

## **New Perspective on Christianity**

There are a myriad of Christian denominations and sects, it is almost impossible to count. To grow up in one and take their beliefs at face value and accept them as absolute truth is naivety or arrogance. The tertiary beliefs are not the only topics under debate, but also what is considered core primary doctrine. There is so much division, even within one branch of Christianity, yet all of them claim to be the most correct. It is important to learn more outside a person's own beliefs in order to better understand and format their own and going to a different denomination has shown me how much variance can be in the same religion and how much history can change as it is passed down and sifted through one's own experiences and worldview.

The church that I decided to attend is Faith Presbyterian Church which is about 15 minutes away from campus. I come from a non-denominational background so I decided to go to a different tradition within the protestant faith. The building is pretty small, with only about 100-200 seats available. Upon entering, we are handed a bulletin with the order of the service on it, as well as the lyrics to the hymns and the words to the creeds and confession of sins. The entrance of the building has two simple glass doors, and there is a tent outside with name tags and church information as well as gift bags for new visitors. Inside the main hallway is just a common area with free coffee and greeters. People were standing in this area talking to each other and the church was so small that when I entered, someone immediately came walking towards my direction and asked my name and if I had been there before. At the opposite end of the entrance room is the main sanctuary. The main sanctuary is very plain and there are not any decorations on the walls or elaborate architecture. This is particularly different to what I am used to in more non-denominational churches where the auditorium is much larger seating upwards of one thousand people, and the entire room is painted black with colorful lights to illuminate the

room. Non-denominational churches that I have been to throughout high school seem almost like a concert whereas the Presbyterian church seemed more focused on the actual sermon. The front of the sanctuary has a big wooden cross which is aligned with the stand where the pastor preached from. The seats are not pews and instead they are regular event seats that people rent out for events with speakers. The college students sat on the right side while the older people and the people with families sat in the middle and left side. There are only two pastors; one is the main pastor and the other leads the college and youth ministry. I went to two services, and they were both structured the same way. The service started at ten in the morning and ended around eleven forty-five. They started by singing two hymns and then announcements and then a reading from the Bible. The worship band was pretty small, having one guitar player, a bass player, and two singers. The music sung as part of worship was not as much as churches that I am used to because the non denominational churches have loud drums, guitars, bass, violin, keyboard and multiple vocalists. All of them stood or sat on a small corner of the stage. The main pastor was not the one who went on stage to say the announcements, instead it seemed to be a regular man from the congregation. The scripture reading was also done by another member of the congregation. After the announcements and the reading of a short passage, there were two more hymns sung. In between each part of the service, the guitarist played a classical guitar riff from a hymn. After they were done we were told to sit down and the pastor went up on stage. He was not holding a bible, he was just holding one of the little bulletins that we were all handed. Because I went to two sermons, I got a better sense of the general style of the teaching. The pastor begins the sermon in a way that is very reminiscent of the beginning of an essay. He starts off with a broad idea, and throughout the sermon goes more in depth. When he read the passage that was related to what he was preaching, we were instructed to stand. This is different from my

church back home where we stay seated the entire sermon and just stand for the worship songs. After the sermon we said the Apostles Creed as well as confession of sins. Following this, there was communion where everyone got up row by row and made two lines leading to the front of the stage where the bread and wine was. We each picked a piece of bread and a cup of either grape juice or wine and went back to our seats where the pastor then instructed us to eat and drink. After communion we sang another hymn and the last part of the service we sang the Doxology, and after that, the pastor gave us a benediction. At the end of the service everyone got together and talked and they handed me a bulletin inviting me to church events as well as local Christian ministries that they partner with such as RUF (Reformed University Fellowship). Overall the people were very friendly and although the worship service was more structured and formal than what I am used to.

By going to this different denomination, I have gained a new perspective on the Christian faith. There seems to be more divide within the Christian church than I had originally thought before seeing another branch, even though non-denominationalism and presbyterianism are still both under the same umbrella of Protestantism. This new understanding links with the information that I have learned in the course that there is much we actually do not know about early christianity, and what Jesus and the main apostles actually taught. Even the Bible has some disagreements as well as discrepancies that both Christian and Secular scholars have debated for years. All of the Christian churches, including from my conversation with the members of the Presbyterian church, agree that Paul and Jesus taught the same message and gospel, while scholars such as Bart Ehrman claim that Paul and Jesus had different beliefs and taught their teachings through a different perspective from each other. Many of the churches today are nothing like the early churches and probably do not even believe the same thing. There are

divisions even in important matters such as the sacraments like communion and baptism. Not only are there debates on what the purpose of each of the sacraments are, but there are also debates on how many there are. On top of confusion and disagreement on the sacraments, not even all Christian denominations agree on the divinity and characteristics of Jesus and God. Some denominations say that Jesus is not God, some say that Jesus and God the Father are two separate Gods, and others claim that they are different parts of God. Even what I described earlier about the Presbyterian church shows this division. Compared to the non-denominational church that I attended in high school, they disagree on the sacraments, as well as the being of God and the trinity. History does not seem to be a paramount factor in either of the denominations and although the Presbyterian church which I attended seemed more traditional, it is still much less traditional than Catholic mass for example. Neither of the denominations which I attended discussed what was covered throughout the course, and they seemed to approach the questions and sermons in similar ways, despite reaching different conclusions.

If someone does not challenge their own views, it will seem as if everyone else agrees. Even within the Christian tradition, there are so many differences in traditions and beliefs that people claim are the views of the early church. Though most Christian churches agree on the core primary issues such as the gospel, there are disagreements on how a person should practice their faith. Reformers and individuals who start denominations each have evaluated the teachings and writings of the New Testament and led people according to their own interpretation, not considering the scholarly perspectives. This division shows that modern day Christianity is diluted and shifted from what it used to be and history can be seen differently through the lens of time.