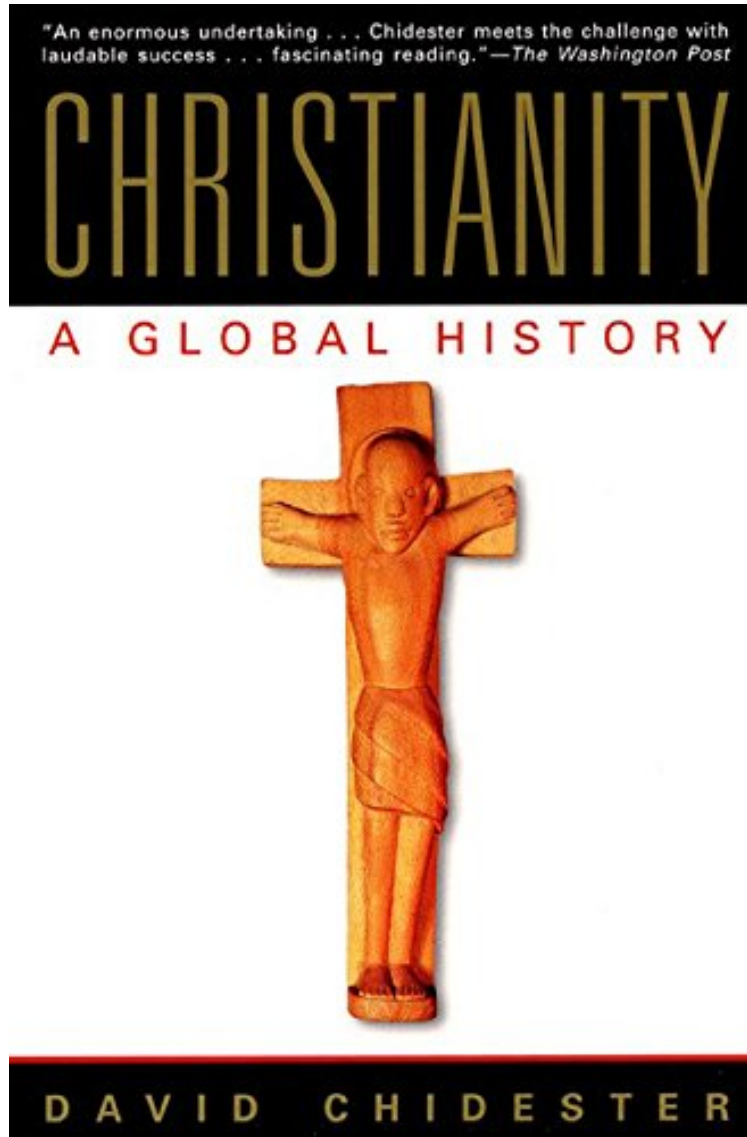


Christianity: A Global History

David Chidester

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David Chidester : Christianity: A Global History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Christianity: A Global History:

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David Chidester, one of the world's foremost scholars of religion, traces Christianity's growth and development from the time of Jesus to the dawn of the third millennium, revealing its rich diversity through the deeds and beliefs of heretics and saints, witches and healers, preachers and inquisitors. Chidester explores the emergence of the major streams of Christian thought and practice, distilling the cultural history of the Church and its impact on the world into this superbly readable book. Alongside this broad panorama is a richly human story that the author brilliantly encapsulates in incisive character sketches and historical vignettes. Christianity, in all its many facets, has been and continues to be one of the most influential forces in history. Chidester shows that this religion, with its roots deep in the ancient world, has always been in a constant state of evolution, affecting and affected by the religions and societies around it. At times Christianity has coexisted peacefully with other forms of belief, exchanging ideas and practices with them. At other times profound, even violent, conflict has arisen. In this book David Chidester intelligently and objectively portrays Christians in different times and places, as a minority and as the majority group, a religion both absorbing and resisting the world around it. Christianity reveals the religion as it was and is lived in the life of everyday people rather than focusing on the dry dogmas and beliefs that fill most histories. Chidester's accomplishment is to capture the complexity and grand sweep of this story in one remarkable volume that is destined to take its place as a classic of religious history.

.com David Chidester is an American academic who teaches in South Africa. He is modest enough to use an old joke against himself. When Chidester told Archbishop Tutu he taught comparative religion, Tutu twinkled, "Ah, comparative religion--that is the religion for those who are comparatively religious." The objectivity and modesty that allows Chidester to poke fun at his own profession enlightens his monumental history of the Christian Church on every page. Chidester tells the Christian story from its beginnings as a persecuted sect in the Roman Empire up to its present day international diversity. It is a rich and complex tapestry, and Chidester handles his huge subject with rigorous scholarship, copious but unobtrusive notes, and a clear and readable style. He keeps track of the big historical trends while focusing on the fascinating personalities who have dragged the Christian Church into scandal and schism as well as lifted it to the heights of inspiration and holiness. Chidester splits the Christian era into three chunks: the opening 10 chapters deal with the first 500 years, the next 10 deal with the middle millennium, and the last section covers the world wide expansion of Christianity since the Reformation. Those who like their church history to be a disguised religious pep talk won't like this book because Chidester is expert at not taking sides. But for anyone who wants to study the majestic procession of Christianity through the history of the last 2000 years, this big book is worth every penny. -- Dwight Longenecker, .co.ukFrom Publishers WeeklyIt takes a brave author to write this kind of history, where every chapter, in some cases every sentence, requires passing through territory that has been analyzed, debated, deconstructed and reassembled for 2,000 years. Yet Chidester (professor of comparative religion at Cape Town University) is up to the task, providing a readable, objective sweep of Christian history that reflects an admirable knowledge of the details without ever losing sight of the larger currents. He takes the reader through three epochs: from the birth of Christianity in 1st-century Roman Palestine to the 4th century, when Christianity was the imperial cult; from the fall of Rome through the Reformation; and from the discovery of the New World to today's New World Order. Perhaps necessarily, his most intriguing chapters come in the final third of the book, where there is less familiar material to explore, though each of the first two sections offers a lucid summary of current scholarship. In the chapter on Asia, his description of the fracture between Thomas Christians in India (who took on the trappings of elite Hindi culture) and 16th-century Portuguese missionaries, laden as it was with issues of class as well as theology, has great relevance for today's debates over inculturation. Specialists will find omissions and oversimplifications, but Chidester has braved their scorn, and the reader seeking a broad understanding of Christianity's evolution will be grateful. (Dec.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistChidester approaches Christianity as a scholar of comparative religion and with the ethics, he says, of a novelist. So this book is a good story, accessible to a very large audience, that doesn't transform its subject into a monolithic object divorced from history and place. It progresses from the social and religious milieu of an obscure figure from the periphery of the Roman empire through an isolated community's paradoxical rise to identity with, first, Roman and, then, European power to Christianity's status as a simultaneously global and local movement faced, from its beginnings, "with the challenge of using local materials to build a home . . . in the world but not of it."^B As an American resident of South Africa for more than a decade, Chidester is excellently placed to observe a recent shift in Christianity's center, and his gifts as a writer allow him to put that vantage point to use in producing an introduction to Christianity's history that will be of long-lasting

value to students of religion and society in and out of the academy. Steven Schroeder Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved