



The Christians

A VIEWER'S GUIDE

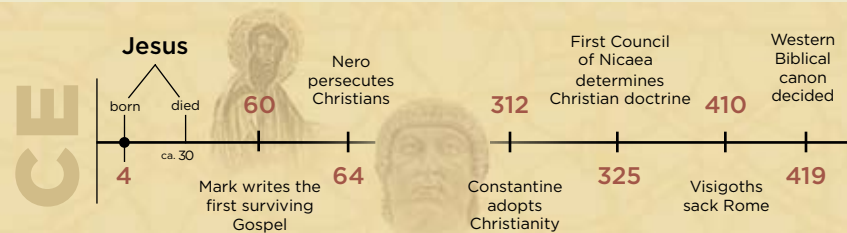
Athenä:

Highlights

- In contrast to the Judaic tradition of a distant, awe-inspiring God who spoke only through prophets, Christians worshipped a personal, immediate God who took human form in Jesus and preached a message of humility and trust in divine mercy.
- With Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, Christianity became the only major religion to have the suffering, degradation, and eventual triumph of its god as its central event.
- Internal disputes characterized Christianity from the very beginning; Paul preached a more inclusive faith than that taught by Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.
- When Constantine adopted Christianity, the once-persecuted sect found wide acceptance as the official religion of Rome.

Questions to Consider

1. In your opinion, why did Christianity hold such appeal for its early followers, despite the risk of persecution?
2. How do you react intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually to the Greek Orthodox ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, commemorating Christ's resurrection on Easter?



EPISODE 2 THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

Highlights

- As bishop of Milan, Ambrose insisted that Emperor Theodosius repent for a mass execution, which began a long tradition of Christian clergy using moral authority and public pressure to influence secular leaders.
- In 1054, cultural differences and theological disagreements about the nature of the Trinity led to a split between what would later be called the Catholic Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church of Constantinople.
- In contrast to the worldly political concerns of the Christian hierarchy, Anthony of Egypt embodied the religion's ascetic impulse that persists to this day.

Questions to Consider

1. Do religious leaders attempt to exercise moral authority over governments and influence policy today? How so? Do you agree or disagree with such attempts?
2. Thomas Merton, a 20th-century American Trappist monk, wrote that people enter monasteries not to escape from the world, but to

learn to live in it. What do you think he meant? How do you react to the ascetic tradition in Christianity or any other faith?

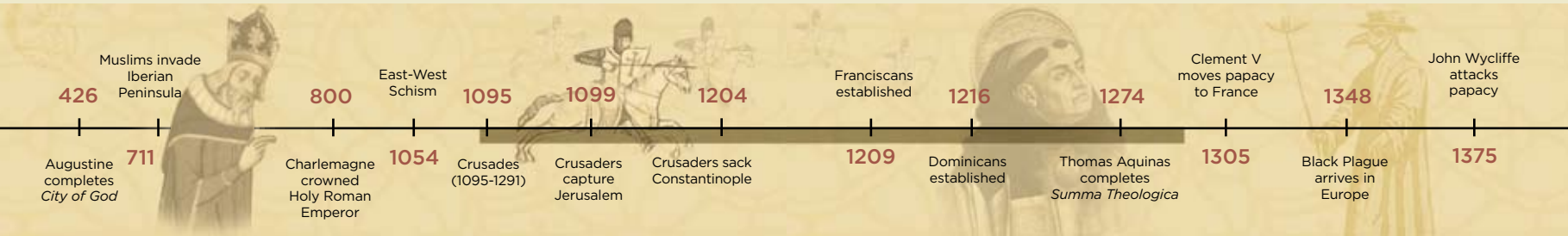
EPISODE 3 THE BIRTH OF EUROPE

Highlights

- When barbarian invaders decimated the Roman Empire, contravening the Christian idea of a divinely ordained *Pax Romana Christiana*, Augustine of Hippo preached the acceptance of God's will and hope in a spiritual "city of God."
- Throughout Europe, Christianity absorbed the religions that it displaced while adapting some of their most important rites.
- In 800 CE, with the blessing of Pope Leo III, Charlemagne became Holy Roman Emperor; he used the network of monasteries and other Christian institutions as instruments of his rule.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the fall of Rome create a theological crisis for Christianity?
2. How did the close relationship between the church and the government benefit people in a feudal society? What problems did it present?



EPISODE 4 FAITH AND FEAR

Highlights

- Enthusiasm for God and fear of death and damnation fueled the rise of the great European cathedrals during the Middle Ages.
- Built by craft guilds, Gothic cathedrals required the involvement of everyone in the community and took many generations to complete.
- Some medieval Christians saw suffering as the central experience of their faith and focused on physical pain as a penance for sin.
- By preaching the virtues of poverty and simplicity, Francis of Assisi attempted to reform a church focused on acquiring wealth and displaying it conspicuously.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of any contemporary endeavors that compare with medieval cathedrals in terms of the communal effort and generational perseverance required?
2. In seeking transcendence, all religious traditions grapple with suffering and death as realities of human existence. What role does suffering play in your personal beliefs? Does it have value?

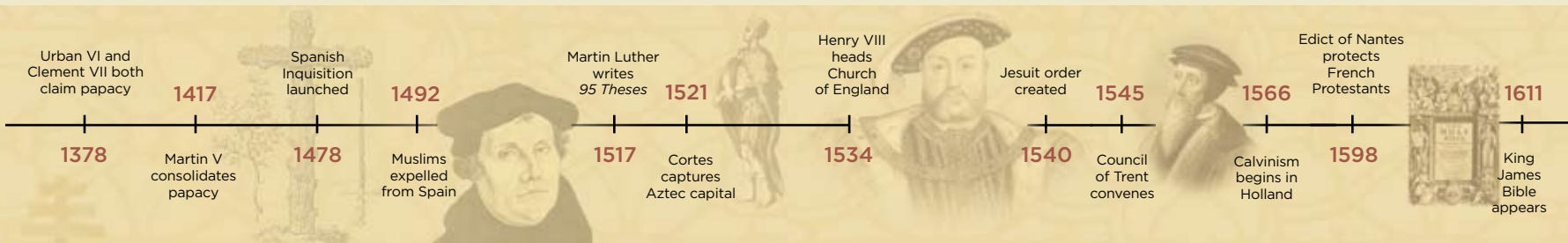
EPISODE 5 PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Highlights

- Although Christians, Jews, and Muslims consider themselves “people of the book” (the Hebrew Bible), sites held holy by all three religions have caused friction and open warfare through the centuries.
- Driven by religious zeal and greed, Christian kingdoms mounted a series of Crusades to wrest control of the Holy Land beginning in 1095.
- Ferdinand and Isabella united Spain in the late 15th century, expelling or killing Jews and Muslims who wouldn’t convert to Christianity.

Questions to Consider

1. In what sense did religious faith—as opposed to greed or thirst for power—motivate the Crusaders?
2. In this episode’s broad historical survey of Islamic-Christian-Jewish relations, do you see any instances that offer models of hope for today?



Highlights

- By the 15th century, popes were both secular and religious leaders: holding land, commanding an army, and indulging their appetites for wealth, power, and pleasure. From 1378 to 1417, as many as three men laid claim to the title simultaneously.
- Dissidents such as Englishman John Wycliffe and Czech Jan Hus publicly railed against ecclesiastical corruption and refused to accept papal authority.
- With its accumulated wealth, the church commissioned many of the masterpieces produced by Michelangelo, Raphael, and other Renaissance geniuses, who rediscovered the dignity of humankind and saw art as an extension of divine creation.

Questions to Consider

1. How does corruption in any institution compromise its authority?
2. What relationship do you see between wealth and art? Does knowing the history behind Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* or *Pietà* affect your experience of the works in any way?

