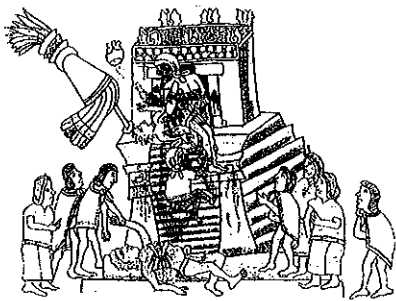


21 About Beliefs and Ideas



Human sacrifice was a fundamental part of the religion of the Aztec people, who lived in what is now Mexico.

If you want to believe in great green dragons, go ahead; no one will stop you. In the United States we are free to believe anything we want.

If you believe in a moon god, you can even start a Moon God religion. Some people may think you are a bit weird, but no one will throw you in jail.

It wasn't always that way. There was no religious freedom in America at first. The very idea would have seemed strange to the Native Americans, and to Columbus and Queen Isabella. In both America and Europe religion and government were bound together. This was expected, but it sometimes led to disaster. The Aztec Indians killed tens of thousands of people who held beliefs different from theirs. Europeans spent centuries fighting religious wars before some of them began to question whether it was right to force others to believe as they did.

In 15th-century Europe most people were Roman Catholic. There were some Jews and Muslims, too, but no Protestants. (The Protestant churches hadn't been founded yet.) Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Catholicism were the only Christian religions.

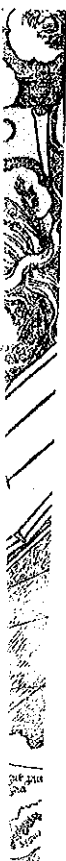
The Protestant religions would get started in the 16th century when a man in Germany named Martin Luther protested and tried to reform the Catholic Church. There were 95 things in the Catholic

The center of Roman Catholicism is in Rome, Italy; the religion is led by the Pope. The Eastern Orthodox Church is divided into regional churches led by *patriarchs*. The leading Orthodox Church is in Istanbul (formerly called Constantinople), Turkey.

A **reformer** is someone who wants to change the world and make it better.

st relat- almost und not y have es." aldsee- tinent. it, and ICA on

Many o. This Amer- ready ?



Here are the names of some Protestant religions: Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, and Methodist.

Speaking Out

History teaches us that there are always a few clear-sighted people who resist popular opinion and stand up for what they think is right, even if that means that most people laugh at them or send them to jail. Some people in the 15th and 16th centuries spoke out against slavery. Some spoke out against the expulsion and murder of Jews and Muslims in Spain. Some spoke out against torture. But most people didn't listen to them.

Church that Luther thought should be changed. He wrote them all down and nailed the list to a church door. Some people agreed with Luther's list; many didn't. Those who agreed were called "protesters." They started new Christian religions: *Protestant* religions. Because the protesters thought of themselves as reformers, the time they lived in is often called the Reformation.

Unfortunately, the clash between Protestants and Catholics led to centuries of hatred and violence in Europe. Instead of talking calmly about their differences, Protestants and Catholics fought about them. There were terrible wars that split towns and families. Neighbors and relatives killed each other because they thought differently about religion, and yet all of them claimed to be Christian. Many people went to the New World to escape from those wars of religion. Many went in search of freedom of belief.

Remember 1492? That was the year Columbus made his first voyage to the New World. It was also the year all Jews had to leave Spain. Those who stayed were forced to convert to Christianity. If they only pretended to convert—and were caught secretly practicing their religion—they were burned alive.

Slavery was common everywhere then, and it didn't seem wrong to many people: not to the Portuguese or the Arabs or the Dutch or the Spaniards or the Africans—who were all involved in selling human beings as slaves.

Some explorers thought they could serve God by converting the Indians to Christianity and, if the Indians wouldn't convert, by killing them. In America the Aztec Indians practiced blood sacrifices; the Iroquois tortured their captives; the Mound Builders kept slaves. They didn't think that was wrong either.

How could people behave that way? Were they different from us?

Not really. Slavery, torture, and religious intolerance have been around for a long time. It is always easy to do and think as everyone else does. And here we are, at one of the most important reasons for studying history: to learn from the mistakes of others.

Columbus had many good qualities, and yet he made slaves of the



Ind
peo
doi
doi
vict
C
only
thin
Can
A
bett
T
ans
M
to b
This
any
T
belo
ning



Queen Isabella asked a special religious court, called the "Inquisition," to come to Spain. It forced people who weren't Catholic to convert or leave the country. If they refused, the court tortured and executed them. As you can see, the court had some imaginative ways of doing this.

Indians. Reading history, you will learn about many well-meaning people who did terrible things to others. Often, they believed they were doing good. They meant to do good. Many people told them they were doing good. Does that excuse them? Does it make a difference to the victim? Is it right to force others to think as you do? Is it possible?

Columbus and most Spaniards believed their religion was the only true religion. Suppose you are convinced that your way of thinking is good for everyone. Suppose you are sure you are right. Can you be sure?

Are you bad if you do something wrong but you don't know any better?

These are the questions that philosophers ask. They have no easy answers. Think about them. Talk about them. Write about them.

Many of us are Americans because someone in our family wanted to be free—free to believe whatever he or she wished to believe. This country gave birth to a form of religious freedom unknown anywhere else in the world.

The United States was first, among all nations, to allow people to belong to any church, or to none. But it didn't happen in the beginning, as you will see.