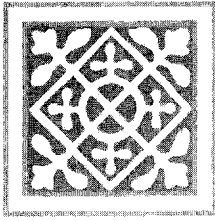


# VOICES OF CHRISTIANITY

A GLOBAL INTRODUCTION

REBECCA MOORE





# Voices of Christianity

## A GLOBAL INTRODUCTION

REBECCA MOORE

*San Diego State University*



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## Higher Education

### VOICES OF CHRISTIANITY: A GLOBAL INTRODUCTION

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# Invitation

Dear Reader,

I decided to write this introduction as a letter because it really serves as an invitation: an invitation to read. While an introduction sets the stage and helps create a sense of expectation within the reader, it is also more formal, and sometimes more alienating, than a letter. A letter is more intimate, more informal, and, I hope, more inviting. And that is exactly what I would like to do in this letter: invite you to learn about Christianity by reading an assortment of Christian texts.

This anthology has two purposes. First and foremost, it tells the story of Christian history through primary documents. Primary sources are the original words and writings of historical figures. They may be public records, letters, diaries, journals, or other kinds of writings. In the case of Christianity and the readings in this book, these primary documents may be sermons, commentaries, arguments, poems, liturgies, hymns, analyses, or other types of writing—like letters, for instance. Thus, this book provides an overview of 2000 years of Christian history from a variety of perspectives and in many different ways. By the time we get to “the end,” we will have a good sense of how Christianity developed, what the key beliefs and practices of Christians are, and why there is so much diversity in the world’s single largest religion.

The second purpose of this book is to provide the tools needed to read primary sources. I hear many students complain that they do not understand what they read. Sometimes teachers fail to give students sufficient guidance to help them through difficult texts. I am convinced, however, that with enough preparation, students can read and comprehend a wide variety of primary source materials. This book is designed to demystify the reading process and to help us approach *any* reading assignment, not just the ones in this anthology.

Reading involves not just mastering the words but somehow making sense of the words and then “getting” the meaning of the words all put together. This “getting it” is not something innate or inborn; it is something that is learned. Some are fortunate to learn it early, and some never learn it. Good readers have mastered a number of techniques—consciously or unconsciously—that help them persevere when the going gets rough. This book supplies a method for reading, analyzing, and comprehending a number of different styles of writing. While we learn about Christianity, we will also be learning how to approach texts that are radically different from what is written today.

For example, I will discuss genres, a fine French word meaning “kind,” or sort or type. A genre is simply a category. Music genres include jazz, rock, heavy metal,

rap, the blues, and country. Fiction genres encompass science fiction, for example, and mysteries, romances, Westerns, children's literature, and much more. Each genre has its own rules: romance novels follow a certain formula that is different from the formula for Westerns. Similarly, the rules for writing sermons are different from those governing letters, or poems, or Bible commentaries. If we know what the genre is, we know what to expect. This knowledge helps with comprehension because we are already bringing some understanding to the text we are reading.

It also helps to know who wrote something, and why, and when. Our social and cultural contexts definitely affect how we understand things. Someone who is in a bitter child custody dispute, for example, will see the nature of marriage differently than will someone who is happily married. The writers represented in this book are no different. They are engaged in conversations with other Christians and with society at large. If we know the historical or theological setting, we have a better chance of following the conversation. This book therefore discusses the contexts of the readings to help create a preunderstanding of what each writer feels is at stake.

And yes, a great deal was at stake for the writers of the following texts. They were writing about important issues—in some instances, with life-and-death consequences, or even with what they perceived to be eternal-life-and-eternal death consequences. Christians have rarely played supporting roles on the stage of world history. Rather, they have been deeply engaged in debates, arguments, and apologetics, that is, persuasion. A great deal was at stake for these writers, and if we know this, we can begin to appreciate what they are trying to say.

Reading requires imagination. Although it may seem that the words on the page are merely black-and-white symbols, this is far from the case. The words on the page are windows onto the heart and mind and soul of the writer. When we remember that flesh and blood wrote these squiggly lines—and that the writers believed they had a compelling reason to do so—we begin to understand reading for what it really is: a dialogue between writer and reader.

