Topic: **Churches and religion in Europe**

Description

Religion is defined as a set of beliefs, feelings and rituals that bind an individual or a human group to what it considers sacred, in particular to the deity, or the set of dogmas, precepts and rites that constitute a given religious cult.

Religions, therefore, are inseparably interwoven into the totality of aspects of human civilisation. Political and social institutions (e.g. royalty or the family), economic institutions (hunting, agriculture, various trades), arts, techniques and customs invariably have historical connections to, or are even rooted in, religion; also individual peoples' views of nature, the environment and history are rarely without links to religious ideas.

We try to describe these links through the following subtopics:

1. Spreading of religions: From protohistoric cults to classical myths, from monotheistic religions to new religious trends and contemporary secularisation. TC1. TC2. TC3. TC4.

2. Sacred art: Man's desire to communicate through artistic expression from its origins to the present day. TC1. TC2. TC3. TC4.

3. The long road to tolerance: The freedom to change religion or to profess no religion, to manifest it in practice without being harmed, is a right that has suffered and its path often hindered. TC1. TC2. TC3. TC4.

4. Violence: Holy Wars, Jihad and Anti-Semitism: In principle, one can agree that religion is a relevant factor when it comes to many conflicts, including contemporary ones; but it is not the only cause, and many other interests contribute to violence in the name of religion. TC1. TC2. TC3. TC4.

5. Divergences, schisms, splits: In the history of religions there have often been disagreements that have led to a group breaking away from the community of believers. TC1. TC2. TC3. TC4.

Concepts

Tolerance, rights, religious freedom, atheism, secularisation, spread and contraction, war and conflict, schism, splitting, interests, charity, compassion, devotion, temporal power, spiritual power, excommunication, iconoclasm, heresy, almsgiving, sin.

Chronological axis

From the origins of man (50,000 to 100,000 years ago) to the present. See topic 9 timeline

For Christianity the timeline is from year 0.
For Islam from the year of the Hegira, 622 AD.

Spreading of religions.

There is little to surprise: in their long history, religions have sometimes intermingled. And whether you believe in God, Allah or Yahweh, in the teachings of the Buddha, in nature spirits like the Indians or in Ganesh, the Hindu elephant-headed god, you are part of the large family of more than five billion people who have faith in at least one god.

Mircea Eliade, one of the greatest scholars of religions, used to say that religious feeling is part of man: in practice, it has existed as long as we have existed.

It all started with a series of questions. Difficult questions, those that man has always asked himself and that probably every being has asked at least once in his life: "Who created us?" and "Where do we end up when we die?".

Let's think of a man or a woman in protohistory, that long period divided into Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic, which goes from the appearance of man to the invention of writing. As they went about their daily activities, our ancient ancestors realised one thing: that what they do is not entirely up to them. Something is always beyond their control; it is something mysterious, which they can never know or master. At a certain point, they try to give a face to this mystery and to relate to it: religion was perhaps born at this moment. Historians of religions are very cautious and say "perhaps" since the sources of the period are very few and, above all, writing had not yet been invented.

However, each faith developed its own version of how many and what faces this Mystery has. So much so that today there are more than 30,000 religions, doctrines, beliefs, sects and tribal cults in the world.

In Italy, according to the latest data released by the Centre for the Study of New Religions (Cesnur), more than eight hundred are practised. Today, the two most widespread are Christianity and Islam: but before the birth of Jesus and Mohammed, what did people believe in?

In ancient times, thanks to sedentarisation and the development of agriculture, polytheistic religions were formed (a word that comes from the Greek: *polis* "much" and *theos* "god"); ancient civilisations believed in the existence of as many gods as there were "magical" aspects of the world around them; "divine" was everything that, in Nature, they could not explain: the Rain, the Sky or the Sea.

The Egyptians, for example, had been worshipping the Sun since 2500 BC, whose warmth and light made life possible and governed every part of the world: they called him Ra.

For the Sumerians, in the area of Mesopotamia or the Fertile Crescent, as early as 3400 BC the most important goddess was Inanna, who represented the fertility of the Earth and of mankind.

Often the ancient Greek gods (whom the Romans imported to the Italian peninsula from the 6th century BC) were also linked to the forces of Nature: if lightning struck,

the Greeks believed that it was Zeus, the father of all gods, who threw the lightning bolt.

According to the Germanic and Scandinavian peoples, thunder was instead the work of Thor: 5,000 years ago, they worshipped a god armed with a magic hammer.

In short: the gods were very powerful, which is why the ancients were afraid of them. In order to win over the supernatural powers and, in some way, control them, people went so far as to sacrifice animals, objects and even human beings in their honour.

The extremely religious Etruscans (8th-1st century BC), terrified at the thought of disappointing the gods, tried their best to interpret their messages. The best in this field were the haruspices, special priests who were responsible for "reading" the divine will in the liver of sacrificed animals.

Nevertheless, in the history of religions there have also been people who claimed to have met God, such as Moses, Mohammed and Jesus. The revelations that Yahweh, Allah and God entrusted to them, put down in writing, became the 'holy scriptures' of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, the three great monotheistic religions (from the Greek *monos* 'one' and *theos* 'god', meaning 'believing in one God'). In the case of Hinduism, the third most practised religion in the world, it was the *rishi* (the wise seers of ancient India) who composed, around 1500 BC, the four sacred books of the Hindus: the Vedas.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic religions. It is said that the first man to believe in one God was Abraham, a nomadic shepherd, with whom the Lord made a covenant about 4,000 years ago. But, according to the Jews, around 1250 BCE. God, whom they call Yahweh, decided to renew that covenant with all the Jewish people. He did so in Egypt, on Mount Sinai, where he met their Master, Moses. The covenants were clear: salvation and prosperity in the Promised Land (or Land of Israel, not to be confused with the modern state of Israel), in exchange for keeping the commandments. Since then, the Jews have known that they must strictly observe God's law, contained in the Torah, the most important of their sacred texts. And they still await the arrival of the Saviour, the Messiah who will bring universal peace to the world.

The life of the Jewish people, however, was not at all easy: in 587 BC the capital Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the Temple, the city's main place of worship, was burnt down and the Jews were exiled to Babylon. The exile in Babylon began the Diaspora, the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world. In 538 BC Cyrus authorised the return of the Jews to Israel and the construction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews came under various dominations until, in the 2nd century B.C., the Maccabean revolt restored political independence to the people of Israel, an independence that lasted until 63 B.C., when the Romans conquered Judea. The Roman Empire conquered the whole area, which it called Palestine, and controlled the region for almost seven hundred years.

The Jews attempted to rebel against the Romans in 70 AD. After a siege, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Second Temple was razed to the ground forever (now only the

ruins of the Western Wall, called the Wailing Wall and considered the holiest site in Judaism, remain), and resistance was quelled. The Jews dispersed again (second and final Diaspora) and settled in Roman-controlled areas along the shores of the Mediterranean and in the Near East. After the destruction of the Second Temple and at the turn of the second and third centuries AD, the Jews laid the foundations of an oral Jewish law to complement the Torah. This corpus was then transcribed at the end of the 2nd century AD and is known as the *Mishnah*. The discussion around the *Mishnah* was also written down and is called the *Gemara*. The *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* as a whole are called the *Talmūd*.

Meanwhile, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire at the end of the 4th century and there were restrictions on the rights of the Jews.

In the Byzantine Empire until the conquest of Constantinople (1453) the Jews, who had been subject to persecution and restrictions since the Justinian era, still participated in the economic life of the state.

In the meantime, at the dawn of the modern age, a distinction was made between the Jews who lived in the Mediterranean and Eastern areas, known as Sephardim (in Hebrew *Sefarad* means "Spain"), and those who lived in Northern Europe, known as Ashkenazim (*Ashkenaz* means "Germany"), to whom we owe the creation of a language with its great literature, Yiddish. The Spanish Jews, on the other hand, spoke *Ladino*, a mixture of Old Spanish and Hebrew.

In Italy, after the deliberations of the Lateran Council in 1215, it was mainly the Inquisition that aggravated the situation of the Jews, who were present in almost all regions in the 13th century; in 1321 John XXII condemned the errors of the *Talmūd*. Several Italian cities, however, called on the Jews to exercise interest-bearing loans: it was so in Venice (1366), Florence (1437), Mantua (1454) and Milan (1465). However, their expulsion from the Aragonese dominions led to their forced exodus from Sicily (1482) and Sardinia (1492); in 1540 they were also removed from the Kingdom of Naples.

In France, periods of tranquillity and well-being were followed by times of restrictions and persecutions, especially under Louis IX, who expelled the Jews from his States (1254); readmitted and expelled several times, in 1394 they were definitively expelled from the Kingdom.

In Germany, their position remained generally good until the Crusades, when the massacres (pogroms) began. From the time of Barbarossa, the Jews were considered servants of the imperial chancellery and enjoyed a certain amount of protection; Frederick II welcomed them to the court in Palermo. In Austria they were granted their own civil jurisdiction by Duke Frederick II in 1244. With the Golden Bull of Charles IV (1356) the electors obtained the privilege of keeping Jews and taxing them; however, persecutions and massacres continued. In the Iberian Peninsula the invasion of the Arabs (711) brought freedom and prosperity to the Jews for about three centuries. Under Christian kings they enjoyed relative tranquillity, but the Inquisition (1233) worsened their situation: under Henry III of Castile and Leon (1390-1406) persecutions, killings and forced conversions began, and in 1480 a special tribunal against converted Jews (called *Marranos*) was set up in Seville. Conditions worsened

further with the unification of Spain: in 1492 the expulsion decree was issued and in 1496 they were also banned from Portugal. In England, the Jews were totally expelled in 1290. As early as the 6th century AD, there were Jewish communities in southern Russia, where a Cazar prince converted to Judaism in 740, and a Jewish principality existed for about two centuries. During the persecutions in Germany at the time of the Crusades, Poland was a place of refuge for the Jews; their conditions worsened when King John Albert (1492-1501) forced them into ghettos.

