
Documents

Considering the Evidence: Cultural Change in the Early Modern World



Cultural and religious traditions change over time in various ways and for various reasons. Some of those changes occur as a result of internal tensions or criticisms within those traditions or in response to social and economic transformations in the larger society. The Protestant Reformation, for example, grew out of deep disaffection with prevailing teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and drew support from a growing middle class and a disaffected peasantry. At other times, cultural change occurred by incorporating or reacting against new ideas drawn from contact with outsiders. Chinese Confucianism took on a distinctive tone and flavor as it drew upon the insights of Buddhism, and a new South Asian religion called Sikhism sought to combine elements of Hindu and Muslim belief. Whatever the stimulus for cultural change, departures from accepted ways of thinking have sometimes been represented as a return to a purer and more authentic past, even if that past is largely imaginary. In other cases, however, change was presented as a necessary break from an outmoded past even if many elements from earlier times were retained.

All across the Eurasian world of the early modern era—in Western Europe, China, India, and the Middle East—important cultural changes were brewing. In each of the documents that follow, we are listening in on just one side of extended debates or controversies, focusing on those who sought some change from established ways of thinking. To what extent were these changes moving in the same direction? How did they differ? What were the sources of these changes and how were they expressed? How might those who opposed these changes respond?

Document 16.1

Luther's Protest

Europe was home to perhaps the most substantial cultural transformations of the early modern centuries. There the Protestant Reformation sharply challenged both the doctrines and the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, ending the religious monopoly that the Church had exercised in Western Europe for many centuries and introducing a bitter and often violent divide

into the religious and political life of the region. Then the practitioners of the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment that followed from it, introduced a revolutionary new understanding of both the physical world and human society and constructed novel means of obtaining knowledge.

The Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution/Enlightenment shared a common hostility to established authority, and they both represented a clear departure from previous patterns of thought and behavior. But they differed sharply in how they represented the changes they sought. Reformation leaders looked to the past, seeking to restore or renew what they believed was an earlier and more genuine version of Christianity. Leaders of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, on the other hand, foresaw and embraced an altogether new world in the making. They were the “moderns” combating the “ancients.”

The most prominent figure in the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German monk, priest, and theologian (see pp. 723–27). A prolific writer, Luther composed theological treatises, translations of the Bible into German, and many hymns. The excerpts in Document 16.1, however, come from conversations with his students, friends, and colleagues, which they carefully recorded. After Luther’s death, these recollections of the reformer’s thoughts were collected and published under the title *Table Talk*.

- Based on this document, what issues drove the Protestant Reformation?
- What theological questions are addressed in these excerpts? How does Luther understand the concepts of law, good works, grace, and faith?
- In what ways is Luther critical of the papacy, monks, and the monastic orders of the Catholic Church?
- Why might Catholic authorities challenge Luther’s singular emphasis on the Bible? In what other ways might thoughtful Catholics respond to Luther’s charges? (See pp. 725–27 on the Catholic Counter-Reformation.)

MARTIN LUTHER

Table Talk

Early Sixteenth Century

On the Bible

Let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence, in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it.

No greater mischief can happen to a Christian

people, than to have God’s Word taken from them, or falsified, so that they no longer have it pure and clear. The ungodly papists prefer the authority of the church far above God’s Word; a blasphemy abominable and not to be endured; wherewith, void of all shame and piety, they spit in God’s face.

Pope, cardinals, bishops, not a soul of them has read the Bible; ’tis a book unknown to them. They

Source: William Hazlitt, ed. and trans., *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857).

are a pack of guzzling, stuffing wretches, rich, wallowing in wealth and laziness, resting secure in their power, and never, for a moment, thinking of accomplishing God's will.

On Salvation

He that goes from the gospel to the law, thinking to be saved by good works, falls as uneasily as he who falls from the true service of God to idolatry; for, without Christ, all is idolatry and fictitious imaginings of God, whether of the Turkish Koran, of the pope's decrees, or Moses' law.

The Gospel preaches nothing of the merit of works; he that says the Gospel requires works for salvation, I say, flat and plain, is a liar. Nothing that is properly good proceeds out of the works of the law, unless grace be present; for what we are forced to do, goes not from the heart, nor is acceptable.

But a true Christian says: I am justified and saved only by faith in Christ, without any works or merits of my own....

Prayer in popedom is mere tongue-threshing...; not prayer but a work of obedience.

On the Pope and the Church Hierarchy

The great prelates, the puffed-up saints, the rich usurers, the ox drovers that seek unconscionable gain, etc., these are not God's servants....