When I began this letter, I thought perhaps I should start with “Dear Readers”—the plural. Although reading seems to be a solitary pursuit, it is far from it. In the olden days, when books and literacy were rare, books were read aloud. The word *lecture* comes from the Latin root *legere*, which means “to read.” Texts were read out loud, and usually read to more than one person. The letters of Paul, for example, were written to churches in the Mediterranean and were intended to be read to the entire group. “I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them,” Paul concluded his first letter to the Thessalonians (5:27). In the New Testament letter to the Colossians, similar evidence of this kind of reading appears: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (4:16). In the convents and monasteries of the Middle Ages, the nuns and monks ate their meals while listening to someone reading from scripture or from theological works. Throughout the day, they would stop their tasks, go to chapel, and read or recite the psalms. Today we tend to understand what we have read much better when we have a



chance to discuss the reading with others: “Is this what he really means?” “I thought she was saying something else.” In many respects, then, reading is a collective process, a method of dialogue and engagement that is never solitary.

At the same time, there is a privacy to reading that is undeniable. The dialogue that occurs between writer and reader takes place, initially at least, in one’s own mind. There is an “I–Thou” relationship, in the words of Martin Buber, a “you ‘n’ me” connection that excludes the rest of the world. The writer is first speaking to *me*, and *I* am the one to process those words through my own experiences, abilities, and insights. Once *I* digest the words, *I* make them my own: *I* comprehend, that is, *I* grasp, what is being said; *I* get it. And then *I* check it out with others to see if *I* got it right or if my own opinions distorted what *I* thought *I* saw.

Of course, with religious texts, there is yet another dimension: the realm of the transcendent and the divine; the province of God. This adds a challenge to readers because we must continuously make judgments about whether the writer is expressing her own opinion or is channeling in some way for the divine. This is an especially difficult question when reading scripture. Yet whether we believe that the text presents merely human reflections or divinely inspired revelations, we can still ask the same questions: What is being said? How is it being said? What argument is being made? What evidence is given in support of the argument? Who is the opposition, and what is their argument? In other words, we can read religious texts with the same critical mind that we bring to other texts. While the subject matter differs, our method can usually, though not always, remain the same. We ask questions of the text just as we would ask questions of the person sitting next to us, because it was a person—whether divine or human is beyond our knowledge—who wrote the text.

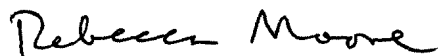
There is a further complication in a compilation such as this, which contains selections rather than entire works. We are always entering in the middle of the conversation. We’re not sure what was said before we came in, and we don’t know how the conversation will continue once we leave. The best approach to reading these selections resembles one we might take when we go into a room and the party has already started. Rather than barging in, we usually get the lay of the land: check out what’s going on, who’s doing the talking, and where the food is; and when we join a group, we usually listen to see what the subject matter is before we jump in with our own comments.

Listening to the author is one way to manage difficult texts. Sometimes, however, our thoughts interfere with our ability to understand. We might be preoccupied with how exhausted we are, or how bored we are, or how hungry we are. Or our thoughts might be a bit more critical: Who does this guy think he is? He’s wrong wrong wrong! Who ever heard of something so [pick one: weird, strange, bizarre, ridiculous, blasphemous]?!! These latter thoughts are certainly preferable to the former because they indicate an engagement with the text. But if we can manage the self-discipline (having gotten enough food and sleep before reading), it is even better to try to listen to the author to understand what is being said.

