

## World Religions in Greater Indianapolis Teaching Module

**Teacher Name:** Joshua M. Phillippe

**Humanities Discipline:** Art History

**Date:** January 29, 2016

**World Religion:** Christianity

**Teaching Module Title:** Christianity and the Altarpiece

### Teaching Module Goals:

1. Discuss the foundation, growth, and divisions within Christianity.
2. Familiarize students with concepts of the Eucharist, Incarnation, and Holy Orders.
3. Reflection and class discussions focusing on Roger van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* altar wall fresco.

### Assigned Reading and Videos:

John Bowker, *World Religions*, "Christianity", emphasis on pages 150-153, 164-173.

Khan Academy Videos, Dr. Beth Harris & Dr. Steven Zucker on Michelangelo  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2MuTvQM61Y>, Last Judgment Fresco, 8 minutes  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEE3B8Fsuc0>, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 7 minutes

### Study Questions and/or Discussions Prompts for Students:

1. What is the Eucharist?
2. What is the Incarnation?
3. Why is St. Benedict of Nursia an important monastic figure (pg. 166)?
4. What is the "Great Schism" (pg. 168-169)?
5. Completed in 1450 Roger van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (pg. 164-165, detail on pg. 150) is dense with Catholic imagery. Angels hover throughout the composition with robes and wings painted the symbolic color associated with each sacrament. What are the seven Catholic sacraments and what are their representative colors?
6. How did the invention of the printing press change Christianity (pg. 170-171)?
7. *The Last Judgment* (pg. 172-173) was the final fresco that Michelangelo painted for the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo began working on it twenty-five years after he had completed his famous ceiling. The post-Reformation judgment scene visualizes "the saved" being separated from "the damned" in a more graphic and violent manner than his highly ordered ceiling. Describe a few of the differences in this Last Judgment wall painting and the Orthodox judgment icon on page 169. How would you describe Michelangelo's style and arrangement? Screen the [video](#) on this fresco linked above. What components do you find most interesting in this complicated composition? Both this work and Van der Weyden's oil painting were created for display behind the altar. Consider their different messages and be prepared to discuss both artworks further in class.



*The Last Judgment* (1536-1541), Michelangelo (1475-1564), fresco on altar wall, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Rome