Our dealing and proceeding against the pope is altogether excommunication, which is simply the public declaration that a person is disobedient to Christ's Word. Now we affirm in public, that the pope and his retinue believe not; therefore we conclude that he shall not be saved, but be damned....

Antichrist is the pope and the Turk together; a beast full of life must have a body and soul; the spirit or soul of antichrist is the pope, his flesh or body the Turk.... Kings and princes coin money only out of metals, but the pope coins money out of every

thing—indulgences, ceremonies, dispensations, pardons; 'tis all fish comes to his net....

The pope and his crew are mere worshippers of idols, and servants of the devil.... He pretends great holiness, under color of the outward service of God, for he has instituted orders with hoods, with shavings, fasting, eating of fish, saying mass, and such like.... [F]or his doctrine he gets money and wealth, honor and power, and is so great a monarch, that he can bring emperors under his girdle.

The chief cause that I fell out with the pope was this: the pope boasted that he was the head of the church, and condemned all that would not be under his power and authority....

If the pope were the head of the Christian church, then the church were a monster with two heads, seeing that St. Paul says that Christ is her head. The pope may well be, and is, the head of the false church.

The fasting of the friars is more easy to them than our eating to us. For one day of fasting there are three of feasting. Every friar for his supper has two quarts of beer, a quart of wine, and spice-cakes, or bread prepared with spice and salt, the better to relish their drink. Thus go on these poor fasting brethren; getting so pale and wan, they are like the fiery angels.

The state of celibacy is great hypocrisy and wickedness.... Christ with one sentence confutes all their arguments: God created them male and female.... Now eating, drinking, marrying, etc., are of God's making, therefore they are good.

[T]hey [the Catholic Church] must make full restitution of that which, with their lies and deceit, they have got and stolen from emperors, kings, princes, nobility, and other people.

A Christian's worshipping is not the external, hypocritical mask that our spiritual friars wear, when they chastise their bodies, torment and make themselves faint, with ostentatious fasting, watching, singing, wearing hair shirts, scourging themselves, etc. Such worshipping God desires not.

Document 16.2

Progress and Enlightenment

If the Protestant Reformation represented a major change within the framework of the Christian faith, the Scientific Revolution and the European Enlightenment (see pp. 737–44) came to be seen by many as a challenge to all Christian understandings of the world. After all, those two movements celebrated the powers of human reason to unlock the mysteries of the universe and proclaimed the possibility of a new human society shaped by human hands. Among the most prominent spokesmen for the Enlightenment was the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), a French mathematician, philosopher, and active participant in the French Revolution. In his *Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind*, Condorcet described ten stages of human development. Document 16.2 contains excerpts from “The Ninth Epoch,” whose title refers to the era in which Condorcet was living, and the “The Tenth Epoch,” referring to the age to come. Condorcet’s optimism about that future was not borne out in his own life, for he fell afoul of the radicalism of the French Revolution and died in prison in 1794.

- What is Condorcet’s view of the relationship between the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment?
- How, precisely, does Condorcet imagine the future of humankind?
- How might Martin Luther respond to Condorcet’s vision of the future? How do their understandings of human potential differ?
- To what extent have Condorcet’s predictions come to fruition in the two centuries since his death?

MARQUIS DE CONDORCET

Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind

1793–1794

The Ninth Epoch: From Descartes to the Formation of the French Republic

[T]he progress of philosophy... destroyed within the general mass of people the prejudices that have af-

flicted and corrupted the human race for so long a time.

Humanity was finally permitted to boldly proclaim the long ignored right to submit every opinion to reason, that is to utilize the only instrument given to us for grasping and recognizing the truth. Each human learned with a sort of pride that nature had never destined him to believe the word of others. The superstitions of antiquity and the abasement

Source: Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), Epoch IX and Epoch X.

of reason before the madness of supernatural religion disappeared from society just as they had disappeared from philosophy....

If we were to limit ourselves to showing the benefits derived from the immediate applications of the sciences, or in their applications to man-made devices for the well-being of individuals and the prosperity of nations, we would be making known only a slim part of their benefits. The most important, perhaps, is having destroyed prejudices, and reestablished human intelligence, which until then had been forced to bend down to false instructions instilled in it by absurd beliefs passed on to the children of each generation by the terrors of superstition and the fear of tyranny....

The advances of scientific knowledge are all the more deadly to these errors because they destroy them without appearing to attack them, while lavishing on those who stubbornly defend them the degrading taunt of ignorance....

Finally this progress of scientific knowledge... results in a belief that not birth, professional status, or social standing gives anyone the right to judge something he does not understand. This unstoppable progress cannot be observed without having enlightened men search unceasingly for ways to make the other branches of learning follow the same path....