The situation of the Jews worsened with the Counter-Reformation: not only in Catholic countries, but all over Europe they were forced to live in a separate district (ghetto), were excluded from professions, sometimes expelled or subjected to fierce persecution. In 1593 the bull *Caeca et obdurata*, issued by Clement VIII, put an end to cohabitation in many centres, decreeing the expulsion of the Jews from the Church States, with the exception of Rome, Ancona and Avignon. In some countries, however, the condition of the Jews remained tolerable: thus, from the territory of the Venetian Republic they were never totally expelled; in Tuscany they enjoyed particular protection; their commercial activities were protected as anti-Spanish and anti-Dutch in Cromwell's England and as anti-Spanish in Holland during the struggle for independence.

A European movement towards emancipation only began in the 18th century, especially with the spread of the Enlightenment. The Declaration of Independence (1776) and the American Constitution (1789) recognised the rights of the Jews; in 1782 Emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Tolerance; the equal rights of the Jews were recognised in 1791 in France and in Frankfurt in 1811; in 1848 they were emancipated in the state of Sardinia and later in other regions of Italy.

After 1870, in all the states of Western and Central Europe (where the Jews represented a more or less conspicuous minority) the process towards effective equality of the rights of the Jews with those of other citizens began, not without serious resistance (anti-Semitism). For a long time the situation of the far more numerous Jewish communities in Eastern Europe was very different: in Russia the Jews still suffered persecution and massacres and only in 1917, with the advent of Bolshevism, did they obtain complete freedom and civil and political equality; the same happened in Poland in 1919.

The advent of Nazism in Germany produced the most serious anti-Jewish persecution recorded in history; it began in 1933 with the promulgation of the first anti-Jewish racial laws (which Fascist Italy followed, in turn issuing anti-Jewish racial legislation in 1938) and led to the mass extermination perpetrated in 1941-45 (Holocaust 15-17 million victims, of which 5-6 million were Jews).

The conviction that only the birth of an independent Jewish state could solve the Jewish problem and protect the Jews from anti-Semitism, was the basis of the Zionist movement which, already from the end of the 19th century, and especially during the British occupation (then mandate) of Palestine (1917-48), and then immediately after the war, promoted the establishment of Jewish colonies in the country, laying the groundwork for the foundation of the State of Israel (14 May 1948).

Today, France, with half a million Jews, is home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, followed by the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, Ukraine and Hungary. Countries that were once at the centre of world Jewish life, such as Poland, Belarus, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Greece, Spain and Portugal, now have small communities that have been reduced to a marginal or almost non-existent role.

Christianity

According to the Gospels (the books about the life of Jesus, written by his apostles), 753 years after the foundation of Rome, a special child was born in Bethlehem (Palestine). The archangel Gabriel had announced his arrival to his mother, Mary, explaining that the baby was the son of God. Jesus, this is his name, preached God's love for mankind until his death and many disciples followed him: Christianity was born.

The first Christian communities, called 'churches', were eschatological communities: they lived in expectation of the kingdom whose coming would occur at the end of time. The spread of the new religion, born within a Jewish culture that had already established relations with Hellenism, favoured contacts with different cultures, integrating many of their elements and thus contributing to the creation of new and original cultural forms, both in the East, where Jewish elements were more tenaciously preserved, and especially in Greece, Asia Minor, North Africa and the West in general.

The religion quickly spread to the lower and upper classes (in particular the senatorial class, as St Paul explicitly stated), and took on an increasingly more articulated structure; each church was presided over first by a group of "elders" (*presbýteroi*, from which comes priests) and then by a person in charge called *epískopos* (overseer, supervisor, from which comes "bishop") assisted by priests and deacons (*diákonoi*) who were responsible for assisting the poor.

In the 2nd century the Church of Rome, founded by the apostles Peter and Paul, and embedded in the heart of the capital of the empire and its social and political context, began to claim greater spiritual authority and prestige than other ancient communities of churches, such as Alexandria and Antioch; when Constantine I the Great moved the imperial capital to Constantinople (330), the latter joined the former as the fourth great patriarchate.

After the last persecution of 305-311 by Diocletian, Constantine proclaimed freedom of worship in 313 with the Edict of Milan, which allowed Christians to openly profess their faith on an equal footing with the followers of all other religions in the empire. It was finally with Emperor Theodosius that Christianity became the sole religion of the empire (Edict of Thessalonica, 380; followed by the prohibition of pagan cults, 391-392).

The Franks and their ruling dynasty, the Merovingians, were the first people to convert directly from paganism to Catholicism. Established in Gaul from the 3rd century onwards, King Clovis I converted to the Catholic faith and was baptised on Christmas Day 498. Britain had already been Christianised from the 4th century

onwards. But the invasion of Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians led to the disappearance of the British Church, except in Wales and Scotland. The Christianisation of the Germanic peoples began around the 7th century, promoted by the Church of Rome from the south-east (Brittany) and the first mission to Irish/Scottish lands from the north-west. The last pagan king of the Anglo-Saxons, Arwald, died in 686. Scandinavia, on the other hand, was the last region of Germanic Europe to be converted, and was also the most reluctant to accept the new religion. From the early Middle Ages onwards, the territories of northern Europe were gradually converted to Christianity by Germanic leaders, culminating in the Northern Crusades. Later, German and Scandinavian nobles extended their power by subjugating Finns, Sami, Balts and some Slavic peoples.

In this way, between the 6th and 7th centuries Christianity became the dominant religion in Europe.

At the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century, Europeans made a series of discoveries and geographical explorations that radically changed the worldview of the time. The Catholic Church did not remain a spectator of colonial expansion. In May 1493 Pope Adrian VI promulgated the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, which established a boundary of expansion in the world between the Portuguese and Spanish empires, but this was changed the following year by the Treaty of Tordesillas, later confirmed by Pope Julius II (see Topic 9, subtopic 5). Initially, Portuguese colonialism in Asia had different characteristics from Spanish colonialism in America, with the former based on commercial settlements on the coast and therefore little involvement of the native populations. The situation in Central America was quite different, where the Spaniards systematically penetrated inland, not limiting themselves to the exploitation of wealth but substantially influencing the local populations such as the Maya, Aztecs and Incas. In this way Christianity penetrated capillarly into Central and South America and more superficially into Asia.

In the modern age, following the Protestant Reformation, Catholic Christianity was deeply weakened politically, but the impetus of the Reformation helped to raise its moral standing after the decay it had undergone. In response to the new demands, the Counter-Reformation movement was initiated, a set of measures for spiritual, theological and liturgical renewal that was reflected in all artistic manifestations.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, a political system known as monarchical absolutism took hold in many European states, characterised by the presence of a monarch at the head of the government, the sole holder of legislative, executive and judicial powers according to the justification of the 'divine right of kings'. In this context the monarch declared himself superior to any law and with no other authority, neither temporal nor spiritual, above him. In the European states that remained with the pontiff of Rome after the Protestant Reformation (see subtopic 5), Catholicism imposed itself as the only official religion that could be professed by the subjects, while the sovereign was considered its main defender and promoter.

With the French Revolution freedom of conscience was established, but this was followed by a strong persecution of the Church. In 1801 Napoleon concluded a Concordat with the Church, whereby the state provided subsidies to the Catholic

religion (which was given the status of the religion of the majority of the French), as well as to Judaism, Lutheranism and Calvinism.

Despite attempts by the Congress of Vienna in 1814 to cancel the French Revolution and return to the *ancien régime* (Restoration), European society and politics were now moving towards full and total autonomy from religion, ending the system of relations between society and religion that had characterised previous centuries.

Now, this new phenomenon of secularisation, which goes by the name of separatism, is typical of Western society, i.e. of those countries where the Catholic and Protestant religions are predominant, whereas in Eastern European countries, where the Orthodox religion dominates, we do not see the same phenomenon. The basic principle is that the political-civil-temporal order and the spiritual-religious-supernatural order are not only distinct, but completely separate: State and Church proceed along two paths that never meet, and that have no relation to each other.

Islam

Islam (which in Arabic means "submitted [to God]") is the youngest of the three great monotheistic religions: it was founded at the beginning of the 7th century AD by Mohammed, a caravan driver chosen by Allah to spread his revelations and convert the Arabs, who were polytheists at the time, to monotheism. These revelations were collected in the Koran, the holy book of Islam: the task of every good Muslim is to respect its Suras, i.e. the 114 chapters into which it is divided. Muslims gather in mosques and pray facing Mecca (located in Saudi Arabia), the holy city where their most important shrine, the *Kaaba*, is located. It is to Mecca that every Muslim is required to make a pilgrimage; this is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam. The others are: the testimony of faith, which consists of a sentence to be pronounced every day and which gives proof of the believer's awareness; prayer, which must be recited five times a day, that is, at dawn, at noon, in the middle of the afternoon, at sunset and at night; giving alms, which is also a social duty to help even out injustice; since everything belongs to God, a portion of what is not needed to live on (therefore valued as wealth) should be given annually to the poor; fasting in the month of Ramadan, except for the sick and women during their cycle, while children fast for half a day.

In 622 Muhammad moved (*Hegira*) to Yathrib (later renamed Medina). There the Prophet became a real political leader and the first nucleus of the Islamic community (the *umma*) was formed.

Muhammad later returned to Mecca. After a few years of conflict and diplomatic negotiations with the local clans, most of the tribes converted to Islam.

From then on, the spread of the new monotheism and the territorial conquests of the Arabs were rapid and vast. By the time of Mohammed's death in 632, Islam had united the Arabs into a common religious faith and a politically cohesive community.