And so this invitation to you, my singular reader. The thesaurus provides a number of synonyms for the word *invite*: tempt, encourage, incite, attract, provoke, induce. These are all colorful verbs that describe exactly what I hope to do in this book. I want to tempt you to pick up this book, open it up, and read. I also hope to encourage you to persevere despite occasional difficulties. I plan to do more than merely encourage you or be a cheerleader on the sidelines. By presenting historical background, contextual information, genre discussions, and reflection questions, I would like to induce you to approach these texts knowing that you are well prepared to understand and appreciate what you are reading. The writers in this book can be provocative; they may incite admiration or ire. All of them write from a profound commitment to Christianity, however. Even when we may disagree with what they are saying, we can respect the depth of their belief and attempt to understand why they believe what they do.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was sitting in a garden, agonizing over the course of his life, when he heard children playing a game. They were chanting “*tolle lege; tolle lege*,” which means “take up and read.” Augustine picked up a Bible and read a verse, and it changed his life. I invite you to pick up this book and read it to catch a few glimpses of the incredibly rich treasury of texts that make up the Christian tradition.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Moore

P.S. to Teachers:

The difficulty inherent in developing a collection of readings is the selection process: Which writers should be included? This anthology takes a different approach.

The purpose of this book is to introduce readers to the vast history and diversity of Christianity, particularly its theology, rather than provide samplings of various key figures. Most compilations attempt to provide a buffet menu of readings, with little tastes of everything. This collection differs greatly from the buffet model. If we stick with the food analogy, perhaps we can consider each chapter a full-course dinner comprising specific types of cuisine. When we are finished with each meal, we will have a pretty good idea of what we just ate and digested.

I did not invent this approach to “reading Christianity.” I learned the value of struggling through complete primary sources at Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I have had the good fortune to be raised a Protestant (in the home of a United Methodist minister and his wife), to attend a Catholic graduate school (and Jesuit at that!), and to work for two years with a mentor who is an Orthodox monk. My small-“c” catholic background created a lasting appreciation for the variety of

beliefs and practices that exists within Christianity. That richness can only be grasped by engaging with texts and their writers at some length.

This explains why some writers are “missing” and others are included in their place. My goal is not to cover the Top Fifty Writers of Christianity. Rather, my goal is to help readers understand and appreciate the concerns and passions of various Christians throughout history. Those concerns led to the development of doctrines that are taught today, as well as some that were abandoned by orthodoxy. This book is structured to engage readers in the various conversations that Christians have had over key issues through the centuries, and to give them the tools necessary to do so successfully. If readers follow the conversation as it develops from chapter to chapter, a clear outline of Christian thought emerges.

Since all of us who teach introductory courses in Christianity have certain imperatives about what must be covered, however, free access to a comprehensive Web site accompanies this text: [www.mhhe.com/voices1e](http://www.mhhe.com/voices1e). The site provides links to primary and secondary sources, to bibliographies, and to articles and pictures, in order to broaden and enrich the readings included in the anthology itself. Used with supplementary Internet items as appropriate, this text is designed to be textbook and anthology in a single volume.

I invite your feedback, suggestions, and comments so that the conversation begun in these pages may continue.

## Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go to Jon-David Hague at McGraw-Hill for proposing this project in the first place, for being patient with me throughout the delays, and for believing in what we were doing. Indeed, all of the staff at McGraw-Hill have been extremely helpful, especially Allison Rona and Mel Valentín. I appreciate their care and attention to the project. I also thank copyeditor extraordinaire Tom Briggs for his excellent eye, and ear, for editing.

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The idea of doing a reader that provides complete texts and chapters, rather than “sound bites” of selections, came from the faculty in theology at Marquette University. While there are many people I would like to thank, I will mention only two



by name: Dr. Kenneth G. Hagen, who reviewed several chapters for me even while engrossed in his own writing project; and Father Alexander Golitzin, who gave me an appreciation for Orthodox Christianity.

Many thanks go to the supportive faculty and staff in the Department of Religious Studies at San Diego State University. I also appreciate the assistance of Dr. E. Nick Genovese, from the Department of Classics and Humanities.

Although listed last, the people who endured the most during this process were, of course, members of my family: my husband, Fielding McGehee III, and my father, John V Moore. My mother, Barbara C. Moore, died while this book was in progress. This is one of life's little ironies, since she is the one who taught me about Christianity in the first place.



