African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction
Eddie S. Glaude Jr.

African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction explores the history and circumstances of African American religion through three examples: conjure, African American Christianity, and African American Islam. It argues that the phrase “African American religion” is meaningful only insofar as it describes how through religion, African Americans have responded to oppressive conditions. This bold claim frames the interpretation of the historical record of diverse religious experiences in the African American community. The common tendency to racialize African American religious experiences as an inherent proclivity towards religiousness is rejected and instead the focus is on how religious communities and experiences have developed in the African American community and the context in which these developments took place.

African Religions: A Very Short Introduction
Jacob K. Olupona

African Religions: A Very Short Introduction offers a wide-ranging look at the myriad indigenous religious traditions on the African continent, drawing on archeological research, historical evidence, ethnographic studies, and archival materials. African religious belief—exploring myths, gods and local deities, ancestor worship, rites of passage, festivals, and divination—are considered and the role these religions play in everyday African life, from birthing and death, marriage and family dynamics, to diet, dress and grooming, health care, and even governance, is discussed. Christianity and Islam has spread throughout Africa, but the more extreme fundamentalist sects—which decry traditional religion as paganism—have driven a near total collapse of indigenous practice.

Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction
Robin Le Poidevin

Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction

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date: 20 September 2019
Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction asks if there is more to agnosticism than merely the absence of belief. What is agnosticism? Who were the first to call themselves ‘agnostics’? Agnosticism is something we encounter in science and ethics and should be considered as an historical and cultural phenomenon. It is not confined to the religious sphere. Some of the preconceptions and assumptions amongst both believers and non-atheists are examined and the philosophical case for agnosticism is set out. Agnosticism is a more complex attitude than simply a failure to either commit to, or reject, religious belief.

Angels: A Very Short Introduction
David Albert Jones

Angels: A Very Short Introduction outlines prominent stories and speculations about angels in Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and post-Christian spiritualties. What are angels? Where were they first encountered? Can we distinguish angels from gods, fairies, ghosts, and aliens? And why do they remain so popular? Angels have been portrayed in art as young men in the Hebrew Scriptures, androgynous winged creatures of the pre-Raphaelites, and as the masculine statue of the Angel of the North. Examples are provided of angels in films such as Wings of Desire, and It's a Wonderful Life, as well as angels in literature.

Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction
Mark Chapman

Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction highlights the diversity of contemporary Anglicanism by exploring its history, theology, and structures. Although originally united by location and a common belief, Anglicanism has gradually lost its pre-eminence as the English state religion due to increasing pluralism and secularization. Whilst there are distinctive themes and emphases which emerge from its early history and theology, there is little sense of unity in Anglicanism today. Putting the history and development of the religion into context, this VSI reveals what holds Anglicanism together despite the recent crises that threaten to tear it apart.

Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction
Steven Beller
Antisemitism, as hatred of Jews and Judaism, has been a central problem of Western civilization for millennia. *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* untangles the history of the phenomenon, from ancient religious conflict to ‘new’ antisemitism in the 21st century. It reveals how antisemitism grew as a political and ideological movement in the 19th century, how it reached its dark apogee in the Holocaust, and how it still persists around the world today. This new edition brings this examination of the complex and controversial issue up to date with a discussion of antisemitism in light of the 2008 financial crash, the Arab Spring, and the on-going crisis between Israel and Palestine.

### The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction

*Paul Foster*

The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction explores their origins, discovery, and discusses how the various texts have been interpreted both by the Church and beyond. What are the apocryphal gospels? How do the apocryphal gospels reflect the diversity that existed within early Christianity? To what extent can they be used to reconstruct an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus? These non-canonical texts, considered in the correct context, offer us an important window on the vibrant and multi-faceted face of early Christianity. They do have important limitations, however, and these are set against the limitations of using the New Testament gospels.

### Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction

*Fergus Kerr*

Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction is an introduction to this early thirteenth century Italian Catholic priest's work. Placing Aquinas in an historical context, it explores the Church and culture into which he was born. A controversial figure, often engaged in conflict, Aquinas was, and still is, considered to be one of the great Christian thinkers. He continues to have a profound influence on Western thought. Recently scholars have begun to insist on the importance of studying his biblical commentaries. This VSI is centred on *The Summa Theologiae*, his greatest and most discussed single work, and some of the debates it has given rise to.

### Atheism: A Very Short Introduction

*Julian Baggini*

Atheism: A Very Short Introduction
Atheism is often considered to be a negative, dark, and pessimistic belief that is characterized by a rejection of values and purpose and a fierce opposition to religion. Atheism: A Very Short Introduction sets out to dispel the myths that surround atheism and show how a life without religious belief can be positive, meaningful, and moral. The book presents an intellectual case for atheism that rests as much upon positive arguments for its truth as on negative arguments against religion. It also confronts the failure of officially atheist states in the twentieth century.

Augustine: A Very Short Introduction
Henry Chadwick

Augustine: A Very Short Introduction traces the development of Augustine's thought, discussing his reaction to the thinkers before him, and themes such as freedom, creation, and the trinity. By his writings, the surviving bulk of which exceeds that of any other ancient author, Augustine came to influence not only his contemporaries but also thinkers in the West since his time. He was a key figure in the transition from pagan to specifically Christian philosophy. How did Augustine's thought develop? What were the key influences upon his thought? How important were themes such as free will, time, and ethics to him?