In the years immediately following the Prophet's death, the leadership of the Islamic community was assumed by four caliphs who, succeeding each other rapidly, began the construction of what was to become a great Islamic empire, stretching from Persia to the Iberian peninsula.

The first Arab conquests brought about the end of the weakened Persian Empire led by the Sassanid dynasty and a radical downsizing of the Byzantine Empire, which lost Egypt and Syria.

At the beginning of their expansion, the Arabs maintained the administrative and fiscal organisation inherited from previous empires in the conquered territories. Christians and Jews were allowed to keep their religious traditions in exchange for the payment of a tax. At first, the Arabs constituted a military elite, partially separated from the rest of society.

Quite quickly, however, a process of mutual assimilation began between the newcomers and the local populations. In the 8th century, non-Arab converts to Islam were admitted into the army. At the same time, Arab militias began to settle in the provinces. The Arabic language spread as a common language and the new religion, embraced by most locals, was a central element in the political and cultural unity of the new empire.

During the reign of the first four caliphs, the government of the provinces was entrusted to governors (emirs), assisted by a guard and a judge. Through the emirs, the caliphs maintained a firm central government of power. The office became hereditary and with Uthman (644-656) the Umayyad clan dynasty (660-750) began. Under the Umayyads, the Arabs continued their expansion, conquering North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, often to the satisfaction of the local population.

In the mid-8th century the Abbasid dynasty seized power, killing the last Umayyad caliph. Under the Abbasids, Baghdad became a thriving cultural centre, where doctors, philosophers and scientists from all over the world met. Under the Abbasid dynasty, particularly from the 10th century, strong autonomous pressures developed, either of ethnic origin or encouraged by local governors due to political rivalries. The title of Caliph was claimed both by the Fatimite dynasty, which controlled North Africa and Palestine, and by the Emir of Cordoba, the last heir of the Umayyads. The empire was thus divided into several caliphates.

The south-central part of the Iberian Peninsula - called *al-Andalus* - became an independent emirate in 756 and a caliphate in 929, and achieved a very high level of economic and cultural development. The government pursued a policy of tolerance and integration towards Jews and Christians. In 997, the Caliphate of Cordoba conquered Santiago de Compostela and later took the Berber territories of North Africa from the Fatimites. In the early 11th century, however, the caliphate fragmented into a series of smaller emirates and principalities. *Al-Andalus* would be reunited at the end of the 11th century by the Almoravids, a Berber dynasty that had already established itself in Morocco. Between the 11th and 12th centuries, conflicts with the Christian kingdoms of the north intensified in the Iberian Peninsula, as they took advantage of the weakness of the Caliphate to expand and conquer more and more of its territories.

At the same time, the Fatimites established an autonomous caliphate in Egypt. Later, the Fatimites themselves conquered the whole of the Maghreb and Sicily, always benefiting from peaceful coexistence with Christians and Jews.

Established as an independent emirate, Sicily experienced a century of prosperity and well-being. Agriculture developed not only around the main cities but throughout the island, allowing exports to the African coast. Citrus fruits, palm trees and papyrus were introduced, resulting in the establishment of various industries, promoted and managed directly by the state. The island remained under Islamic rule until the arrival of the Normans in the 11th century.

The Islamic presence in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, was more enduring. A Muslim presence had been established in Hungary from the 10th to the 12th century. In the 13th century, the Mongol peoples who had invaded Bulgaria and present-day Russia and Ukraine began to convert to Islam (from them descended the Crimean Tatars, who dominated large portions of present-day Russia, later becoming a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire in 1475). But it was mainly with the Ottoman Empire that Islam became a constant presence. The Sublime Porte's westward advance began around 1354 and their empire would dominate Greece and much of the Balkans for centuries. In 1453 they conquered Constantinople (renaming it Istanbul), effectively controlling the Black Sea.

In more recent times, the process of decolonisation has led to a religious and political reawakening of Islam. The humiliations suffered in the colonial period and later in the Middle East in the Arab-Israeli wars have led to a rejection of the values of Western civilisation and a return to tradition. The reawakening of Islam received a major impetus from the 'Islamic revolution' in Iran (1979), and then became more extreme in several countries, sometimes taking on fundamentalist overtones (e.g. Algeria, Afghanistan, Sudan).

Today, in Europe, Islam is the majority religion in Kosovo, Azerbaijan and Turkey (90-100%), in Kazakhstan (80-90%), in Albania (70-80%) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (50-70%); and to a lesser but significant extent in North Macedonia (30-50%), Cyprus (20-30%), Georgia, Montenegro and Russia (10-20%).

Current trends: atheism, agnosticism and new religiosities

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer survey on religiosity in the European Union, Christianity is the largest religion in the EU, accounting for 64% of the EU population, compared to 72% in 2012. Catholics are the largest Christian group in the EU, making up 41% of the population, while Eastern Orthodox make up 10%, Protestants 9% and other Christians 4%. Non-believers/agnostics make up 17%, atheists 10% and Muslims 2% of the EU population. 3% refuse to answer or do not know.

Atheism consists in denying the existence of a divine entity, i.e. a superhuman and supernatural being. There are well over two hundred million atheists in the world.

Agnostics, on the other hand, are people who do not even question the existence of a God. They think that the divinity cannot be known to human beings, and since it is unknowable, there is no point in trying to establish whether it exists and what nature it has.

Another way of denying the presence of a God is non-belief, which differs from atheism in that it does not arise from a specific reflection on the existence of a God, but from the choice to live day by day without asking the question.

Thanks in part to recent immigration, new Eastern religions have also appeared in Europe, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism (which together account for just over 1% of the European population). At the same time, an original spirituality, known as New Age, has made its appearance. Born and spread in the second half of the 20th century, the movement preaches the need for spiritual renewal and the opening of a 'new era' under the banner of an inner balance in the wake of the ecological creed, from which a credible relationship between man, science and the environment can be revived. It is characterised by an approach that fuses together the teachings of different religions and beliefs (astrology, mysticism, Christianity, Buddhism, meditation, but also occultism, extrasensory phenomena, crystal therapy and more) heralding the advent of a new cosmic era.

Sacred art.

Man's desire to communicate through artistic expression has been evident since the dawn of our civilisation. Analyses carried out on the remains of protohistoric burials have shown that primates who preceded the appearance of Homo sapiens used their bodies to communicate sacred messages by painting their skin with red ochre, a colour that represented blood, the symbol of the beginning and end of life, and was used for funeral and fertility rites. Other remains that have come down to us are representations, such as statuettes (Palaeolithic Venuses found mainly in Europe), cave paintings (such as those at Lascaux and Altamira) and monuments (megaliths such as those at Stonehenge in England or the Nazca lines in Peru). From this period, the first and most important are the cave paintings (particularly abundant around the Bay of Biscay between Spain and France). Animals, signs and anthropomorphic figures are represented in these caves. In addition, many of the scenes depict hunting scenes and hunters in front of their prey; these scenes have traditionally been explained as magical rituals of good omen towards an existence that must have been difficult, mysterious and difficult to control.

In Greece, art fulfilled a double task. The numerous statues that adorned the temples scattered throughout the regions (the Parthenon in Athens, the temple of Zeus in Olympia, of Apollo in Delphi, etc.) directly involved people, since the sculptures, depicting gods, athletes and leaders, showed themselves as an example to be imitated and were considered as a sort of moralising exhortation. The Greeks, therefore, identified with these works and this process of imitation was facilitated by the fact that the art was made in a naturalistic style. In this context, technical perfection was fundamental (the word 'art' in Greek is *téchne*, meaning craftsmanship). The more works of art were admired for their perfection, the more effective they became as a means of communicating the subjects they depicted. Art, therefore, also fulfilled a task of education.

Roman artistic depictions of deities are further evidence of the pagan kind of representation. They make the divine visible through bodily beauty and the sublime idealisation of forms. The ultimate consequence is that artistic representations of

deities become idols: they are not considered images that refer to a god of a transcendent dimension, but become themselves deities to be worshipped.

In the Jewish religion, art is used and accepted as a direct manifestation of the divine presence, so much so that God Himself participates in the artistic creation: a significant example is when He gives Solomon extremely detailed instructions and commands for the construction of the temple.

In general, the constructions, ceramics and seals of the biblical temples are similar to those of the Phoenicians, Babylonians and Assyrians of the time, i.e. to Mesopotamian art and architecture.

In Roman times, during the reign of Herod the Great, various buildings were erected, including Herod's Temple in Jerusalem, the amphitheatre at Caesarea, and the palace at Masada. After the destruction of the Temple, numerous synagogues were built in the communities. Architecturally, these sacred buildings were inspired by the Roman basilica: the Torah scrolls were placed in the eastern apse and the space was divided into male and female areas; these customs were adopted by the early Christians and remain in use in Orthodox churches. Stone carved capitals and friezes decorated the interior, along with frescoes and mosaic floors. The dead were buried in carved sarcophagi, interred in burial chambers or catacombs, with religious symbols painted or carved into the walls.

Between the Middle Ages and the modern era, Jews living in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East built synagogues and schools in the prevailing local styles. The ancient Jewish community of Venice built several synagogues, the best known of which was rebuilt in the Baroque style. Eastern European synagogues, made of carved wood and decorated with paintings, were almost all destroyed by the Nazis during the Second World War. The Old Testament and religious texts were decorated with miniatures. In the Middle East, under the influence of the iconoclasm that characterised Byzantine art between the 8th and 9th centuries, and later the Islamic ban on depicting living beings, they did not depict animals or humans. In Spain and Germany, on the other hand, Jewish illuminators created lively figurative works, especially in the *Haggada*, the books containing instructions for the Passover ritual. Jewish goldsmiths (especially in Eastern Europe) specialised in the production of silver religious objects: wine chalices, plates and *menorot*, spice containers and lamps for the *Hanukkah* festival.