The Tenth Epoch: The Future Progress of the Human Mind

Our hopes for the future of the human species may be reduced to three important points: the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality within nations themselves; and finally, the real improvement of humanity. Should not all the nations of the world approach one day the state of civilization reached by the most enlightened peoples such as the French and the Anglo-Americans? Will not the slavery of nations subjected to kings, the barbarity of African tribes, and the ignorance of savages gradually disappear?...

If we cast an eye at the existing state of the globe, we will see right away that in Europe the principles of the French constitution are already those of all enlightened men. We will see that they are too widely disseminated and too openly professed for the efforts

of tyrants and priests to prevent them from penetrating into the hovels of their slaves....

Can it be doubted that either wisdom or the senseless feuds of the European nations themselves, working with the slow but certain effects of progress in their colonies, will not soon produce the independence of the new world; and that then the European population, spreading rapidly across that immense land, must either civilize or make disappear the savage peoples that now inhabit these vast continents?...

Thus the day will come when the sun will shine only on free men born knowing no other master but their reason; where tyrants and their slaves, priests and their ignorant, hypocritical writings will exist only in the history books and theaters; where we will only be occupied with mourning their victims and their dupes; when we will maintain an active vigilance by remembering their horrors; when we will learn to recognize and stifle by the force of reason the first seeds of superstition and tyranny, if ever they dare to appear!...

If we consider the human creations based on scientific theories, we shall see that their progress can have no limits;... that new tools, machines, and looms will add every day to the capabilities and skill of humans; they will improve and perfect the precision of their products while decreasing the amount of time and labor needed to produce them....

A smaller piece of land will be able to produce commodities of greater usefulness and value than before; greater benefits will be obtained with less waste; the production of the same industrial product will result in less destruction of raw materials and greater durability.... [E]ach individual will work less but more productively and will be able to better satisfy his needs....

Among the advances of the human mind we should reckon as most important for the general welfare is the complete destruction of those prejudices that have established an inequality of rights between the sexes, and inequality damaging even to the party it favors....

The most enlightened people... will slowly come to perceive war as the deadliest plague and the most monstrous of crimes.... They will understand that they cannot become conquerors without losing their

liberty; that perpetual alliances are the only way to preserve independence; and that they should seek their security, not power....

We may conclude then that the perfectibility of humanity is indefinite.

Finally, can we not also extend the same hopes to the intellectual and moral faculties?... Is it not also probable that education, while perfecting these qualities, will also influence, modify, and improve that bodily nature itself?...

Document 16.3

Debating Confucianism

Cultural change in early modern China was not as dramatic as in Europe. But Confucianism, which had long provided the framework for elite thinking and the basis for China's famous civil service examinations, was surely not a monolithic tradition. The version of Confucianism that prevailed in Ming dynasty China (1368–1644) emphasized strenuous educational efforts (“investigation of things”) leading to moral self-improvement and appropriate action. In practice, this often amounted to the rote memorization of texts in order to pass the examinations, which in turn led to official positions and great social prestige for the elite few. Wang Yangming (1472–1529), a prominent Chinese philosopher, state official, and general, contested this kind of Confucianism. His was a more individualistic, inner-directed Confucianism, allowing ordinary people, not just the well-educated few, to achieve sagehood. Although he explicitly rejected both Buddhism and Daoism, he drew on the interior emphasis of both traditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that Wang Yangming's ideas stirred considerable controversy in elite circles (see p. 735). The selections that follow are presented as conversations between Wang Yangming and his followers.

- In what ways were Wang Yangming's ideas at odds with the prevailing Confucianism of his time?
- Why might his ideas have been subject to severe criticism by more established Confucian thinkers?
- What similarities might you find in the ideas of Martin Luther and Wang Yangming? What differences are apparent? Consider their views of human nature, the ability of individuals to achieve moral improvement, and their relationship to established authority.

WANG YANGMING

Conversations

Early Sixteenth Century

In 1520 I went to Qianzhou and saw Wang Yangming again. I told him that recently, although I was making a little headway in my studies, I was finding it hard to feel secure or happy. He responded, "The problem is that you go to your mind to seek Heavenly principles, a practice called obscurity by principle. There is a trick for what you want to do."

"Please tell me what it is."

"It is simply the extension of knowledge."

"How does one do it?" I asked.

"Take your intuitive moral knowledge as your personal standard. If you think about something, you will know it is right if it is right, wrong if it is wrong. You cannot conceal anything from your intuitive moral knowledge. Just don't try to deceive it. Honestly follow it in whatever you do. That way you will keep what is good and get rid of what is bad. . . .

