

Color Symbolism in Christianity



Christian Liturgical Colors

The use of colors to differentiate liturgical seasons became a common practice in the Western church in about the fourth century. At first, usages varied considerably but by the 12th century Pope Innocent III systematized the use of five colors: Violet, White, Black, Red and Green. The Lutheran and Anglican churches that emerged from the Reformation retained the traditional colors but they disappeared entirely (along with most other ritual) from the worship of the Reformed churches. During the 20th century, the ecumenical Liturgical Movement prompted the rediscovery of ancient Christian ritual—including the traditional colors of the Western church. To these have been added Blue and Gold—colors that were used in some Western rites before the 12th century.

Briefly, the colors express emotions and ideas that are associated with each of the seasons of the liturgical year. Violet is the ancient royal color and therefore a symbol of the sovereignty of Christ. Violet is also associated with repentance from sin. White and Gold symbolize the brightness of day. Black

is the traditional color of mourning in some cultures. Red evokes the color of blood, and therefore is the color of martyrs and of Christ's death on the Cross. Red also symbolizes fire, and therefore is the color of the Holy Spirit. Green is the color of growth. Blue is the color of the sky and in some rites honors Mary. Vestments are often worn as reminders of the emotional focus of the seasons.

The meanings associated with color in Christian worship, art, architecture and design are summarized as follows:

Yellow

This is the symbol of light and purity. It speaks of youth, happiness, the harvest, hospitality, love and benevolence. But since it is also taken as off-white, it can be the color of degradation or cowardice.

Orange

Symbolic of endurance and strength, orange is the color of fire and flame. It represents the red of passion tempered by the yellow of wisdom. It is the symbol of the sun.

Green

Green symbolizes the breaking of shackles, freedom from bondage. It is the color of fertility. In the Christian context, it represents bountifulness, hope and the victory of life over death. It is one of the colors associated with Christmas, and the long season of the Trinity in summer.

Red

Signifies action, fire, charity, spiritual awakening. It also glorifies the sun and the joy of life and love. In the Christian symbolism, it denotes Holy Spirit. It is the color of Pentecost.

Black

Said to represent the absolute, constancy, eternity or the womb, black may also denote death, fear and ignorance. Black is the liturgical color of Good Friday.



Brown

Brown is symbolic of the earth and was often the color of a monk's robe, signifying humility and God's connection with the commonplace and the ordinary.

Blue

Blue signifies the blue skies or the life-giving air and often signifies hope or good health. It is an alternate color for the season of Advent.

White

Purity, virginity, innocence, and birth, are symbolized with this color. White is the liturgical color of Christmas and Easter.

Purple

Purple speaks of fasting, faith, patience and trust. It is the liturgical color used during the seasons of penance; Advent and Lent.

~Henderson, Charles. "The Significance of Color in Christian Symbolism" ©2004 September 16, 2004 <http://christianity.about.com/>

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