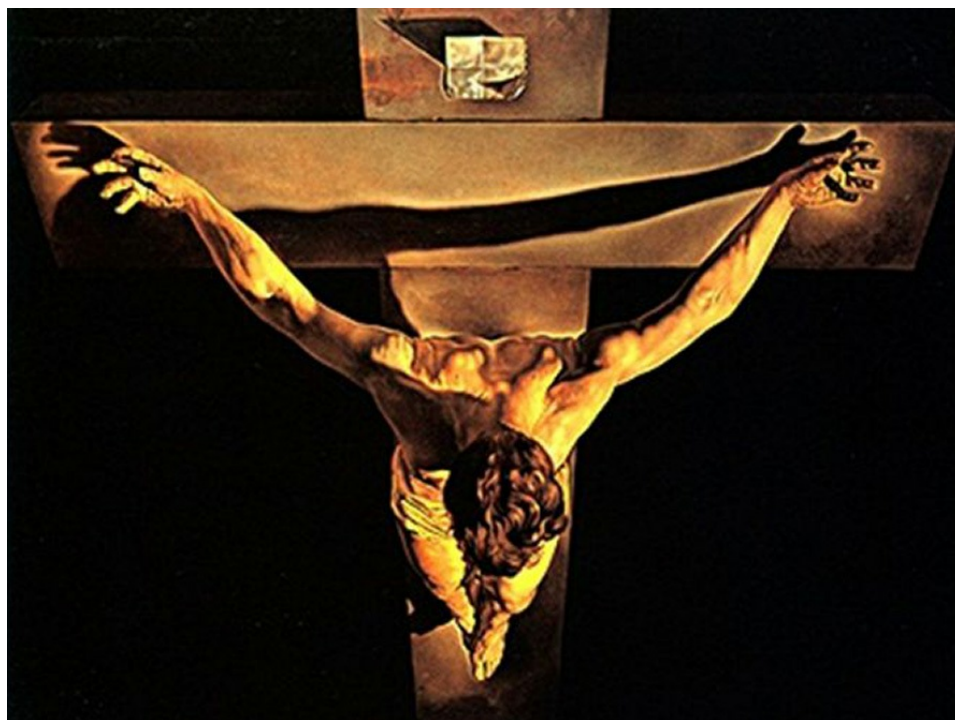


ADAPTED VERSION

# 'No resurrection', say one in four Christians

As Easter weekend arrives, a survey has found that a quarter of British Christians do not believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Does this matter? Or is religion all symbolic anyway?



**Christ of St John of the Cross:** A 1951 painting by Salvador Dalí.

The season of egg hunts, chocolate rabbits and church is here. From Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday over two billion Christians around the world will unite to celebrate the most important story in their faith — the death and rebirth of Jesus. Christmas may wield the greater cultural clout, but Easter remains the theological core of Christianity: more than half of America will go to church this Sunday.

But there is a problem. Fewer and fewer people actually believe that Jesus rose from the dead. According to the BBC a quarter of self-professed Christians in the UK do not believe in the resurrection. In America only 65% of people believe in the story, down from 70% in 2005.

The resurrection is not like an ancient law from Leviticus that bans the growing of different crops on the same field; it is absolutely key to the message of Christianity.

To Christians it is proof of God's power to forgive sin and conquer death. It paves the way for the Second Coming. The idea that Jesus

rose from the dead is one of the most important in human history.

There is not one proven case of a human being rising from the dead. So believing in the resurrection involves a leap of faith that many people are unwilling to make.

But they may still believe in the fundamental precepts of Christianity, and in the message of the resurrection itself. In a more rational, scientific world, many people now describe themselves as "cultural Christians".

In every religion there is a tension between those who read scripture literally and those who believe that religion is symbolic, and its stories merely parables to encourage people to live moral lives.

Reform Judaism places much less emphasis on ritual and personal observance than Orthodox Judaism, while research by Pew Forum suggests that one in ten Muslims do not view the Koran as the literal word of God.

Is religion a case of believing individual stories, or is it all about the message

contained within them?

## A matter of interpretation

The point of religion is to guide men and women in how to live their lives, say some. Most Christians now do not believe in the creation story, but that does not make Christian ideas any weaker. What it takes to "be a Christian" is to want to be a Christian. The more you practice the things that Jesus taught, the stronger a Christian you will be.

That is wishy-washy nonsense, reply others. What is the point of religion if there is no need to believe? You might as well make a religion from the moral lessons in the books of Charles Dickens. The resurrection is not simply a parable; it validates the claim of Jesus to be the son of God. For those who believe the story, it is history's great watershed moment.



## Q: What do we know?

A: We can be almost certain that a man called Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem in about 33AD. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that the founder of Christianity "suffered the extreme penalty" — assumed to be crucifixion.

## Q: What do we not know?

A: The big one: did Jesus rise from the dead? And if he did, does that make him the son of God? Billions of people believe the answer is "yes", though detractors believe there is hugely insufficient evidence to believe something so

extraordinary.

## Q: What do people believe?

A: According to the BBC's survey, exactly half of all British people do not believe in the resurrection. Interestingly, 9% of non-religious people do believe in the resurrection.

## YOU DECIDE

1. Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead?
2. Do you need to believe in specific stories to be a member of a certain religion?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Write down your own definition of the word "Christian" and compare it to those of your classmates.
2. Find a full version of the painting in the image above, and write a 500 word piece analysing it.

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*"Humans do not need religion to live moral lives."*

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## WORD WATCH

**Egg** – In many cultures around the world, the egg is a symbol of new life, fertility and rebirth. The decoration of eggs at Easter is believed to have started in the 13th century.

**Maundy Thursday** – The commemoration of the Last Supper, where, according to the Bible,

Jesus took bread, divided it between his 12 apostles and said: "This is my body which is given for you." It was at the Last Supper that Jesus predicted one of his 12 apostles would betray him.

**Half of America** – According to CNN.

**Leviticus** – The third book of the Jewish Bible and of the Old Testament. It is one of the five

law books, the others being Genesis, Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Leviticus is notorious for containing some of the Bible's strangest and most violent decrees.

**Second Coming** – The Christian concept that Jesus will return to Earth to judge both the living and the dead.

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 Notes