In the 20th century, some painters and sculptors of Jewish descent delved into particular aspects of their culture to produce specifically Jewish art. Some contemporary Israeli artists, while following modern international trends, have begun to develop characters that suggest the emergence of an emerging local style.

Christianity followed the line taken by the Jews, initially also assuming the rejection of art as it could lead to idolatry. Very soon, however, the Jewish conception was overcome because a new way of understanding art in the light of the Incarnation was born. In the Jewish world, the prohibition of the use of images was linked to the impossibility of depicting God. The Christian religion, on the other hand, believed that God was incarnate in Jesus: he had become man, so it was possible to represent him.

In the East, figurative art is centred on the creation of the image of Christ, which must be realised by artists through a rigorous technique handed down over the centuries. This is why Eastern artistic images - icons - have never changed style. The light of God shines through the colours; the very material of the icon has the capacity to reflect the glory of God and the faithful can honour it as something that puts them directly in contact with God through vision. This conception is the conclusion of a long period of struggles and discussions, called iconoclasm, which saw the imperial court of Constantinople and the Orthodox monks pitted against each other between 726 and 843. In that painful affair, the awareness that the icon-image should represent Christ in His two natures, human and divine, was strengthened. This consideration, however, did not involve modern Western art.

In Europe, the spread and preaching of religious orders had brought about new ferments, including a greater attention to emotion and nature. In addition to contemplative art, Christian art also had new functions, such as:

- didactic and catechetical. Art is an instrument that enables people to learn Christian concepts quickly and immediately. It is a means of teaching valid at all levels: from a simpler initial stage to the learning of much more complex theological themes, which require a more advanced preparation on the part of the faithful. The images serve as a book of the poor - *Biblia Pauperum* - for immediate communication.

- decorative, i.e. the use of everything that embellishes a place or situation one finds oneself in, since the principle of beauty applied in decoration is common to all creatures because it comes from God. The first example of decoration is plants, flowers, fruit, birds, etc.: the whole of creation is willed by God to participate in His praise. The use of precious materials - gold, silver, precious stones - serves to manifest, through the richness it expresses, the divine presence. This is why liturgical art is mainly made of precious materials: it is at the service of divine worship and in every part implies a profound symbolic meaning.

- ideological, which also leads to religious struggle. Towards the beginning of the 16th century, a new form of iconoclasm spread through northern Europe, further demonstrating the close link between faith and art. First Luther, and soon afterwards Calvin and Zwingli, strongly criticised the Church of their time, which they blamed for the severe relaxation of religious life. Their criticism not only touched on various theological themes, but also went so far as to nullify the function of Christian art. The need to eliminate all artistic forms is confirmed for them by the fact that images were executed with richness and refinement. Within a few years, a large number of churches were sacked and numerous works destroyed. Again, as in Byzantine iconoclasm, art became a true battleground. The Catholic Reformation, codified in the Council of Trent, which ended in 1563, also dealt with Christian art: it was defined as a valid instrument contributing to spreading and keeping alive the faith among all peoples.

In this context, Christian architecture fulfils both spiritual and functional tasks. The sacred space, a place of prayer par excellence, must also be characterised by a certain practicality, as it is intended to host the liturgical action of the community.

Christians have always felt that the church is a space for the community, as evidenced by their participation in the construction of the building. This was the case from the 11th century until around the 14th century, when the great cathedrals were built. From a stylistic point of view, first there was a more sober and imposing phase, the Romanesque; then the desire for union with God was made visible with the use of very slender upward architectural forms and large windows filling the church with light: the Gothic. The churches and convents of religious orders reflect the spirituality of the founding saints. There is thus a different application of artistic means according to different ways of living the faith. One example is the Cistercian architecture advocated by St Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century. It reflects the search for a simple and linear form, as can be seen by comparing the plans of the numerous churches scattered throughout Europe, which can be likened to a single schematic module, repeated without alteration.

In the last two centuries, as a result of the desacralisation of society, the intimate relationship between faith and human reality has ceased to exist, and consequently Christian artistic research has been marginalised in an increasingly peripheral sphere. The sacred has been replaced by the subconscious or has been completely annulled. Since man no longer feels the need for the divine presence, he also finds the creation of Christian art futile. On the other hand, in a cultural context that seems to deny it, modern sacred art is characterised by a strong and often dramatic spirituality.

At the same time, Christian art through the missions has always been directed towards non-European countries. At one time, missionaries brought images and other artistic objects directly from Europe to facilitate the spread of the faith or for liturgical celebrations. In this century, the Church has tried to respect the artistic tradition of each people. In 1925, Pius XI promoted a large exhibition on missionary art in the Vatican. From that moment on, the aim was no longer to impose a ready-made art on Christians from other continents, but to encourage local inspiration and to foster a cultural exchange between different artistic realities.

Islamic art was born soon after the Islamic conquest, during the Umayyad dynasty (660-750 AD), and almost immediately manifested a total unity of aspects that would be maintained over the centuries. Although the principles of Islamic art had no scriptural basis, they possessed a profoundly Islamic character. Arab traders, before the advent of Islam, had contacts with Byzantine, Persian, Greco-Roman and even Indian art; however, these remained outside their primary interests. Mainly, it was the renunciation of a nomadic life and the adoption of sedentary ways of living that necessitated the emergence of art in conformity with Islam.

After the success of the first Islamic conquests, there were mass conversions in most of the lands subject to Muslim authority, bringing the Muslim Arabs into contact with other cultures. By conquering different peoples, Muslims had at their disposal artistic and technical traditions practised by various civilisations, such as the Hellenic and Romanesque-Byzantine of Syria, the Sassanid of Iran and Mesopotamia, the Coptic of Egypt with its legacy of the pharaohs, and numerous local traditions such as that of the Berbers. All these elements were available to the new community.

From its inception, Islamic art followed a selective process that favoured some motifs and styles over others. This process was undertaken by the artists themselves, many of whom were converts to the new religion. Art thus had to adapt to the new ethical and aesthetic criteria and to the needs of the new patrons, with worship playing a predominant role. It was in religious architecture that Islamic art expressed its ingenuity in integrating pre-existing artistic traditions and adapting them to its own purposes and demands. The best examples of this kind of early integration of subject and motifs are in the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem - the first monument of Islam (late 7th century) - the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (ca. 706-716 AD) and the Qusair 'Amra in the Jordan desert.

The new Muslims needed an aesthetic mode that would satisfy the spiritual and contemplative nature of their religion, reinforce its founding concepts and social structure, and be a constant reminder of its principles whose roots go back to Abrahamic monotheism. The challenge was taken up by the early Muslims, who, working with old motifs and techniques known from their Semitic, Byzantine and Sassanid predecessors, developed new ones as needs and inspirations arose. One hundred and fifty years after the arrival of Islam, Islamic art had formed its own language and aesthetics. For example, the Great Mosque of Cordoba (785 A.D.) in Andalusia and the Ibn Tulun Mosque (879 A.D.) in Egypt were, not for long, phases in a provisional evolution, but they were, quite rightly, unsurpassed masterpieces that displayed distinctive rules and aesthetics. In its creative phases, art in the Islamic world was the adaptation of an older figurative structure. For Muslims, it was not an innovation, but a recombination, with internal modifications of their experience and knowledge. In the following centuries, the Muslim world maintained this very close relationship with its predecessors and surrounding cultures. Until the 18th century, Islam remained the only major culture in close contact with almost every other centre of civilisation and life in Asia, Africa and Europe, with an intensity of contacts that varied from place to place and from century to century.

A very important aspect of Islamic art is the alleged irreproducibility of the human figure. In the Arab world, figurative representation had been cultivated since the beginning of Islam in a spectacular and monumental form, as we can see in the mosaics of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem and the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Figurative art in its various aspects was present continuously since the 7th century, after Islam was revealed. The arts of calligraphy and abstraction did not develop in the Muslim world to compensate for or replace the forbidden living image, but flourished in parallel with figurative painting. Writing and painting were branches of the same art, where the calligrapher and the painter used the calligraphy in the same way. The prohibition of figurative and human representation in Islam does not apply to those images executed for decorative purposes. Strictly speaking, it applies only to the image of the Deity that is unrepresentable, a practice rooted in Abrahamic monotheism that is directly opposed to idolatrous polytheism. However, portraiture of divine messengers, prophets and saints is generally avoided for two reasons: first, to prevent their images from becoming objects of idolatry and, second, because no

reproduction could truly represent the qualities inherent in such holy men and women.

From the very beginning, unrepresentability and not iconoclasm was the foundation of Islam's sacred art. The words of the Prophet, condemning those who wish to imitate the work of the Creator, have not always been interpreted as a pure and simple rejection of all figurative art, but a condemnation of an idolatrous purpose.

The long road to tolerance.

Religious freedom is the freedom to change religion or not to profess any religion, to manifest it in teaching, practice, worship and observance, while retaining the same rights as citizens of a different faith. It also includes the right of religious groups to bear witness and spread their message in society, without being the object of contempt or persecution.

In the classical Greek and Roman world, there was no real problem of tolerance, due to the very nature of the religion of the Greek cities and of the Roman state, which was neither revealed nor dogmatic, and could therefore easily absorb foreign or new divinities and cults. At most, there were individual episodes of intolerance in relation to political, social and public order issues (as, for example, the accusation of impiety against Socrates and the prohibition of bacchanals in Rome in the 2nd century BC). Even the hostile attitude towards Christianity on the part of the empire was not so much a matter of religious intolerance as a reaction to the behaviour of Christians towards the cults of the state. In the biblical tradition, however, the problem is more complex, because attitudes of tolerance coexist with clear condemnations of idolatry. Even Christianity, which saw itself as a revealed religion and therefore as the bearer of the one truth, could not admit the coexistence of paganism, Judaism and Manichaeism. Once the structure of the Church had been established and strengthened, and Catholicism had become the official religion of the empire, and then of the barbarian states, heresy became a public crime that had to be prosecuted. In the Middle Ages, St Thomas Aquinas had argued that differences in worship between Christians, Jews and Muslims could be tolerated, i.e. endured, making St Augustine's idea that faith, the work of grace, cannot be imposed by men. The intellectuals of the Renaissance, for their part, had nurtured the project of a philosophical religion capable of resolving conflicts between the followers of different religions.

However, it was in the Modern Age that the principle of tolerance, as an acceptance of the multiplicity of religions and, consequently, the need for their free and autonomous coexistence, was formulated and took hold.

In particular, the climate in which the precise need for religious tolerance took shape was, in the 16th century, that of the Reformation, in relation to the freedom of worship granted by the prince to subjects of a different religion. With the Peace of Augsburg (1555), at the end of the War of Smalcalda, the right to define the religious denomination of the State passed from the emperor to the princes; dissenters were only allowed to emigrate with their property to places where their faith was

professed. The religious wars in France had a different outcome, where a series of edicts of tolerance to guarantee the Calvinist nobility and their freedoms culminated in the Edict of Nantes in 1598; but this did not prevent the restoration of the religious unity of the kingdom, with the monarchic-absolutist principle prevailing. Richelieu took away the guarantees granted to the Huguenots and dissolved their garrisons, while recognising their religious and civil rights (1629); Louis XIV completely revoked (1685) the Edict of Nantes. A similar development to the French one took place in Poland, where the Warsaw Diet (1573) recognised equal rights for the Catholic Church, the *Ecclesia maior* (bringing together Calvinists, Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren) and the *Ecclesia minor* (anti-Trinitarian Anabaptists). Even in the Principality of Transylvania, independent from the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, the complex national and religious reality favoured a special legal arrangement, characterised by a wide freedom of worship (Diet of Torda, 1568). By the end of the century, however, the religious restoration, effectively promoted through the Jesuit order throughout Central and Eastern Europe, broke the balance of power between the various denominations and gradually rendered the principles of freedom of worship inoperative.

At the same time as these legislative acts, the need arose in religious philosophical thought to reconcile individual aspirations for freedom of thought in the religious and philosophical fields with the interests of civil society and the state.

In the last decades of the 17th century, the idea of tolerance matured in different circles: Baruch Spinoza (a Dutch Jew) in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* defended freedom of thought and limited the powers of the State to external things and actions, so as to safeguard the right of everyone to express their thoughts even in matters of religion; the Englishman John Locke, committing the State to guarantee and promote civil goods, removed from its competence the choices dictated by the conscience of each person and clearly separated the tasks of the State from those of the Church, which could not find any support for its decisions in the State. In French culture, the idea of tolerance was affirmed above all through Pierre Bayle's polemic against dogmatism and against the pretence of imposing religious convictions by force; on the other hand, the German Samuel von Pufendorf defended tolerance by limiting the sphere of law, and therefore of the State, to the legal system and to executive power, thus removing from state power the entire sphere of individual conscience (moral and religious) and denying the Church the right to exercise, directly or indirectly through the State, executive power over the few faithful. In the Age of Enlightenment, the battle for tolerance was one of the fundamental aspects of the polemic against dogmatism, fanaticism and superstition and influenced the constitutional orientations of the Revolution. As intellectual attitudes evolved, principles of freedom were incorporated into the declarations of rights that marked the constitutional history of the Atlantic area: in 1649 the Catholic colony of Maryland promulgated an Act of Tolerance; in 1789 the French Constituent Assembly proclaimed freedom of conscience as a human right; in 1791 the Federal Constitution of the United States of America followed.

In the 19th century, having acquired the right of the individual to profess his faith and worship, tolerance took the form rather of the freedom of the Church or the Churches in their relations with state power. Tolerance is then progressively identified with freedom of conscience, which the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, in his treatise *On Liberty* published in 1859, defined as "liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral or theological".

In a further expansion of its meaning, the principle of tolerance became synonymous with pluralism not only of ideas, but also of the variety of people's lifestyles. The only limit to tolerance as freedom is the prohibition of inflicting harm on anyone. In other words, differences can and must be tolerated or recognised only to the extent that they do not harm anyone, and therefore do not violate the fundamental rights of the individual, nor do they jeopardise the very constitution of society, the possibility of peaceful coexistence between heterogeneous individuals and groups.

Closely linked to the principle of tolerance is the issue of the secularity of the State, which, in fact, stems from the processes of secularisation and entails the clear separation of the political and religious spheres.

The secularity of the State can be expressed in two different ways, consisting either in a strict separation between the State and religious denominations (e.g. in the United States of America or France) or in favouring (or explicitly protecting) religious practice, provided that there is no discrimination between the various religious denominations (this is the case, for example, in Italy). While the first perspective has the consequence of subjecting all religious confessions to a discipline of common law, the second has the effect of resorting to institutions of a conventional nature (such as concordats and agreements) to regulate relations between the State and religious confessions. Different again was the case of the socialist form of State, where the formal proclamation of the separation between the State and religion concealed a substantial preference for atheistic positions (as, for example, in the Soviet Constitution of 1936).

Violence: Holy Wars, Jihad and Anti-Semitism.

Jihad

Between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, the expression 'holy war' often hit the headlines: fanatical Islamic terrorists, responsible for terrible attacks, present themselves as the promoters of a holy war against the West, a no-holds-barred battle that indiscriminately targets civilians. But holy war is an expression with a very ancient history, rooted in the original message of Islam, and which has little to do with the theses of these terrorist organisations.

In Europe, the Arabic word jihad has long been translated as 'holy war'. This is a misleading translation, which has often led to a misunderstanding of the exact meaning of the term. Literally jihad means 'effort', it identifies the impetus to achieve a given goal and can refer to the spiritual effort of the individual to improve himself. But jihad is also an armed action that has as its objective the expansion of Islam or its

defence: it is in this case that one speaks of holy war. Many interpreters of the sacred texts of Islam consider this to be the "little jihad", while they judge the spiritual effort of self-transformation to be the "great jihad". Also in this case, in fact, it is a war, but it is a war that the Moslem fights within himself, against his more material instincts and the temptations of a pagan life, without faith. Prevalently, however, the term jihad has been interpreted as the holy war against the infidels, the armed instrument for the spread of Islam.

The Qur'an and the treaties of Islamic law stipulate that holy war must be waged only against infidels (pagans and polytheists) and that armed action must be preceded by an explicit invitation to convert to Islam: only in the face of a refusal must war be waged. In the event of a holy war, Jews and Christians are not obliged to convert, but must submit to the payment of a tribute and accept the protection of Islam. The obligation to take part in jihad does not extend to every single Muslim: it is sufficient that an adequate number of members of the community perform this task. In war it is forbidden to kill women, children, the old and the sick; it is also forbidden to take personal possession of goods of a certain value unless it is food for one's own sustenance.

Jihad has nothing to do with the violent actions of terrorists of a fundamentalist matrix (fundamentalism) who threaten everyone, in Europe, in the United States and in the Arab countries themselves, claiming to have launched a holy war against the West and its allies. As happened in Algeria in the 1990s, when entire villages of innocent civilians were slaughtered, or in the terrible suicide bombings in Israel, New York (2001), Istanbul (2003), Madrid (2004), London (2005) and Paris (2015).

Jihad, finally, is not a pillar of Islam (like profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, pilgrimage and fasting during Ramadan), but a duty, prescribed by God through his prophet Muhammad. In the Koran and other texts, the term jihad is often followed by the expression *fi sabil Allah* 'in the path of God'. A Muslim devotes his whole self to jihad, just as a monk dedicates his life to the service of God. For the Qur'an, moreover, jihad is one of the gates to Paradise: the Qur'an opens the gates of heavenly bliss to those who fight for Islam, and those who die in the holy war are martyrs for the faith.

Nowadays, in many Muslim countries, the call for a strict interpretation of the scriptures has become louder and louder. In this climate of widespread hostility towards the Western world, terrorists seek to exploit the religious and political language of Islam, using extremist theses that distort the meaning of jihad as stated in the Koran. One of the objectives of the terrorists is to accentuate the contrasts between the West and Islam, denying the possibility of peaceful coexistence, which is what common history has often taught us.

Crusades

To understand what the crusades were, one must bear in mind the importance of pilgrimages in the Middle Ages. At the end of the year 1000, the first crusade was simply an armed pilgrimage to free Jerusalem and the tomb of Christ from Muslim domination. In the following centuries these expeditions turned into real wars to

conquer the Holy Land and more or less large territories wrested from the Turks, also in order to increase the trade of the Christian powers (see Topic 9, subtopic 5).

Nowadays many Catholics set off to visit the shrines, but in the Middle Ages believers who were able to do so felt almost obliged to undertake a pilgrimage, much as Muslims go to Mecca today.

The most worthwhile pilgrimage of all was to the Holy Land, to the places where Jesus lived and died. Around the year 1000, however, Christian pilgrims suddenly encountered many difficulties because the tolerant Arabs were replaced by the Turks, then warriors (who had nothing in common with the Arabs, neither in origin nor in language). The Byzantine Empire also feared the advance of the Turks and asked the Pope in the West to send an armed expedition.