Once when Wang Yuzhong, Zou Shouyi, and I were attending him, Wang Yangming said, "Each person has a sage inside of him or her, which he or she suppresses because of lack of confidence." He then looked at Wang Yuzhong and said, "You have been a sage from the start." Yuzhong rose and politely demurred. The teacher added, "This is something everyone has. Why should you demur?"

"I do not deserve your praise."

"Everyone has this, so naturally you do. Why be so polite? Politeness is not appropriate here." Yuzhong then accepted with a smile.

Wang Yangming carried the discussion further. "Intuitive moral knowledge exists in people. No mat-

ter what they do, they cannot destroy it. Even robbers know that they should not rob. If you call them robbers they are embarrassed."

Wang Yuzhong said, "Material desires can obscure the intuitive moral knowledge in a person, but not make it disappear. It is like the clouds obscuring the sun. The sun is not lost."

Wang Yangming said, "You are so smart. No one else sees it."

A lower-ranking official, who had for a long time been listening to discussions of our teacher's doctrines, once said, "His doctrines are excellent, but because I am so busy keeping records and taking care of legal cases, I cannot study them further."

When Wang Yangming heard of his remark, he said to him, "When did I say you should abandon your records and legal cases to take up study? Since you have official duties, you should use them as a basis for your study. That is the true investigation of things. For instance, if you are questioning a plaintiff, you should not get angry because his answers are impolite or become pleased because he uses ingratiating language. You should not hate him for his efforts to go around you and purposely punish him. Nor should you bend your principles and forgive someone because he implores you. You should not dispose of a case quickly because your own affairs are too pressing, nor let other people's criticisms or praise or plots influence your decision. These ways of responding are all selfish. All you need to know is in yourself. Carefully check for any sign that you are biased, for that would confuse your recognition of right and wrong. This is how to investigate things and extend knowledge. Real learning is to be found in every aspect of record keeping and legal cases. What is empty is study that is detached from things."

Document 16.4

The Wahhabi Perspective on Islam

Within the Islamic world, the major cultural movements of the early modern era were those of religious renewal. Such movements sought to eliminate the “deviations” that had crept into Islamic practice over the centuries and to return to a purer version of the faith that presumably had prevailed during the early years of the religion in the seventh century. The most influential of these movements was associated with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1791), whose revivalist movement spread widely in Arabia during the second half of the eighteenth century (see pp. 733–34). Document 16.3, written by the grandson of al-Wahhab shortly after the capture of Mecca in 1803, provides a window into the outlook of Wahhabi Islam.

- What specific objections did the Wahhabis have to the prevailing practice of Islam in eighteenth-century Arabia?
- How did Wahhabis put their ideas into practice once they had seized control of Mecca?
- What similarities do you see between the outlook of the Wahhabis and that of Martin Luther? What differences can you identify?
- How might you compare eighteenth-century Wahhabi Islam with movements of Islamic renewal, or “fundamentalism,” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? (See Chapter 24.)

ABDULLAH WAHHAB

History and Doctrines of the Wahhabis

1803

Now I was engaged in the holy war, carried on by those who truly believe in the Unity of God, when God, praised be He, graciously permitted us to enter Mecca.... Now, though we were more numerous, better armed and disciplined than the people of Mecca, yet we did not cut down their trees, neither did we hunt, nor shed any blood except the blood of victims, and of those four-footed beasts which the Lord has made lawful by his commands.

When our pilgrimage was over... our leader, whom the Lord saves, explained to the divines what we required of the people, ... namely, a pure belief in the Unity of God Almighty. He pointed out to them that there was no dispute between us and them except on two points, and that one of these was a sincere belief in the Unity of God, and a knowledge of the different kinds of prayer...

They then acknowledged our belief, and there was not one among them who doubted.... And they swore a binding oath, although we had not asked them, that their hearts had been opened and their doubts removed, and that they were convinced who-

Source: J. O’Kinealy, “Translation of an Arabic Pamphlet on the History and Doctrines of the Wahhabis,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 43 (1874): 68–82.

ever said, "Oh prophet of God!" or "Oh Ibn 'Abbes!" or "Oh 'Abdul Qadir!" or called on any other created being, thus entreating him to turn away evil or grant what is good (where the power belongs to God alone), such as recovery from sickness, or victory over enemies, or protection from temptation, etc.; he is a *Mushrik*, guilty of the most heinous form of shirk,^o his blood shall be shed and property confiscated. . . . Again, the tombs which had been erected over the remains of the pious, had become in these times as it were idols where the people went to pray for what they required; they humbled themselves before them, and called upon those lying in them, in their distress, just as did those who were in darkness before the coming of Muhammad. . . .

