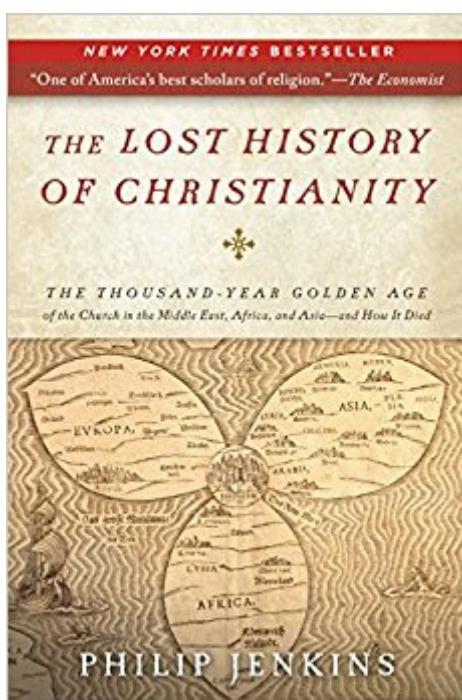


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# The Lost History Of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age Of The Church In The Middle East, Africa, And Asia--and How It Died



## Synopsis

“Jenkins is one of America’s top religious scholars.” —Forbes magazine  
The Lost History of Christianity by Philip Jenkins offers a revolutionary view of the history of the Christian church. Subtitled “The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died,” it explores the extinction of the earliest, most influential Christian churches of China, India, and the Middle East, which held the closest historical links to Jesus and were the dominant expression of Christianity throughout its first millennium. The remarkable true story of the demise of the institution that shaped both Asia and Christianity as we know them today, The Lost History of Christianity is a controversial and important work of religious scholarship that sounds a warning that must be heeded.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Revisionist history is always great fun, and never more so than when it is persuasively and cogently argued. Jenkins, the Penn State history professor whose book *The Next Christendom* made waves several years ago, argues that it’s not exactly a new thing that Christianity is making terrific inroads in Asia and Africa. A thousand years ago, those continents were more Christian than Europe, and Asian Christianity in particular was the locus of tremendous innovations in mysticism, monasticism, theology and secular knowledge. The little-told story of Christianity’s decline in those two continents—hastened by Mongol invasions, the rise of Islam and Buddhism, and internecine quarrels—is sensitively and imaginatively rendered. Jenkins sometimes challenges the assertions of other scholars, including Karen Armstrong and

Elaine Pagels, but provides compelling evidence for his views. The book is marvelously accessible for the lay reader and replete with fascinating details to help personalize the ambitious sweep of global history Jenkins undertakes. This is an important counterweight to previous histories that have focused almost exclusively on Christianity in the West. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

*\*Starred Review\** Jenkins turns from the recent history and trend projections of such invaluable books as *The Next Christendom* (2002) and *God's Continent* (2007) to a much broader canvas, roughly from the fifth century to the twentieth, within which the first global Christian establishment persisted for a thousand years. The predominant churches of that establishment were Nestorian and Jacobite, sufficiently different in conceptions of the nature of Christ to be considered heretical by Catholics and Orthodox. They consisted of hundreds of bishoprics from Egypt and Abyssinia to India and China, with the greatest concentration in Mesopotamia. For centuries, they got along well with neighbor faiths, especially Islam. But the pressure of invaders into Islamic-ruled lands, from the East (Mongols and Turks) even more devastatingly than from the West (the Crusades), and the fact that Christians often allied with those invaders, eventually provoked savage reaction from Muslims, especially, and, most lethally, from Islamicized Turks. So secular politics tolled the long death knell of Nestorian-Jacobite Christianity. In leaner, clearer prose than ever before, Jenkins outlines and analyzes this history, which few present-day Christians have even heard of. This may be the most eye-opening history book of the year. --Ray Olson --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