In 1095, Pope Urban II asked the pilgrims to leave en masse. The first crusade was simply an armed pilgrimage; those who left did not call themselves 'crusaders', but simply 'pilgrims'. Only later did they sew a red cloth cross on their right shoulder and chest and another on their shield, to visibly show their religious commitment. The pope granted these special pilgrims a plenary indulgence (cancelling all sins and punishments in purgatory), which until then had only been enjoyed by martyrs. In fact, the pope considered that going to the Holy Land was like martyrdom, because one's life was at risk to defend religion.

In the West, there were many knights without land who lived, like brigands, from assaults and depredations. Demographic growth, in addition to its positive results, had brought great social unrest: suddenly many more men than in the past were looking for the means to live a better life. On the other hand, merchants returning from their travels described the East as paradise, full of riches and treasures. At the end of the 11th century, the armed pilgrimage to the Holy Land aimed at driving out the infidels (the Muslims) and bringing these places back under Christian rule, but the fighters also expected extraordinary plunder and conquest.

As soon as they left, the armed pilgrims carried out horrible massacres of Jews - assimilated to Muslims as opponents of the Christian faith - in Germany, in Cologne, and in the area of the Rhine River. For centuries the Jews had lived peacefully among the Christians, but with the crusades anti-Semitism was born and the condition of the Jews in Europe rapidly worsened, with the multiplication of restrictions and discrimination against them. Under the papacy of Innocent III (1198-1216), Jews would be forced to wear a yellow wheel of cloth sewn onto their clothing.

The First Crusade did not end with the capture of Jerusalem alone, but with the conquest of a large territory, mostly coastal, corresponding to the present territories of Israel, Palestine and Lebanon, much of Syria and Jordan and also part of present-day Turkey. This area, initially imposing in size, was organised as a Christian kingdom. The invaders, however, surrounded, always remained in arms and could not maintain their conquests for long. They built huge fortresses and castles and oppressed the local population. More and more fighters had to come from the West to replace the dead, and crusades followed one after another.

Between the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and the loss of the last Christian outpost in the Holy Land in 1291, almost two centuries later, there were officially eight crusades, but in reality the mobilisation was continuous. At any time, those who wished to do so could leave for the Holy Land, in a pilgrimage that was both an expiation of sins and a concrete, physical contribution to the defence of the Christian faith against its enemies.

Organised expeditions were so frequent that it seemed normal for the faithful, on their deathbed, to set aside a certain sum in their wills to finance a fighter, to be used the next time any Christian ruler organised a departure. Keeping the usual numbering of the Crusades, in the fourth (1202-04) the Crusaders, in order to pay for the ships provided by the Venetians, were obliged by them to conquer Zadar, a city with a port on the Dalmatian coast. Zadar was Christian, but Venice had other aims in mind. Having won Zadar, Venice ensured that the crusaders, lured by the mirage of richer booty, moved against the Byzantine Empire: Christians against Christians again. Constantinople was conquered after a two-month siege on 18 July 1204. It was another massacre; churches and monasteries were destroyed, treasures and sacred furnishings plundered. On those ruins the Latin Empire of the East was created, Venice obtained favourable conditions for its merchants and no one thought any more of Jerusalem and the tomb of Christ.

Even the last two crusades led by the French king Louis IX, known as the Saint, took place far from Jerusalem, in Egypt and Tunisia. The possession of trading posts had become the main reason for the crusades. In the penultimate crusade (1248-49), Louis IX was defeated; taken prisoner, he paid a huge ransom to be freed. Old and ill, Louis IX also wanted to lead the last crusade in 1270. The fleet landed at Tunis, believed to be very close to the Egyptian ports of Alexandria and Damietta: in reality Tunis was thousands of kilometres away.

The reason for such a serious error was due to the maps available to Louis IX. Immediately after landing, the king died of typhus. During the Third Crusade in 1190, the former Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa had drowned in a river in present-day Turkey.

New and special orders of monk-knights also fought alongside the crusaders. The most famous of these were the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre or Templars, the Teutonic Knights and the Knights of St. John in Jerusalem who, having moved first to Rhodes and then to Malta, fought against Muslim ships for many centuries.

On the whole, Christianity and Islam remained two alien and hostile worlds, dominated by fanaticism and prejudice. The extraordinary coexistence that had taken place where the two civilisations had lived together for the longest time, for example in Sicily or Spain, was never repeated. The crusades brought the destruction of splendid cities and endless deaths on both sides.

But in the course of history, violence was not only directed against Muslims but also against Christians themselves, as had already happened during the Fourth Crusade.

The most important example of this is the religious wars that broke out in Germany, France, the Netherlands and the countries of north-eastern Europe following the spread of the Protestant Reformation. France, in particular, was torn apart by religious struggles for years and the most sensational episode was the St Bartholomew's Night Massacre (23-24 August 1572), when three thousand Huguenots (French Calvinists) were killed in Paris. The wars ended with the accession of Henry IV to the throne and the granting of the Edict of Nantes, which granted partial freedom of worship to the Huguenots. During the 17th century the most enduring conflict was the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), which involved Protestant and Catholic countries and was provoked by the Habsburgs' attempt to establish a Catholic state in the heart of Europe. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) marked the end of the period of religious wars in Germany. It established the existence of three religious denominations, Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist, and recognised the right of subjects to profess a religion other than that of their princes.

Anti-Semitism
Anti-Semitism has been and still is one of the most significant expressions of racism in human history. It is based on intolerance, discrimination and hostility towards Jews. Anti-Semitism has a very long history. It was already widespread at the time of the Roman Empire and gained further strength with the spread of Christianity, which helped to build a negative image of the Jews by accusing them of deicide, i.e. of having contributed to the death of Jesus Christ. With the diaspora, which took place between the 1st and 2nd centuries, anti-Semitism took on a new concreteness: driven from their lands, in fact, the Jews dispersed throughout the known world, giving rise to small communities with a strong religious, ritual and social cohesion, which for centuries created a sense of profound cultural and religious estrangement among the host peoples. Substantially integrated into the Arab world, they were the object of discrimination and open persecution in medieval and modern Christian Europe, both by the political and religious elites and by the popular classes. Among the latter, various legends took root about the demonic origin of the Jews and their blasphemous practices against Catholicism. This led, on the one hand, to acts of marginalisation and discrimination, even to the expulsion of the Jews from individual states, and, on the other hand, to massacres fuelled by superstitious beliefs. Forced by multiple prohibitions to exercise professions deemed unseemly or openly condemned by the Church, such as usury loans (which require the borrower to pay back a much higher amount), Jews were often forced to reside in ghettos, closed quarters rigidly separated from the rest of the city.

The French Revolution marked a halt in the history of discrimination against Jews, which was explicitly condemned by the Constitution of 1791. During the nineteenth century, anti-Semitism resurfaced with renewed vigour, coupled with racist theories built on pseudo-scientific foundations. Beyond theories, anti-Semitism soon became a major problem. First in France at the end of the 19th century, with the so-called *Affaire Dreyfus*, named after a French officer of Jewish origin, Alfred Dreyfus, unjustly

accused of espionage and collusion with Germany. Then, and above all, in the middle of the 20th century, in a very large part of Central and Eastern Europe.

Anti-Semitism, which became the dominant ideology in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, resulted in a systematic persecution of the Jews carried out to its extreme consequences (the Final Solution) in Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War, with the support of many collaborationist regimes. This was the *Shoah*, a word in the Hebrew language for the genocide of the Jews in the Nazi extermination camps.

Divergences, schisms, splits.

In the history of religions, contrasts have often occurred that have led a group to break away from the community of believers. Unlike heresy, which arises from differences in doctrine, schism (from the Greek for "separation") originates from a refusal to obey official religious authority and disagreements over issues related to the organization of the community.

The faithful of the monotheistic religions (Jews, Christians, Muslims) recognize the authority of certain sacred texts and of the tradition, that is, of a set of doctrines and established rules, whose interpretation sometimes provokes lively discussions. When the community and the authority that guides it establish that a certain norm must be respected by all, the faithful are obliged to obey: the principle that regulates community life is in fact that of communion, which presupposes agreement on matters considered essential and the acceptance of decisions made by the organs of the community, which are considered legitimate interpreters of the divine will.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul of Tarsus reiterates the need to overcome the divisions among the various Christian groups that refer to different spiritual leaders. The first council, held in Jerusalem in the presence of the apostles, after a discussion established some common norms with these words: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements" (Acts of the Apostles 15: 28). Subsequent councils, beginning with that of Nicaea (325), foresaw excommunication, that is, exclusion from communion, for those who did not accept the decisions made.

Whoever does not accept the rules established by the community and decides to unite with other dissenters in opposition to the official authority therefore provokes a heresy or a schism. In the first case it is a rejection of certain doctrines, in the name of a different interpretation of the sacred texts; in the second case, however, the contrast arises mainly for practical and organizational reasons, even if sometimes doctrinal differences are added.

In the Jewish world, the first attempt at schism was that of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against Moses and were immediately punished by God.

After the death of King Solomon, the members of some tribes of Israel no longer went to the temple in Jerusalem to perform the sacrifices required by the law of Moses, but built other buildings of worship in their territories, causing a schism that lasted for centuries. At the time of Jesus, the Samaritans, who had built a temple on Mount Gerizim, were considered schismatics, and the Pharisees, faithful to official Judaism,

avoided any relationship with them. The Essenes, who lived secluded in a desert area, formed a sect separate from official Judaism and rejected the corrupt clergy of Jerusalem.

