

ROBERT W. STRAYER: Chapter 15, Religion and Science in conflict. Alongside the global exchange of goods, the early modern era also witnessed the global exchange of ideas. These cultural interactions are the focus of Chapter 15.

Christianity spread across the Americas, and Philippines, Siberia, and elsewhere, turning what had been European Christianity into a genuinely world religion and transforming the spiritual outlook of millions of people. Modern science began in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, where it challenged both the teachings and the authority of Christian churches. It introduced a new way of thinking about the world, almost a religion for some people, which subsequently was adopted all over the world.

Within the Islamic world, a religious renewal movement known as Wahhabi Islam, tried to purify Islam, removing what they saw as illegitimate beliefs and practices that had crept in over the centuries. By the late 20th century, that form of Islam had acquired a global reach and motivated much of Islamic radicalism.

This exchange of ideas was seldom simple. It usually involved some combination of acceptance, adaptation, and resistance to what was new. Native Americans, for example, who adopted the religion of their European conquerors, made it their own, often identifying Christian figures with their own gods and spirits.

The background to Europe's scientific revolution included earlier borrowing of much Arab science. Even as the Catholic Church long resisted many elements of the new scientific outlook. Chinese authorities found elements of European science useful, particularly in its astronomy, mathematics, and map-making. But they largely rejected the religious message of Christian missionaries.

All of this serves as a reminder about the importance of ideas in history, for they shape the mental or cultural worlds that people everywhere inhabit, and they influence our behaviour as well. Ideas are important.