We razed all the large tombs in the city which the people generally worshipped and believed in, and by which they hoped to obtain benefits or ward off evil, so that there did not remain an idol to be adored in that pure city, for which God be praised. Then the taxes and customs we abolished, all the different kinds of instruments for using tobacco we destroyed, and tobacco itself we proclaimed forbidden. Next we burned the dwellings of those selling *hashish*, and living in open wickedness, and issued a proclamation, directing the people to constantly exercise themselves in prayer. They were not to pray in separate groups. . . . but all were directed to arrange themselves at each time of prayer behind any Imam who is a follower of any of the four Imams.^o . . . For in this way the Lord would be worshiped by as it were one voice, the faithful of all sects would become friendly disposed towards each other, and all dissensions would cease. . . .

[W]e do not reject anyone who follows any of the four Imams, as do the Shias, the Zaidiyyahs, and the Imamiyyahs, &c. Nor do we admit them in any way to act openly according to their vicious creeds; on the contrary, we compelled them to follow one

of the four Imams. We do not claim to exercise our reason in all matters of religion, and of our faith, save that we follow our judgment where a point is clearly demonstrated to us in either the Quran or the Sunnah.^o . . . We do not command the destruction of any writings except such as tend to cast people into infidelity to injure their faith, such as those on Logic, which have been prohibited by all Divines. But we are not very exacting with regard to books or documents of this nature, if they appear to assist our opponents, we destroy them. . . . We do not consider it proper to make Arabs prisoners of war, nor have we done so, neither do we fight with other nations. Finally, we do not consider it lawful to kill women or children. . . .

We consider pilgrimage is supported by legal custom, but it should not be undertaken except to a mosque, and for the purpose of praying in it. Therefore, whoever performs pilgrimage for this purpose, is not wrong, and doubtless those who spend the precious moments of their existence in invoking the Prophet, shall . . . obtain happiness in this world and the next. . . . We do not deny miraculous powers to the saints, but on the contrary allow them. . . . But whether alive or dead, they must not be made the object of any form of worship. . . .

We prohibit those forms of Bidah^o that affect religion or pious works. Thus drinking coffee, reciting poetry, praising kings, do not affect religion or pious works and are not prohibited. . . .

All games are lawful. Our prophet allowed play in his mosque. So it is lawful to chide and punish persons in various ways; to train them in the use of different weapons; or to use anything which tends to encourage warriors in battle, such as a war-drum. But it must not be accompanied with musical instruments. These are forbidden, and indeed the difference between them and a war drum is clear.

^o **shirk:** unbelief.

^o **the four Imams:** founders of the four major schools of Islamic law.

^o **Sunnah:** traditions of Muhammad's actions.

^o **Bidah:** improper or erroneous behavior.

Document 16.5

The Poetry of Kabir

Early modern India was a place of much religious creativity and the interaction of various traditions. The majority of India's people practiced one or another of the many forms of Hinduism, while its Mughal rulers and perhaps 20 percent of the population were Muslims. And a new religion—Sikhism—took shape in the sixteenth century as well (see pp. 736–37). Certainly there was tension and sometimes conflict among these religious communities, but not all was hostility across religious boundaries. In the writings of Kabir (1440–1518), perhaps India's most beloved poet, the sectarian differences among these religions dissolved into a mystical and transcendent love of the divine in all of its many forms. Born into a family of Muslim weavers, Kabir as a young man became a student of a famous Hindu ascetic, Ramananda. Kabir's own poetry was and remains revered among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike. Document 16.5 contains selections from his poetry, translated by the famous Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore in the early twentieth century.

- In what ways was Kabir critical of conventional religious practice—both Muslim and Hindu?
- How would you describe Kabir's religious vision?
- How might more orthodox Hindus and Muslims respond to Kabir? How would the Wahhabis in particular take issue with Kabir's religious outlook?

KABÎR

Poetry

ca. Late Fifteenth Century

O servant, where dost thou seek Me? Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque: I am neither in Kaaba^o nor in Kailash:^o

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: . . . Kabir says, "O Sadhu!^o God is the breath of all breath."

It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs;

For the priest, the warrior, the tradesman, and all the thirty-six castes, alike are seeking for God. . . .

^o**Kaaba:** the central shrine of Islam in Mecca.

^o**Kailash:** a mountain sacred to Hindus.

Source: Rabindranath Tagore, trans., *The Songs of Kabir* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915).

^o**Sadhu:** a Hindu spiritual seeker who has abandoned ordinary life.

The barber has sought God, the washerwoman,
and the carpenter—
Even Raidas^o was a seeker after God.
The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste [an
untouchable].
Hindus and Moslems alike have achieved that End,
where remains no mark of distinction.