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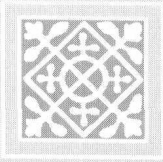
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## INVITATION TO

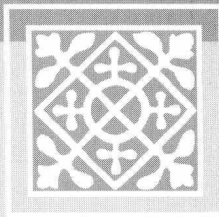
# Part One

PART ONE reveals just how rapidly Christianity developed during the first five centuries of the Common Era. It traces the transformation of a small, apocalyptic movement popular among some Palestinian Jews into an international organization with power and authority throughout the Roman Empire.

CHAPTER ONE begins by looking at the historical and theological context in which Jesus and his movement emerge. It briefly surveys the history of Israelite religion, the ancestor of both Judaism and Christianity, and discusses the composition of biblical texts. It closely examines key passages of the Christian Old Testament—what Jews would call the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh—that the followers of Jesus turned to in order to understand their Lord. Chapter One also looks at the first-century Judean environment into which Jesus was born, as well as at his teaching and at the scholarly study of his teachings. It then describes the impact of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (that is, to non-Jews), whose letters make up the majority of the New Testament and greatly contribute to all subsequent Christian theology.

CHAPTER TWO concentrates on the extremely fruitful period of church and doctrinal development during the first five centuries after Jesus' death. While Christian practices differed from place to place, the two primary practices of the early church were baptism and communion. Christian beliefs also differed from place to place, and the nature of Jesus and his relationship to God was hotly debated. In order to clarify what was "correct" Christian doctrine regarding Jesus, a number of church councils developed creeds and faith statements that spelled out official church teaching.

PART ONE concludes with the fall of the western Roman Empire and sets the stage for the myriad theological developments that occur in the Middle Ages.



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Persians capture Babylon	539	
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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Jewish Roots of Jesus, Paul, and Christianity

### Literary Sources for Understanding Jesus

While Christianity claims Jesus Christ as its central figure, its history neither begins nor ends with his life, death, and resurrection. Jewish beliefs and traditions, and the struggle of Jews against their Roman rulers during the first century C.E., provide the context in which Jesus was born. (Chapter Two examines the Greek and Roman context in which subsequent Christian doctrine develops.) The story of Jesus that appears in the New Testament of the Bible is really just a small part of this sacred text for Christians. The four Gospels that describe Jesus' earthly life—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—take up less than a quarter of the New Testament, and still less of the entire Bible, which for Christians includes an Old Testament and a New Testament.

A number of literary sources exist that set the scene for Jesus' arrival on the world stage. First, of course, is the Bible, with its Old Testament, which relates the story of the Israelites, and the New Testament, which relates the story of first-century Jews and of Jesus and his followers. Other texts—such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha—illuminate the religious framework further by revealing the diversity of Jewish thought in Jesus' day. All of these texts broaden our understanding of who Jesus was.

A Semitic tribe of nomads known as the Israelites wrote the first and largest part of the Bible. The Israelites, who are the religious ancestors of Christians and Muslims as well as of Jews, compiled a collection of scrolls. This collection ultimately formed a body of Jewish scripture called Tanakh, an acronym for Torah (the first five books of the Bible); *Neviim* (the Prophets); and *Ketuvim* (the Writings). Protestant Christians know Tanakh as the Old Testament, while Catholic and Orthodox Christians include ancient Jewish texts written in Greek, as well as the Tanakh, in their Old Testament. Biblical scholars use the term *Hebrew Bible* for the texts accepted as authoritative by Jews, to provide a neutral, all-inclusive phrase for the writings three major world religions hold sacred. Muslims dub Jews and Christians “people of the Book,” and in essence they are correct in labeling the Hebrew Bible *the* book, since all three faiths base subsequent holy texts upon it. Jews have the Talmud, Christians have the New Testament, and Muslims have the Qur'an.

The Hebrew Bible chronicles the fortunes of the Israelites. It uses poems, legends, prophetic oracles or sayings, prayers, hymns, dialogues, sermons, and other