in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. by Frederick D. Maurice, James Martineau, and F. W. Robertson
  - Influence of 19<sup>th</sup> c. German Biblical criticism
  - A small, elitist group
  - Famous figures: poets M. Arnold & A. Tennyson

**General characteristics of the Church of England:** As “**Defender of the Faith**” (“F. D.” on British coins), the Monarch is at the head of the Church; the hierarchy is independent of Rome: ruled by 2 “**provincial**” **Archbishops** (the Archbishop of Canterbury = “Primate of all England,” whose London residence is called “**Lambeth Palace**,” & the Archbishop of York = ‘Primate of England’) & 44 **diocesan bishops**, especially the senior Bishops of London, Durham, & Winchester; bishops & archbishops are appointed by the Monarch, on the advice of the Prime Minister; the 2 Archbishops & 24 of the diocesan bishops sit in the **House of Lords** (but no member of the clergy can sit in the House of Commons); the 43 dioceses are divided into **13,500 parishes**, which are ruled by vicars or rectors; the Church is regulated by the **General Synod**, which meets twice yearly, and is made up of three houses: the House of Bishops (all diocesan b. + 7 “suffragan” [= assistant] bishops), the House of Clergy (259 representatives), & the House of Laity (258 repr. of lay members); a conference is held every 10 years at Lambeth Palace, London, for representatives of all the **Anglican communion** (= Anglicans from the four corners of the world); **female deacons allowed since 1985 & female priests allowed since 1992 – but women still cannot become bishops or archbishops**; mostly Conservative though it became more liberal in the last 25 years; appeals mostly to the (upper) middle classes. **Like other Protestants:** belief in predestination (saved if one of the elect ≠ doomed if one of the reprobate); the individual is alone in the eyes of God: no invocation / intercession of Saints, no confession of sins; two sacraments only: baptism & communion.

24 to 27 million (?) would say they are “C of E,” but only 4% attend regularly

**3) MAJOR FREE CHURCHES (approximately 1 million ?)**  
**= NONCONFORMISTS = DISSENTERS = "PURITANS" (in the 16th & 17th c.)**

**PRESBYTERIANS**

- F. in mid-16th c. by John Knox (1559)
- Administered by lay "church elders" while services & sacraments are performed by "ministers," both being called "presbyters" & having equal status
- More firmly organized, less autonomous groups
- = the established Church of Scotland since 1690 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the only two established Churches in Great Britain)

**CONGREGATIONALISTS ("independent" OR "separatist")**

- F. in the late 16<sup>th</sup> c. by Robert Browne (1580s)
- Doctrine of the priesthood of each believer → independence even from ministers
- Great individualism & autonomy of each congregation, including the right to have its own Biblical interpretation
- Simple services, no altar, no prayer book, no vestments
- Famous figures: the "Pilgrim Fathers" under John Robinson (separatist), Oliver Cromwell

**BAPTISTS (170,000 believers)**

- F. in 1609 by John Smyth & Thomas Helwys (2 former Separatists influenced by Mennonite thinking)
- Baptism by immersion is essential for membership
- Divided into "general Baptists" (belief in general redemption) & "particular Baptists"
- Loose organization, importance of the mission field
- Famous figures: writer J. Bunyan (Cf. *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1684), preacher C. H. Spurgeon (1832-92)

**UNITARIANS**

- 17th c., during the Commonwealth
- Anti-Trinitarians = deny the deity of Christ, & a skeptical attitude toward the Bible
- Mainly intellectuals, importance in philosophy (Cf. movement called "transcendentalism" in the USA)

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (148,000 believers)**

joined in 1972, the first union between two denominations since the Reformation

**QUAKERS = SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (18,500 believers)**

- F. in the 1850s by George Fox during Cromwell's Commonwealth
- No formal ceremony, no fixed beliefs, meetings often consist in silent meditation & prayer
- Strict attitude in private & commercial life, avoid amusements
- Active in education & charity work
- No oath in court & pacifism (first conscientious objectors)
- Famous figures: William Penn (founder of Pennsylvania), Elizabeth Fry (19<sup>th</sup> campaign for prison reform), antislavery thinkers

**METHODISTS (450,000 believers – the largest Free church)**

- F. in 1739 by preachers **John** & Charles Wesley (no belief in predestination) & George Whitefield (belief in predestination)
- "Methodical" form of Christianity = more strictly organized (like Presbyterians)
- Mass meetings in the open air, employ lay preachers, & ordain ministers (usually the function of *bishops*) → driven out of C. of E (in favour of a reunion with C. of E, which has refused so far).
- Convert the new industrial proletariat & the masses to Christianity → stress on mission(arie)s
- Immense emotional (≠ logical) appeal, salvation through sudden conversion, not through conformity with Church teaching

**SALVATION ARMY (= a church with 56,000 believers)**

- F. in the East End of London in 1865 by William Booth (a former Methodist)
- Works for old, poor, & homeless people, & fights against drunkenness, drug addiction, prostitution, AIDS
- Holds services in public & converts the masses to Christianity
- *The War Cry* = its magazine since 1879

**CHRISTIAN SCIENCE**

- F. by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 in Boston, USA
- Sickness & sin are unreal because "not of God"
- No priests, simple services
- Cf. respected international publication: *The Christian Science Monitor* (since 1908)

**General characteristics of Free / Dissenting Churches:** All tend toward **evangelicalism**; **austerity** (Cf. *Sundays*) & **self-discipline**; **no bishops** (= no "episcopacy") & **clergy chosen by laymen**; **women ministers are admitted**; churches are called "**chapels**" & kept **simple** (usually no altar, no images, no ornaments); **strict moral principles**; **against cruel sports, brutality & duelling**; like other Protestants, **mostly Calvinistic** (= belief in predestination), except Wesleyan Methodism & "general Baptists;" appeal especially to the **lower middle classes**; inwardness of true religion → created an **introspective frame of mind** & a psychological interest in English philosophy (Cf. *Hume & Locke*); **religion is a personal experience**, not something based on a fixed creed; **two sacraments only** (but no sacraments for Quakers & Unitarians); "inner light" common to all → tendency toward tolerance.