Highlights

- In 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation by positing that salvation required only personal faith, not the intercession of the church or a pope.
- Two factors fed people's outrage at the church: its practice of selling indulgences, and pamphleteering made possible by the new technology of the printing press.
- Luther's defiance of the church inspired a general peasant uprising in Germany; as the Reformation spread through Europe, it threatened civil as well as religious authority.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think violence was inevitable in the Protestant Reformation?
2. In what ways did the Protestant Reformation take a different shape in England than in the German states? What accounts for those differences?

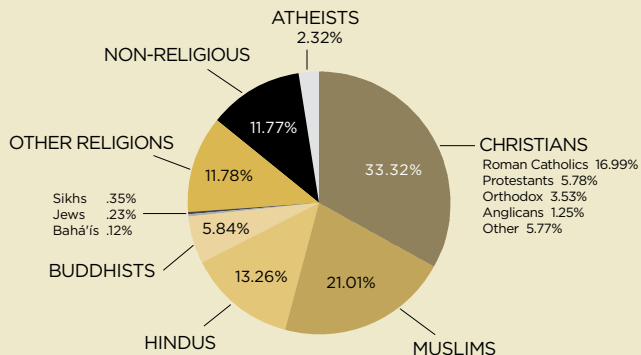


Highlights

- The conquistadors brought Christianity to Spanish-occupied territory in the New World; eventually, however, the church sought to protect its new converts from the brutality of their military overlords.
- Latin American Christianity took on a distinctly local character, as shown in the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe and its mixture with indigenous traditions.
- Formed as the elite intellectual vanguard of the Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits attempted to export Christianity to Asia, with mixed success.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS WORLDWIDE

(Percentage of World Population, 2007 est.)



Source: CIA World Factbook

Questions to Consider

1. How does the spread of Christianity in Latin America compare with its spread in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire?
2. Why do you think Christianity took hold so strongly in Latin America, but not in Asia?

Highlights

- Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, sectarian conflicts often arose in Europe for political as well as religious reasons.
- The Puritans, a strict Calvinist sect that originated in England and migrated to Holland, came to America seeking freedom of conscience, but established a colony where conformity ruled.
- Rhode Island (founded by Puritan exile Roger Williams) and Pennsylvania (founded by Quaker William Penn) made religious tolerance a reality in the colonies.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think persecuted minorities often become zealous persecutors once they achieve power?
2. How would you assess religious tolerance in the United States today?

Highlights

- With its cool rationality and purposeful simplicity, English Protestantism appealed to philosophers like John Locke and Voltaire, but many people found such worship boring and uninspiring.
- With fiery sermons, George Whitefield and John Wesley sought to reawaken emotion and enthusiasm in religion, particularly among

the working class in both America and Britain.

- In 1755, the Great Lisbon Earthquake killed more than 30,000 people; this seemingly irrational event in God's rational world created a crisis of faith for many Christians, including Voltaire.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the tension between polite rationality and zealous enthusiasm manifest itself in religious worship today?
2. How do various religious groups react to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis today? How do they explain unexpected catastrophes in the context of their faith?

EPISODE 11 MISSIONS ABROAD

Highlights

- In the 19th century, England exported Christianity and commerce to Africa; Christian missionaries rallied support for the anti-slavery movement at home and imposed British ideas of culture and civilization abroad.
- Meanwhile, church attendance slipped in Britain during the Industrial Revolution, particularly among the newly urbanized poor and working class.
- Modern missionaries focus on teaching practical skills with a Christian influence. In the words of missionary Pete Smith, they “plant the seed of Christ and allow it to take shape within the culture.”

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think missionary Pete Smith means when he says, “We’re working to put ourselves out of a job”?
2. To what degree do you think religious conversion involves cultural conversion as well?

Highlights

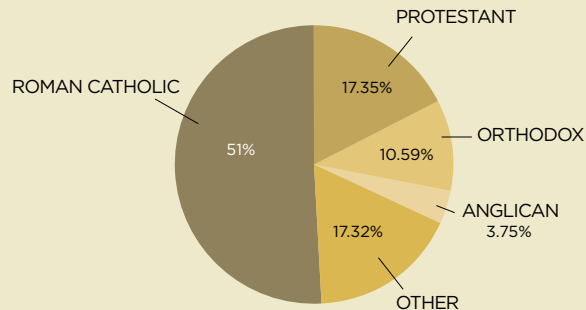
- In the 19th century, Darwin's theory of evolution intensified the long-running conflict between science and religion by casting doubt on humans' unique place in God's creation.
- As shown by the pilgrimages to Fátima and Lourdes, Christians continue to confront a paradox: their most emotionally powerful rites are precisely those that most offend modern scientific rationality.
- Convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962, Vatican II made reforms in Roman Catholicism that provoked a negative reaction from traditionalists and fundamentalists.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think it's possible to reconcile science with religion?
2. In your view, are pilgrimages to religious shrines superstition or spirituality?

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS WORLDWIDE

(2007 est.)



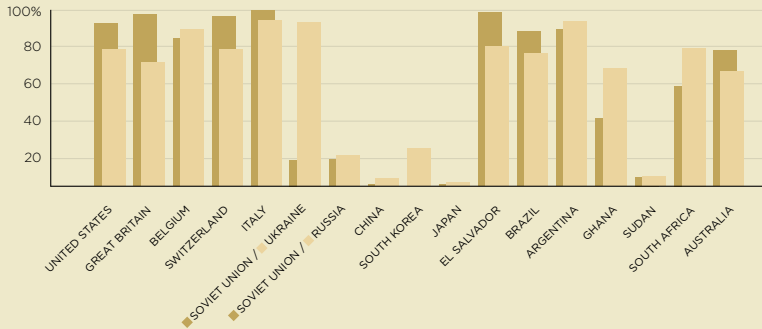
Source: CIA World Factbook

Highlights

- In 20th-century Europe, Communist countries best exemplified atheistic states, but the idea stretches back to the French Revolution.
- In Poland and Soviet Russia, Communist governments officially discouraged religion, but it survived and even flourished among the populace anyway.
- In nominally Christian countries such as Italy, as government programs begin to deliver services traditionally provided by religious charities, Communists and Christians often share the same interests.

PERCENTAGE OF CHRISTIANS BY COUNTRY

1985 2009 (geographic sampling of data)



Source: CIA World Factbook (1985 and 2008-09 editions)

Questions to Consider

1. Have Christian values become secularized in the United States? On the flip side, to what extent has Christianity influenced secular ideology?
2. How has this series affected your perception of Christianity?

AVENUES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Companion Book for the Series

Gascoigne, Bamber. *The Christians*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1977.

General Resources

Chadwick, Owen. *The History of Christianity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

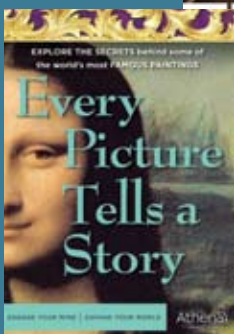
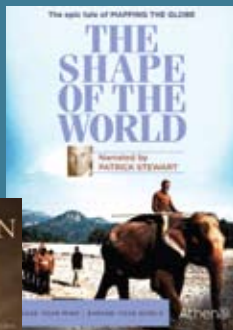
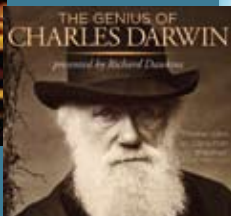
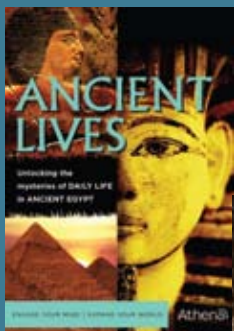
Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity*. 2 vols. New York: HarperOne/Harper Collins, 1984-85.

Hastings, Adrian, ed. *A World History of Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

McManners, John, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Tompkins, Stephen. *A Short History of Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.

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