

Module 3, Discussion 2: Spread of the Major Religions

Main Topic

In their earliest stages, the three major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity and Islam—were spread throughout the world by practitioners of each faith. These people traveled to foreign lands and then shared with and taught to others their beliefs. In the cases of Buddhism and Christianity, both were first established in many different locations and then grew slowly over a period of many centuries. These practitioners were successful in spreading their messages and beliefs across many parts of the world where small amounts of the local populations would learn, convert, begin practicing and eventually grow the religion in an area. Contrarily, the spread of Islam happened more rapidly and forcefully, covering much of Eurasia and Northern Africa within about one century. During this time, it is easy to refer to it as an imperial religion, in that the faith united its peoples into shared territory and societies. Because of this, larger numbers of people converted from their previous faiths over shorter periods of time.

Some of the success of these religions can be attributed to their adaptability. Many of the core principles and values of the religion would remain intact while the customs and beliefs of local cultures would be incorporated into the faith. This made the three religions more attractive to people and assisted in establishing them in more areas.

Interestingly, all three religions grew considerably when the faith was adopted by a ruler of a country or empire. Islam had this advantage from nearly the very beginning. Christianity benefited greatly by its eventual support from Constantine in Rome. Similarly, Buddhism benefited greatly by support from Siddhartha in India.

Re: Spread of the Major Religions (by Jason Davis)

With Islam, I didn't see a lot of force from what was talked about in the video. The armies of course brought the religion of Islam with them when they gained control of the lands like the video stated, but the Sufis that went to spread the message were not leaders.

It may not have been mentioned in the video, but I believe our book discusses how Islam spread quickly in its first century by taking lands in Northern Africa and many parts of Eurasia.

Christianity and Buddhism did not conquer lands in order to spread each faith (at least, not until much later for Christianity).

Re: Spread of the Major Religions (by Desislava Pedeva-Fazlic)

The video does not really elaborate on that, but soon after the emergence of religions and their spread, various sects within each religion came into existence. For example, Christianity first split into Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and there were a variety of other sects that the official Church considered heretic. Later after the Protestant Reformation, we see the proliferation of various Protestant sects, such as Calvinists, Lutherans, Puritans, Quakers etc.

Growing up a pagan, this confused me greatly!

Re: Buddhism, Christianity and Islam (by Sherry Fissori)

I think of those early religions and the word of mouth spreading of the message and think of the children's game "Rumor".

Except, instead of misunderstanding the original message, sometimes it was changed on purpose.