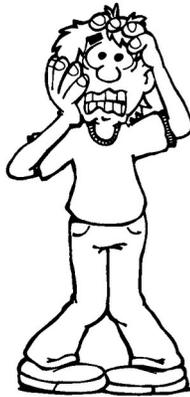


c. Subtle Anti-Semitism It is too easy for discriminatory and stereotyped language to characterize Jewish-Christian discussions. Interpretations of New Testament passages also can easily project negative images on all Jewish people.



In the Middle East, many Arab Christians are of the Orthodox, Eastern Rite persuasion. Rather than following the Pope in Rome, Orthodox practitioners support patriarchs who are independent church heads. They see their church traditions as continuing unchanged from earliest New Testament times.



The following discussion, though appearing technical and detailed, attempts to explain specific differences appearing in Middle East Christian circles. Theologians, church historians and practitioners differ concerning precise descriptions of these churches.

1. Monophysites One of the early councils of the church, the Chalcedon Council of 451 A.D., defined Christ's nature as both human and divine. Monophysites, a Greek term for "one nature", disagreed with this position, claiming Christ had only one nature--divine. Four main churches adhere to the monophysite path--the Assyrian Church of the East, Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian, and Armenian.

a. The Assyrian Church of the East This group is often called the East Syrian Church or Nestorian after their first bishop. During the Middle Ages, these Christians were prominent throughout the Persian empire in the early Middle Ages. They spread through parts of India and China by the seventh century. Small remnants still survive in Iraq, Iran, and the United States.

b. Armenian Orthodox Though dispersed throughout the world, this church is active in Lebanon today.

c. Coptic Orthodox Located in Egypt and parts of Ethiopia, Coptic practitioners believe their founder to be St. Mark the Evangelist, first bishop of Alexandria. Today, the head of this six million member church is titled "Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark."



As with many other Middle East Christian churches...Local priests may marry but bishops and higher church officials come from celibate monastic ranks.

d. Syrian Orthodox Also referred to as the West Syrian Church or Jacobites after their sixth century bishop, these Christians consider the Patriarch of Antioch in Damascus to be their spiritual leader. Adherents conduct worship in Syrian, and make the sign of the cross with one finger, symbolizing their monophysite beliefs.

2. Other Christian Groups Two other groups complicate the Middle East Christian religious picture. Uniates (YOO nee-it)-- Eastern Rite Catholics--accept papal authority in Rome, thus being "reunited" with the Roman Catholic Church. Greek Catholics, Melchites, (MEL-kits), Syrian, and Chaldean Catholics, and Catholic Copts make up these groups.

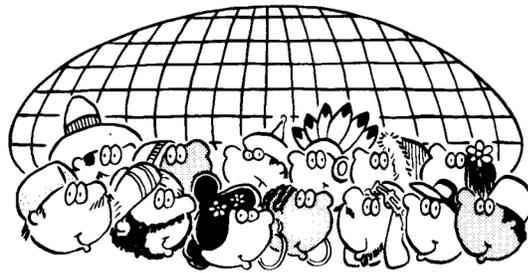


Marionites form one of the largest Arab Christian churches in the Middle East, with over one million practitioners present in Lebanon. As many as 6.5 million have emigrated from the Middle East. These churches claim they never left the Roman Catholic fold. While using a Syriac church ceremony, most of their worship is in Arabic.

Less than 300,000 Protestants reside in the Middle East, being primarily the result of Presbyterian and Anglican missionary efforts.

3. Common Misunderstandings

Variety Recognize the diversity of belief and practice, even within Christian circles, in the Middle East.



Orthodox churches are not just another branch of the Roman Catholic tradition. Each group has cultural and theological distinctions which set it apart from others.

Interactions with Middle Eastern Christians benefit from awareness of these distinguishing traits.



III. Islam



1. The Five Pillars Five foundational faith expressions unite all Muslims:

a. Shahada (sha-HAHD-ah, witnessing) This is the essential creed of Muslim belief. It is repeatedly invoked as part of daily prayer. The shahada states:

"There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

When said with heartfelt intention before two official witnesses, this testimony initiates a person into the Islamic community.



b. Salat (shul-LAHT, prayers)

Five times each day, Muslims pray in Arabic. Salat consists mainly of verses from the Qur'an, praises to God, and requests for guidance. Adherents bow toward the Kaabah in Mecca when praying.

c. Sawm (SOO-uhm, fasting) During the month of Ramadan, thanksgiving is expressed, discipline shown, and communal solidarity and reconciliation affirmed. Practitioners abstain from food and drink from dawn to sunset.

d. Zakat (SA-kat, almsgiving) The faithful demonstrate tangible worship by giving a kind of loan to God of from two to ten percent of one's income, payable at year's end. Charitable causes receive support in more spontaneous manners, as needs arise.

e. Hajj (al-HAHJ, pilgrimage) At least once in a lifetime, preferably during the twelfth month of the calendar, a Muslim takes a trip to Mecca. No one goes on Hajj without first ensuring that family members are provided for in their absence.