Within this earthen vessel^o are bowers and groves,
and within it is the Creator:
Within this vessel are the seven oceans and the
unnumbered stars.
The touchstone and the jewel-appraiser are
within;
And within this vessel the Eternal soundeth, and
the spring wells up.
Kabir says: "Listen to me, my Friend! My beloved
Lord is within."

Your Lord is near: yet you are climbing the palm-
tree to seek Him.
The Brâhman priest goes from house to house and
initiates people into faith:
Alas! the true fountain of life is beside you, and
you have set up a stone to worship.
Kabir says: "I may never express how sweet my
Lord is.

^o**Raidas:** a Hindu poet from a low-ranking Sudra caste.

^o**earthen vessel:** the human body.

Yoga and the telling of beads, virtue and vice—
these are naught to Him."

I do not ring the temple bell:
I do not set the idol on its throne:
I do not worship the image with flowers.
It is not the austerities that mortify the flesh which
are pleasing to the Lord,
When you leave off your clothes and kill your
senses, you do not please the Lord.
The man who is kind and who practices right-
eousness, who remains passive amidst the
affairs of the world, who considers all creatures
on earth as his own self,
He attains the Immortal Being, the true God is
ever with him.

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places;
And I know that they are useless, for I have
bathed in them.
The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak;
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Purana^o and the Koran are mere words; lifting
up the curtain, I have seen.
Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience;
and he knows very well that all other things
are untrue.

^o**Purana:** Hindu religious texts.

Using the Evidence: Cultural Change in the Early Modern World

1. **Identifying the object of protest:** Each of these documents is protesting or criticizing something. How might you compare the ideas, practices, or authorities against which they are reacting? What historical circumstances generated these protests?
2. **Comparing views of human potential:** In what different ways might each of these authors understand human potential? What do they believe is necessary to realize or fulfill that potential?

3. **Comparing religious reformers:** Consider the religious outlook of Luther, al-Wahhab, and Kabir. What similarities and differences can you identify? Do you think WangYangming should be included in this category of religious reformers?
4. **Imagining a conversation:** Construct an imaginary debate or conversation between Condorcet and one or more of the religious or spiritually inclined authors of these documents.

Visual Sources

Considering the Evidence: Global Christianity in the Early Modern Era



During the early modern centuries, the world of Christendom, long divided between its Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches, underwent two major transformations. First, the Reformation sharply divided western Christendom into bitterly hostile Protestant and Catholic halves. And while that process was unfolding in Europe, missionaries—mostly Roman Catholic—rode the tide of European expansion to establish the faith in the Americas and parts of Asia. In those places, native converts sometimes imitated European patterns and at other times adapted the new religion to their own cultural traditions. Furthermore, smaller but ancient Christian communities persisted in Ethiopia, Armenia, Egypt, southern India, and elsewhere. Thus the Christian world of the early modern era was far more globalized and much more varied than ever before. That variety found expression in both art and architecture, as the visual sources that follow illustrate.

Some of the differences between Protestant and Catholic Christianity become apparent in the interiors of their churches. To Martin Luther, the founder of Protestant Christianity, elaborate church interiors, with their many sculptures and paintings, represented a spiritual danger, for he feared that the wealthy few who endowed such images would come to believe that they were buying their way into heaven rather than relying on God's grace. "It would be better," he wrote, "if we gave less to the churches and altars, . . . and more to the needy."³⁰ John Calvin, the prominent French-born Protestant theologian, went even further, declaring that "God forbade . . . the making of any images representing him."³¹

Behind such statements lay different understandings of the church building. While Roman Catholics generally saw a church as a temple or "house of God," sacred because it is where God dwells on earth, Protestants viewed churches more as meetinghouses, gathering places for a congregation. They were not sacred in themselves as places, but only on account of the worship that occurred within them.³² Furthermore, to Protestants, images of the saints were an invitation to idolatry. Acting on such ideas, Protestants in various places stripped older churches of the offending images, decapitated statues, and sometimes ritually burned statues and paintings at the stake. The new churches they created were often quite different from their Catholic counterparts. Visual Source 16.1, a



Visual Source 16.1 Pieter Saenredam, *Interior of a Dutch Reformed Church* (Rijksmuseum Museum)

painting by Dutch artist Pieter Saenredam from about 1645, portrays the interior of a typical Dutch Reformed (Protestant) Church.

Roman Catholic response to the Reformation took shape in the Catholic Counter-Reformation (see pp. 725–27). That vigorous movement found expression in a style of church architecture known as Baroque, which emerged powerfully in Catholic Europe as well as in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Latin America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The interiors of such churches were ornately adorned with paintings, ceiling frescoes, and statues, depicting Jesus on the cross, the Virgin and child, numerous saints, and biblical stories. The exuberant art of these church interiors appealed to the senses, seeking to provoke an emotional response of mystery, awe, and grandeur while kindling the faith of the worshippers and binding them firmly to the Catholic Church in the face of Protestant competition. Visual Source 16.2 is a photograph of the interior of the Pilgrimage Church of Mariazell, located in present-day Austria. A church site since the twelfth century, the building was enlarged and refurbished in Baroque style in the seventeenth century.

- What obvious differences do you notice between these two church interiors? What kind of emotional responses would each of them have evoked?



Visual Source 16.2 Catholic Baroque: Interior of Pilgrimage Church, Mariazell, Austria (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

- In what ways do these church interiors reflect differences between Protestant and Catholic theology? (See Snapshot, p. 724.) Why does the Protestant congregation face toward the pulpit, from which the minister presents his sermon, while the Catholic worshippers look toward the altar, where Holy Communion takes place? Pay attention as well to the kind of geometric shapes apparent in each church and to the role of preaching.
- How might Protestants and Catholics have reacted upon entering each other's churches?
- Keep in mind that Visual Source 16.1 is a painting. Why do you think the artist showed the people disproportionately small?

Throughout Latin America, Christianity was established in the context of conquest and colonial rule (see pp. 728–30). As the new faith took hold across the region, it incorporated much that was of European origin as the construction of many large and ornate Baroque churches illustrates. But local communities also sought to blend this European Catholic Christianity with religious symbols and concepts drawn from their own traditions in a process that historians call syncretism. In the Andes, for example, Inca religion featured a supreme creator god (Viracocha); a sun god (Inti), regarded as the creator of the Inca people; a moon goddess (Killa), who was the wife of Inti and was attended by an order of priestesses; and an earth mother goddess (Pachamama), associated with mountain peaks and fertility. Those religious figures found their way into Andean understanding of Christianity, as Visual Source 16.3 illustrates.

Painted around 1740 by an unknown artist, this striking image shows the Virgin Mary placed within the “rich mountain” of Potosí in Bolivia, from which the Spanish had extracted so much silver (see p. 683). A number of smaller figures within the mountain represent the native miners whose labor had enriched their colonial rulers. A somewhat larger figure at the bottom of the mountain is an Inca ruler dressed in royal garb receiving tribute from his people. At the bottom left are the pope and a cardinal, while on the right stands the Habsburg emperor Charles V and perhaps his wife.

- What is Mary's relationship to the heavenly beings standing above her as well as to the miners at work in the mountain? What is the significance of the crown above her head and her outstretched arms?
- The European figures at the bottom are shown in a posture of prayer or thanksgiving. What might the artist have been trying to convey? How would you interpret the relative size of the European and Andean figures?
- Why do you think the artist placed Mary actually inside the mountain rather than on it, while depicting her dress in a mountain-like form?



Visual Source 16.3 Cultural Blending in Andean Christianity (Nick Buxton, photographer)

- What marks this painting as an example of syncretism?
- Do you read this image as subversive of the colonial order or as supportive of it? Do you think the artist was a European or a Native American Christian?

In China, unlike Latin America, Christian missionaries operated in a setting wholly outside of European political control, bringing their faith to a powerful and proud civilization, long dominant in eastern Asia, where Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism had for many centuries mixed and mingled. The outcome of those missionary efforts was far more modest and much less successful than in the Americas (see pp. 730–32). Nonetheless, in China too the tendency toward syncretism was evident. Jesuit missionaries themselves sought to present the Christian message within a Chinese cultural context to the intellectual and political elites who were their primary target audience. And Chinese Christians often transposed the new religion into more familiar cultural concepts. European critics of the Jesuit approach, however, feared that syncretism watered down the Christian message and risked losing its distinctive character.

Visual Source 16.4 provides an example of Christianity becoming Chinese.³³ In the early seventeenth century, the Jesuits published several books in the Chinese language describing the life of Christ and illustrated them with a series of woodblock prints created by Chinese artists affiliated with the Jesuits. Although they were clearly modeled on European images, those prints cast Christian figures into an altogether Chinese setting. The woodblock print in Visual Source 16.4 portrays the familiar biblical story of the annunciation, when an angel informs Mary that she will be the mother of Christ. The house and furniture shown in the print suggest the dwelling of a wealthy Chinese scholar. The reading table in front of Mary was a common item in the homes of the literary elite of the time. The view from the window shows a seascape, mountains in the distance, a lone tree, and a “scholar’s rock”—all of which were common features in Chinese landscape painting. The clouds that appear at the angel’s feet and around the shaft of light shining on Mary are identical to those associated with sacred Buddhist and Daoist figures. To Chinese eyes, the angel might well appear as a Buddhist bodhisattva, while Mary may resemble a Ming dynasty noblewoman or perhaps Kuanyin, the Chinese Buddhist goddess of mercy and compassion.