*The Lost History of Christianity* covers an area of Christian History that is sorely lacking attention. Jenkins reminds us that the so called "dark ages" were actually a time of flourishing and progress in the Eastern church. He also lines up arguments against modern criticism that Christianity is simply a white Eurocentric religion, by recognizing the roots and influence the Eastern Church had up till 1500. I was struck by the seeming evidence that we have romanticized that the Church is built on the blood of the martyrs. While this may be true in some or even many forms of Christianity, it is also evident that there are places where Christianity was crushed, burned, and persecuted almost entirely out of existence. The overall tone is generally charitable, recognizing that while there is nothing inherent in Islam to cause it to be more brutal or persecutory, than Christianity or Judaism, there have certainly been mass exterminations in the name of Allah, perhaps the most brutal during

the Armenian Genocide in the early 1900's. Jenkins, however, is an equal opportunist and shows where the Catholic Church was at times less tolerant, and more prejudice towards the Eastern Church than the Islamic movement was. My greatest critique would be Jenkins seeming distaste for Catholic Orthodoxy. He takes random potshots, and at times goes to great lengths to show how problematic Catholic rule was. He seems to revel in the idea that groups left the church early on and still flourished, and also enjoys pointing out how the Eastern Church preferred Islamic rule over Catholic subjection. (After starting this review I did some research and found out that Jenkins is a former Catholic who has converted to Anglicanism. Perhaps this is part of the issue.) Within this critique I was moderately frustrated with his treatment of general orthodoxy which he shrugs off as European and Catholic. The councils, while perhaps imperfect, must be seen with at least some sense of authoritative Spirit involvement, if not we lose a large portion of what most if not all would call orthodoxy. (He does agree that the Nestorians were not as far removed from Christianity as the gnostic heresy, which I appreciated). My second critique is the pace. At times Jenkins seems to bog down into every possible (and at times un-needed) detail, then at others times he will gloss over from so high it's difficult to see the major themes. All things considered "The Lost History" pays attention to a part of Christianity that is rarely considered. It looks charitably at the major players involved, and it pieces together a backstory that helps frame much of the turmoil we are still seeing in the Middle East.

A very interesting read, especially in our information age which seems to suffer from a lack of any real historical perspective. He ties together fascinating details, and brings out a very helpful picture of the Middle East and Asia and the impact and relationship of the 3 main world religions. It is helpful to understand that the author does not adhere to any of these faiths, and writes more from the perspective of humanist or archeologist that sees them all with mild sense that doesn't strongly reject or approve, but rather sees religions just as culture with positives and negatives. I found the lack of chronological order a bit scattered at first- he jumps time periods and nations and cultures from page to page, and while the reader must work a bit more to draw your own conclusions, the book serves to really paint the years of history that much of the west is largely ignorant of. Definitely worth a read. Regarding the kindle formatted file, I just wish that the references had links. For a historical work with tons of references and cited material this is quite frustrating, and largely means that you have to ignore all the references. Really with the book was updated with the links (which is the power of the kindle after all).

This book will completely change the way you look at the history of the Christian church. If you've ever wondered what happened to the descendants of the churches that Paul founded in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and points east, this book will tell you. It is striking that such a large part of the Christian church, its liturgy, its history and its theology, could be largely obliterated and lost to the rest of the church. Those who think that we live in the "end times" now need to read this book, as it describes a very real "end time" for Church of the East.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book about the forgotten history of the Christian church from Palestine to China. Because most of the churches throughout Asia were eventually extinguished, many modern Christians do not realize that nearly half of Christendom in the year 1000 AD existed outside of Europe. Places like Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Persia (Iran), Turkmenistan, Armenia, India, China and more had a strong Christian presence and thriving intellectual tradition. After outlining the history of these churches, and the history of their demise, the author then moves on to discussing how Eastern Christianity left its stamp on Islam. The final chapter is devoted to suggestions on how Christians might choose to understand the implications of the ostensible failure of so many churches. If you thought the history of Christianity was synonymous with the history of Europe (as I did), this book will be an eye-opening read for you! This book will also be of use for those interested in the history and development of Islam, which borrowed a significant number of traditions from its religious predecessor.

Lot of emphasis on certain little known / little documented personalities, presented as a series of anecdotal stories -- but not strict chronological order. Considering the available evidence, a pretty good job of transmitting the knowledge. Still, would have liked a broader scope written in a more linear fashion that would keep the flow of history more clearly in the foreground of the text.

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