The Bible: A Very Short Introduction
John Riches

The Bible: A Very Short Introduction looks at the importance accorded to the Bible by different communities and cultures. Why has the Bible generated such a variety of uses and interpretations? How was it written? What is the canon and what role does Biblical criticism play? This VSI explores all these issues as well as examining why the Bible has been such an influence on Western culture and why it continues to exert an enormous influence over many people's lives. It also considers how the Bible has been appropriated by high and popular culture and its use for political ends.

The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction
Brian Cummings
The Book of Common Prayer is one of the most influential books in history. For nearly six centuries, it has formed the order of worship for established Christianity in England, and is now printed in many languages around the world. The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction tells the fascinating history of the book, from medieval to modern times, and explains why it is easily misunderstood. Changing in meaning and context over time, the Book of Common Prayer has acted as a cultural symbol, affecting the everyday conduct of life as much as the spiritual, and dividing conformity from non-conformity, in social terms as well as religious, from birth to marriage to death.

The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction
Terryl L. Givens

Print Publication Year: 2010 Published Online: Sep 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780195369311.001.0001

The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction examines the Book of Mormon primarily in terms of the claims that its narrators make for its historical genesis, its purpose as a sacred text, and its meaning for an audience which shifts over the course of the history it unfolds. Five governing themes — revelation, Christ, Zion, scripture, and covenant — serve as vectors for analysis of the Book's central doctrines and teachings, particularly in relation to familiar nineteenth-century religious preoccupations. This VSI samples characters and representative passages from the Book and surveys its contested origins and addresses questions of the record's historicity.

Buddha: A Very Short Introduction
Michael Carrithers

Print Publication Year: 2001 Published Online: Sep 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780192854537.001.0001

The Buddha: A Very Short Introduction examines the complex and sometimes conflicting information that Buddhist texts give about the life and teaching of the Buddha. What can we learn about the social and political background of India in the Buddha's time? How did his thought develop into what constitutes Buddhist thought today? How has Buddhism survived so well through the centuries? What is the contemporary relevance of Buddhism? His teaching prospered throughout the subcontinent of India for more than 1,500 years and by the 13th century ad it had spread. Until the 20th century, the Buddha was probably the most influential thinker in human history.

Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction
Damien Keown

Print Publication Year: 2013 Published Online: Sep 2013
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780199663835.001.0001
Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction introduces the reader to the teachings of the Buddha and to the workings of Buddhism in daily life. It looks at the distinctive features of Buddhism, examining who the Buddha was and what his teachings were. By considering how Buddhist thought has developed over the centuries, this VSI considers how contemporary dilemmas can be faced from a Buddhist perspective. This new edition provides new perspectives on Buddhist thought, including up-to-date material about the evolution of Buddhism throughout Asia, the material culture of Buddhism and its importance, new teachings on the ethics of war and peace, and changes to ethnicity, class, and gender.

Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction
Damien Keown

Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction illustrates how Buddhism might approach a range of fascinating dilemmas confronting the modern world, ethical moral issues ranging from abortion and suicide to cloning. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a growing interest in Buddhism, and it continues to capture the imagination of many in the West who see it as either an alternative or a supplement to their own religious beliefs. Why is it that ethics has not received as much attention in traditional Buddhist thought as it has in the West? Why are there so few publications on the subject?

Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction
Jon Balserak

Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction explores major ideas associated with the Calvinist system of thought. Beginning during the Protestant Reformation in cities like Zurich, Geneva, and Basel, Calvinism—also known as Reformed Theology—spread rapidly throughout Europe and the New World, eventually making its way to the African Continent and the East. This VSI examines how Calvinism spread and took root, helping shape church, society, and much of contemporary thought, especially Western thought, on everything from theology to civil government, economics, the arts, work and leisure, education, and the family. The common misconceptions and objections to Calvinism are examined, along with a Calvinist understanding of God, the world, humankind, and the meaning of life.
Despite a long history of external threats and internal strife, the Roman Catholic Church remains a vast and influential presence in our modern world. But what were its origins, and how has it changed over the centuries? Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction covers the history of the Catholic Church and considers some of the key issues facing Catholicism today, such as the recent clerical abuse scandals and the impact of the growth of Islam. It also shows how Catholics are being increasingly challenged by tensions between their traditional Christian values and rights endorsed by the secular world, and considers the future for the largest and oldest institution in the world.

Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction
Beth Williamson

Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction explores the work of major artists such as Memling, Holbein, El Greco, and Rossetti, and well-known examples including the frescoes of St Francis at Assisi. How do didactic and consciously devotional works compare with the controversial work of contemporary artists such as Andres Serrano and Chris Ofili? Christian images have a long history within the Western art tradition, from the narrative and devotional works of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, to the radical new interpretations of the twenty-first century. Over the centuries the nature of the representation of key themes and subjects found in Christian art such as the Eucharist, the crucifixion, the Virgin Mary, and the saints has changed considerably.

Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction
D. Stephen Long

Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction presents a discussion of the relationship between Christian ethics, modern, and postmodern ethics, and explores practical issues including sex, money, and power. What are the inherent difficulties in bringing together ‘Christian’ and ‘ethics’? Christian ethics is not a precise science; rather, it is the cultivation of practical wisdom from a range of sources. This VSI looks at the failures of the Christian tradition, including the crusades, the conquest, slavery, inquisitions, and the Galileo affair.
These events raise challenges for modern Christian ethics. They have implications in the modern era, that affect our lives in the present age.