Muslims also split, a few years after Muhammad's death, into two opposing communities: the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Shiism is the general denomination (derived from the Arabic *shi'a* "party, faction", implying 'Ali and his descendants) of the minority component of Islam, whose origin dates back to the civil war (*fitna*) that opposed 'Ali ibn Abi Talib to Mu'awiya, the future Umayyad caliph, between 657 and 661. Shi'ism is considered a heresy of traditional Islam, but this is a misinterpretation since its theological foundations are the same as those of Sunnism: Qur'anic revelation and Muhammad's prophecy. According to Shiites, however, the Qur'an is created, while Sunnis see in such a statement a questioning of deep Islamic monotheism and argue instead that the sacred text is uncreated, that is, it is coeternal with God and dictated literally by God to the Prophet. Moreover, for the Shiites, next to Muhammad there is - with a particular role - 'Ali, the friend of Allah, that is the *Imam*, the one who knows the secret essence of Islam (knowledge that from 'Ali passes to his descendants). Only the Imam has the authority to interpret the Koran and the sunna (the "tradition"). It is precisely on the value attributed to the figure of the Imam that Shiism is divided into moderate, medium and extreme: for the first, the Imam is almost a god, for the second he is infallible, for the third he is rightly guided. Medium Shiism, also known as Imamite and Twelver, believes that the last Imam (the twelfth) disappeared in the ninth century: on Earth he is now in *ghayba* "concealment", but he will return to be visible at the end of the world making justice triumph. Imamite Shiism has the largest number of followers in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, India and Syria. The members of extreme Shiism are the Ismailites, who unlike the Imamites interrupted the succession to the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq (765). Within Ismailism there were many branches, some of which succeeded in gaining power (the Fatimids ruled in Egypt from the tenth to the twelfth century); others departed considerably from Islam (such as the Assassins, from the Arabic *hashishi* "one who uses hashish"). The present Ismailists totally deviate from the theories of their predecessors, theorizing a line of succession that goes up to the 49th Imam (the Agha Khan), a sort of incarnation of God on Earth. The number of Ismailites (to which are added the Druze, a real community in its own right, and the Nusairi) is small; they are present in India, Syria and Lebanon. Moderate Shiism corresponds to the Zaydites, who do not differ much from the Sunnis and are mostly concentrated in Yemen, where their confession is the official religion.

Sunnism, on the other hand, refers to the majority current of Islam, which defines orthodoxy in opposition to dissidents (especially Shiites) and in the name of respect for the custom approved by all and the prophetic model. While the minority Islam was formed dramatically in the first decades after the death of Muhammad, from the split that led to the birth of the "party of 'Ali", the Sunna was defined more slowly, during a process that led, at the end of the tenth century, to the selection of acceptable traditions and so-called law schools that regulated the interpretation of the sacred

law (*shari'a*). The original characteristic of Sunnism was the recognition of the full legitimacy of the first four elective caliphs; later dogmatic differences from other sects arose, including the belief in the eternity of the Qur'an and in predestination, according to which God has foreseen every single act and event in the life of believers. Sunnism comprises about 85-90% of the Muslim community worldwide.

In the Christian world, the first schismatic movements (that of Novatian and that of the Donatists) arose when, in the face of persecution, there was discussion about the attitude to take towards those responsible for serious crimes (such as murder or adultery) and those Christians who, out of weakness, had denied their faith in order to avoid death (and who later repented). The official Church decided to welcome these Christians back into the community, while a group of intransigent Christians rejected this decision, believing that they could not live in communion with those who had been guilty of such a serious sin (apostasy, i.e. the act of denying the faith). In the fifth century, other dissident communities (Nestorians and Monophysites, including the Coptic Church of Egypt and Ethiopia) arose after the rejection of the decisions of the ecumenical councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

However, the most famous schism is certainly the one that determined the separation of the Eastern Churches, called Orthodox, from the Roman Church, which in the course of the Middle Ages assumed more and more a leading role towards the other Christian communities. Already in the ninth century, at the time of the Patriarch of Constantinople Photius, there was a temporary separation between the two Churches; in 1054 the Patriarch Michael Cerularius and the representative of the Pope, Cardinal Humbert, excommunicated one another, and during the liturgical celebrations of the two Churches the names of the leaders of the other Church were no longer remembered. It was however in the following decades, when the Crusades created a climate of serious hostility, that this separation became total and definitive, despite various attempts to overcome it.

At the time of Tsar Peter the Great, a group of believers broke away from the Russian Orthodox Church because of liturgical and organizational differences, creating the community of Old Believers.

Between the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, mainly for political reasons, two or even three popes were elected at the same time, each of whom claimed to be the legitimate successor of Peter, with the support of some states and groups of faithful who obeyed him. This was the so-called Western Schism, which was overcome only after a few decades: the subsequent Catholic tradition defined the pontiffs considered not legitimate, as antipopes.

In modern times, the Protestant Reformation was born in Germany through the Augustinian monk Martin Luther and was a vast movement of renewal of faith and piety in the Western Christian Church. It then spread throughout Europe thanks to the work of other reformers, such as the Swiss Zwingli and the French Calvin. The Reformation began with the business of indulgences. Unscrupulous preachers, commissioned by ecclesiastical authority, led people to believe that they could obtain divine forgiveness and free the souls of their loved ones from the pains of purgatory

by buying an indulgence. It was to protest against this unworthy trade - and to expound his doctrines on sin and grace - that Luther published his 95 theses against indulgences, posting them in 1517 on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, attached to the University where he taught the Holy Scriptures. Luther's ideas quickly spread to all countries of Europe and in all walks of life, including the working class, arousing support and dissent: the debate was passionate as never before. After a phase of religious wars, in 1555, the Peace of Augsburg was signed, which sanctioned the division between Catholics and Protestants on the basis of the principle *cuius regio, eius religio*, which required subjects to follow the religion of their prince, whether Catholic or Lutheran.

About half of the Christians in Western Europe accepted the Reformation, giving rise to several national churches, called Protestant or Evangelical. As for the Catholics, who made up the other half, they responded by convening the Council of Trent (1545-63), which was both a reaction to the Protestant Reformation (and in this sense we speak of Counter-Reformation) and an attempt to renew the Catholic Church from within (and from this point of view we speak of Catholic Reformation).

The Reformation was, at the same time, unitary in its faith content and plural in its organizational forms. The initiative taken by Luther in Germany and the parallel initiative of Ulrich Zwingli (fifteenth-sixteenth century) in German-speaking Switzerland, then continued by John Calvin (sixteenth century) in Geneva, gave rise, directly or indirectly, to four different types of Reformation.

The first is the Lutheran, established mainly in Germany, in Alsace and in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. The second is the Zwinglian-Calvinian Reformation (known as the Reformed Reformation), which took hold in several Swiss cantons and in Scotland and spread widely in Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, France, the Netherlands and England itself. In England, however, a third type of reform prevailed, the Anglican reform, which preserved the episcopate (on the model of the Catholic Church) and traditional forms of worship and devotion, while making Reformed theology its own. The fourth type of reform is the Anabaptist reform (known as the radical reform), which challenged "Christian society" as a pure fiction and rejected its most characteristic sign: infant baptism. Baptism, the Anabaptists argued, cannot be imposed; it must be a free choice of the believer.

The spread of Reformation thought in Italy was remarkable, in almost all regions, but the nascent Italian Protestant community in the sixteenth century was annihilated by repression (imprisonment or exile). Only in some valleys of Piedmont did the Waldensians, who in 1532 had adhered to Calvin's Reformation, survive.

In the nineteenth century, the decisions of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), which defined the dogma of papal infallibility, were rejected by a group of German Catholics, who founded the Church of the Old Catholics; while in our times a new schism has been provoked by Monsignor Lefebvre and other traditionalist groups who did not accept the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and in particular the liturgical reform promoted by it.

In the Protestant world schisms have recently been provoked by those who did not agree with the decision to admit women to the priesthood. Today, however, the main

Churches prefer to consider the exponents of the other communities as 'separated brothers' rather than as schismatics; in particular, the Catholic Church considers the Orthodox Church as a 'sister Church', with respect to which what unites is more important than what divides, in the name of a vision inspired by ecumenism.

Glossary

Caliph: (Arabic *khalīfa*, "successor") Supreme monarch of the universal Islamic community (*ummat al-islāmiyya*). According to orthodox Islamic doctrine, he must be an adult Muslim, Sunni, of free status and descendant of the Quraish, the tribe of Muhammad.

Cult: Cult can be defined as the set of acts through which a community worships one or more deities or other supernatural forces (spirits, ancestors, saints), in order to secure their benevolence and thus increase the welfare of the community itself. The term cult derives from the Latin verb *còlere*, which means "to cultivate" but also "to honor", "to venerate", "to treat with respect". Worship can be internal or individual, such as a prayer or meditation recited in silence, but more often it consists of external and public actions and gestures, called acts of worship. In this second meaning, the cult indicates the set of rites and practices typical of a religion, based on a more or less ancient tradition. Some aspects of worship very common both in monotheistic religions and in polytheistic religions are collective prayers, reading, recitation and commentary of sacred texts (for example, the Torah of the Jews, the Bible of Christians, the Koran of Islam), offerings and sacrifices, pilgrimages and processions. Dance and music are also often important aspects of worship: these are also actions (one might say performances) through which people seek to establish and maintain a good relationship with sacred beings.

Diaspora: Diaspora refers to the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 A.D.) the Jews were dispersed throughout the world. For several centuries they were subject to discrimination: they were often persecuted and isolated in ghettos, i.e. neighborhoods from which they were not supposed to leave. At the beginning of the twentieth century some Jewish groups founded Zionism, a movement that intended to gather again in a homeland the Jews who wanted it, and that therefore favored the emigration from Europe to Palestine. After the massacres of the Nazis (the so-called Shoah, or the Holocaust) was founded the State of Israel, which intends to realize the millennial dream of a return of the Jews in the land of their ancestors.

Ecumenism: The term indicates the commitment to union among the different Christian Churches, on the basis of a common profession of faith. Even in past centuries the Churches sought unity, but they conceived of it as a return to the true Church by those who had held erroneous theses. Today each Christian community seeks to dialogue with the others, without claiming to be a 'perfect society'.

