

Stereotypes and Prejudices on Christianity

Intellectual Output 2, Unit III



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Roots and values

Prejudices and stereotypes about Christianity come from its role in the history of Europe: for centuries Christianity has been the dominant religion, and is still supported by some European states. It had a strong impact on cultural and social life: the question of the contribution of Christian values to European/humanistic values created two opposite stereotypes. One is a positive stereotype, in which Christianity is a moral force behind every positive value; the other considers this point of view as a way for Christians to deny any other intellectual contribution to these “European values”.

The question of values is behind another stereotype/prejudice: there is a contradiction between the core of the Christian teachings (“love your neighbor”) and the actual behavior of Christians, who are said to be hypocritical since their words and actions contradict Christian teachings.

In any case, the meaning of European and Christian values has to be defined. Even Christianity must be clarified. In many countries, it is often confused with the main denomination, e.g. Catholicism in France, Italy or Spain and Protestantism in Denmark. Generalization must be avoided. From the beginning, Christianity was characterized by its diversity: there are many Christian denominations (or Churches), each with its own interpretation and practices.

More information on:

- [differences in worship](#)
- [differences in the role of the sacraments](#)
- [differences in the role of ministers](#)
- [the diversity of Christian denominations](#)
- [the origins of the Roman Catholic Church](#)
- [the origins of Eastern Orthodox Church](#)
- [the Protestant Reformation](#)

A narrow-minded, outdated and prejudiced religion

Since Christianity was for a long time (and in some cases still is) the dominant and state sponsored religion in Europe, it is often linked to upper social classes and political, social, cultural dominance. In some cases, Christianity is seen as a tool to assert a social superiority.

These ideas lead to a stereotype/prejudice which considers Christianity as the foundation of social and political conservatism. In this perspective, Christians and Christianity are considered as backward-looking, with old-fashioned/outdated values, prejudiced against the others and refusing to acknowledge new ideas and new or different ways of life.

Indeed, Christianity has most of the times been at odds with the new trends set by the Industrial and French Revolutions, but the situation is more complex: in the 19th century, Christian churches were often strong supporters of conservatism, but there were also other

trends such as Christian socialism. In the course of the 20th century, Christian churches have tried to be in less open opposition with the new trends.

More information on:

- [Christian churches and the modern world](#)
- [Vatican II and the Catholic update](#)