- What specifically Chinese elements can you identify in this image?
- To whom might this image have been directed?
- How might educated Chinese have responded to this image?
- The European engraving on which this Chinese print was modeled included in the background the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion. Why might the Chinese artist have chosen to omit that scene from his image?

Visual Source 16.4 Making Christianity Chinese (Courtesy, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome)



- How would European critics of the Jesuits' approach to missionary work have reacted to this image? To what extent has the basic message of Catholic Christianity been retained or changed in this Chinese cultural setting?

As Chinese emperors welcomed Jesuit missionaries at court, so too did the rulers of Mughal India during the time of Akbar and Jahangir (1556–1627). But while Chinese elite circles received the Jesuits for their scientific skills, especially in astronomy, the Mughal court seemed more interested in the religious and artistic achievements of European civilization. Akbar invited the Jesuits to take part in cross-religious discussions that included Muslim, Hindu, Jain, and Zoroastrian scholars. Furthermore, the Mughal emperors eagerly embraced the art of late Renaissance Europe, which the Jesuits provided to them, much



Visual Source 16.5 Christian Art at the Mughal Court
(Rare Book Department, The Free Library of Philadelphia)

of it devotional and distinctly Christian. Mughal artists quickly learned to paint in the European style, and soon murals featuring Jesus, Mary, and Christian saints appeared on the walls of palaces, garden pavilions, and harems of the Mughal court, while miniature paintings adorned books, albums, and jewelry.

In religious terms, however, the Jesuit efforts were “a fantastic and extravagant failure,”³⁴ for these Muslim rulers of India were not in the least interested in abandoning Islam for the Christian faith, and few conversions of any kind occurred. Akbar and Jahangir, however, were cosmopolitan connoisseurs of art, which they collected, reproduced, and displayed. European religious art also had propaganda value in enhancing their status. Jesus and Mary, after all, had a prominent place within Islam. Jesus was seen both as an earlier prophet and as mystical figure, similar to the Sufi masters who were so important in Indian Islam. Mughal paintings, pairing the adult Jesus and Mary side by side, were placed above the imperial throne as well as on the emperor’s jewelry and his official seal, suggesting an identification of Jesus and a semidivine emperor. That the mothers of both Akbar and Jahangir were named Mary only added to the appeal. Thus Akbar and Jahangir sought to incorporate European-style Christian art into their efforts to create a blended and tolerant religious culture for the elites of their vast and diverse realm. It was a culture that drew on Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity.

But as Catholic devotional art was reworked by Mughal artists, it was also subtly changed. Visual Source 16.5 shows an early-seventeenth-century depiction of the Holy Family painted by an Indian artist.

- Why do you think that this Mughal painter portrayed Mary and Joseph as rather distinguished and educated persons rather than as the humble carpenter and his peasant wife, as in so many European images?
 - Similarly, why might he have placed the family in rather palatial surroundings instead of a stable?
 - How do you imagine European missionaries responded to this representation of the Holy Family?
 - How might more orthodox Muslims have reacted to the larger project of creating a blended religion making use of elements from many traditions? Consider the possible reactions of the Wahhabis (Document 16.4, pp. 756–57) and Kabir (Document 16.5, pp. 758–59).
 - What similarities can you identify between this Indian image and the Chinese print in Visual Source 16.4? Pay attention to the setting, the clothing, and the class status of the human figures, and the scenes outside the windows.
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Using the Evidence: Global Christianity in the Early Modern Era

1. **Making comparisons:** What common elements of Christianity can you identify in these visual sources? What differences in the expression of Christianity can you define?
2. **Considering Mary:** The Catholic Christian tradition as it developed in Latin America, China, and India as well as Europe provided a very important place for representations of the Virgin Mary. Why might this feature of the Christian message have been so widely appealing? But in what ways does the image of the Holy Mother differ in Visual Sources 16.3, 16.4, and 16.5? In what ways were those images adapted to the distinctive cultures in which they were created?
3. **Pondering syncretism:** From a missionary viewpoint, develop arguments for and against religious syncretism using these visual sources as points of reference.
4. **Considering visual sources as evidence:** What are the strengths and limitations of these visual sources, as opposed to texts, as historians seek to understand the globalization of Christianity in the early modern era? What other visual sources might be useful?