Heresy: The term heresy derives from the Greek and means "choice". Over time it came to indicate certain groups or sects that were characterized by particular philosophical or religious choices. In the Letters of St. Paul the term already took on a

negative meaning, referring to an internal division within the community. Heresy is contrasted with orthodoxy (from the Greek "right opinion"), in the name of which heresies were fought, sometimes even resorting to violence.

Indulgence: The doctrine of indulgence is an aspect of the faith affirmed by the Catholic Church, which refers to the possibility of erasing a very specific part of the consequences of a sin (called temporal punishment), from the sinner who has confessed his error with sincere repentance and has been forgiven through the sacrament of confession.

Jerusalem: Jerusalem is not only a city, it is not only the current capital of the State of Israel. It is a symbol, but it has been also and above all a meeting place between different civilizations, different ways of thinking. It has a very long history that sinks into the most ancient past of humanity. It is the holy city par excellence, where the three religions of the biblical stock find their origins and their truths. This is another reason why so much has been fought in Jerusalem, in the name of an idea of faith that excludes the others. With its unique light, Jerusalem teaches that different religions can live side by side.

Mythology: The myths of a people, that is, the traditional fantastic narratives of deeds performed by divine figures or ancestors (mythical beings), spread, at least originally, orally.

Monotheism: Ancient peoples worshipped many divinities conceived, each with particular characteristics, in the likeness of man. Alongside these cults, a more spiritual conception of divinity developed, identified with a single God, omnipotent and omniscient. The great monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Polytheism: The term polytheism literally means "many gods" and is usually used to indicate a religion based on the worship of many gods or higher beings.

Rite: An important aspect of the social life of all peoples. Rituals are in fact widespread in human societies and represent the set of rules that governs the conduct of a sacred action, the ceremonies of a religious cult. Their periodic performance can strengthen the solidarity among the members of a group and, at the same time, allow the expression of conflicts and emotions. Rituals are not only typical of religions or of "exotic" and distant societies: we find rituals in the world of work, politics and economics.

Talmud: A Hebrew word that literally means "study"; but it indicates, in substance, a great book: the collection of comments and opinions on the ethical, juridical and ritual norms of the Jewish people (Judaism). This corpus of texts has an - so to speak - open nature. In fact, the Talmud is to be imagined as the very long minutes, or transcript, of discussions between masters. It is composed of two parts: the first is the Mishnah (which means "repetition"), an ancient code of Jewish laws written around the 2nd-5th century A.D., to which the Ghemarah (i.e., more or less, "completion") was later added, by way of commentary and expansion. The combination of these two texts makes up the Talmud, which was put in writing in a period between the sixth and seventh centuries.

Yahweh: Hebrew name for God. The form of the name, which is not pronounced by the Hebrews, is known from Greek adaptations. The meaning remains obscure to this

day; the biblical explanation (Exodus 3:14: "I am he who is") should be considered as a reflection of a possible etymology, related to exist or to make exist.

Digital resources

Title: Internet Sacred Text Archive
Subject: Archive of online books about religions
Description: Archive of online books about religion, mythology, folklore and the esoteric on the Internet. The site is dedicated to religious tolerance and scholarship and has the largest readership of any similar site on the web.
Temporal Coverage: From the origins to contemporary age
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm
Type: website
Format: text
Source: Public
Language: English

Title: Art in Christian Tradition
Subject: Database of images of Christian art
Description: The Art in the Christian Tradition (ACT) database is a regularly updated visual image internet resource. The visual images in the ACT database represent the continuum of the practice of Christianity from the 1st century A.D. to the present. Many of the images are interpretations of Christian scripture: the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Apocrypha. Sarcophagi, mosaics, frescoes, manuscripts, sculpture, architecture, and paintings are searchable by keyword, scripture reference, iconographic content, personal name, time period, and geographic location.
Temporal Coverage: From 1st century AD to the present
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-search.pl
Type: images
Format: text
Source: Vanderbilt University
Language: English

Title: The Noble Quran
Subject: Full text of the Quran
Description: The website aims to make it easy for anyone to read, study, and learn the Quran.
Temporal Coverage: founded in 1995.
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://beta.quran.com
Type: document
Format: text

Source: Quran.com
Language: English, French, Indonesian, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Albanese, Turkish, Arabic

Title: Hebrew Bible Resources
Subject: A guide to help those writing papers or researching in the area of Hebrew Bible
Description: The site collects: Biblical texts in original Languages, Biblical texts in Translation, Post-biblical and early Jewish texts, the Bible in later Authors and other relevant collections of online texts
Temporal Coverage: History of Judaism
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=297564&p=1986016
Type: documents
Format: text
Source: Library of the University of Chicago
Language: English

Title: Papal documents
Subject: Letters, speeches and other writings from Pope Leo XIII (1878) through Pope Francis (current).
Description: Letters, speeches and other writings from Pope Leo XIII (1878) through Pope Francis (current).
Temporal Coverage: From 1878 to the present
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://www.vatican.va/offices/papal_docs_list.html
Type: documents
Format: text
Source: Vatican
Language: English/Italian

Title: Monastic Matrix
Subject: site dedicated to the study of women's religious communities
Description: site dedicated to the study of women's religious communities from 400 to 1600 CE. Includes a separate section of primary sources, which can be browsed by title/author/community/region/century. Search function also available.
Temporal Coverage: From 400 to 1600 CE
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/monasticmatrix/home
Type: documents
Format: text, letters, images, glossary
Source: Matrix is an ongoing collaborative effort by an international group of scholars of medieval history, religion, history of art, archaeology, religion, and other

disciplines, as well as librarians and experts in computer technology directed by the University of Saint Andrews.
Language: English

Title: Guide to the Early Christian Documents
Subject: Hypertext document that contains pointers to Internet-accessible files relating to the early church.
Description: site dedicated to the files relating to the early church, including canonical documents, creeds, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and other historical texts relevant to church history.
Temporal Coverage: From 1st to 9th century
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/monasticmatrix/home
Type: documents
Format: text, letters
Source: Christian.net
Language: English

Title: The center for Jewish art
Subject: The website of the Center for Jewish art (CJA), a research institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, devoted to the documentation and research of Jewish visual culture.
Description: it documented and researched objects of Jewish art in ca. 800 museums, libraries, private collections, and synagogues in 41 countries. Today, the Center's archives and collections constitute the largest and most comprehensive body of information on Jewish art in existence.
Temporal Coverage: From the origin to the present
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: http://cja.huji.ac.il
Type: document
Format: images
Source: The Center for Jewish art – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Language: English

Title: Discover Islamic art
Subject: The website allows visitors to discover Islamic art through images related to objects and monuments.
Description: The Permanent Collection offers four ways to sort the objects and monuments in the Discover Islamic Art Database. Results include two types of material: The material – objects and monuments – contributed by the Partners from the 14 countries who, between 2004 and 2007, set up the Discover Islamic Art Virtual Museum with the support of the European Union's Euromed Heritage programme. Descriptions are available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish as well as in the language of the country. Objects contributed by Partners through the

project Explore Islamic Art Collections, launched in 2009 with the aim of expanding the Virtual Museum's Database. In this case, Database entries are shorter and available in English and, for some countries, also in the country's language.

Temporal Coverage: From 4th century to the 2000s
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/pc_entrance.php
Type: document
Format: images
Source: Museum with no Frontiers
Language: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and the language of the country in which the monument/object is located.

Title: Digital Islamic humanities project
Subject: A research initiative of the Middle East Studies program at Brown University.
Description: The site contains a working bibliography, useful resources, a frequently updated blog, and information about recent topics related to the Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies.
Temporal Coverage: From the origin of Islam to the present
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: https://islamicdh.org/resources/
Type: document, repository
Format: text, hyperlinks
Source: Brown University
Language: English

Title: EuroPreArt
Subject: It aims to establish a lasting database of European prehistoric art documentation, to launch the base for a European institutional network devoted to this domain, and to contribute to the awareness of the diversity and richness of European Prehistoric Art, as one of the oldest artistic expressions of Humankind.
Description: The database contains 806 records of European engraved or painted rocks, 2760 pictures, tracings or maps, 2865 reference titles in 7 countries involved.
Temporal Coverage: from paleolithic to the Iron Age
Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education
Link: http://www.europreart.net/preart.htm
Type: document, repository
Format: text, hyperlinks, images
Source: EuroPreArt, a web-based archaeological project funded by the European Union
Language: English

Title: CESNUR: The Center for Studies on New Religions

Subject: A center established in 1988 by a group of religious scholars from leading universities in Europe and the Americas to offer a professional association to scholars specialized in religious minorities, new religious movements, contemporary esoteric, spiritual and gnostic schools, and the new religious consciousness in general.

Description: A network of independent but related organizations of scholars in various countries, devoted to promoting scholarly research in the field of new religious consciousness, to spreading reliable and responsible information, and to exposing the very real problems associated with some movements, while at the same time defending everywhere the principles of religious liberty

Temporal Coverage: from paleolithic to the Iron Age

Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education

Link: https://www.cesnur.org

Type: document, repository

Format: text, hyperlinks, images

Source: CESNUR

Language: Italian/English

Title: The five major world religions

Subject: Video that illustrates the interrelated histories and cultures of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

Description: It is perfectly human to face some questions like "Where did we come from?" and "How can we live a meaningful life?". These existential questions are at the heart of the five most widespread religions in the world, and it is not the only thing that connects these faiths.

John Bellaimey illustrates the interrelated histories and cultures of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

Temporal Coverage: From the ancient cults to the present

Audience: Secondary Education, Higher Education

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6dCxo7t_aE

Type: Video

Format: Video

Source: TED-Ed

Language: English with subtitles

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