



“Christ the Redeemer” Statue Is a Rio Icon

All visitors to Rio de Janeiro, certainly including the 35,000 arrivals for the 2012 Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, can't help but notice the imposing “Christ the Redeemer” statue overlooking the city. Brazil's most famous landmark, the structure sits atop the 2,300-foot mountain named Corcovado. Built over nine years, the completed monument was opened to the public in 1931. But it has a long history.



Since its colonization in the 16th Century, Brazil's people have always been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. By itself, the country occupies more than half of the land mass of South America and is the continent's only nation whose chief language is Portuguese. Disputes between Spanish and Portuguese colonizers five centuries ago led to a papal decision that essentially divided what was known of the geographical makeup of the continent's land mass. Henceforth, it would be Spanish territory to the west and Portuguese territory to the east. Spanish colonies ultimately divided into many countries; the Portuguese colonial areas resulted in just the one very large country.

By the 1850s, Catholicism's dominance led to a desire to build a large religious monument to celebrate some aspect of the faith. When the idea reached Portugal, the royal family dismissed it. But, after Brazil separated from Portugal in 1889 to become an independent republic, the idea gained more support. In 1921, a group known as the Catholic Circle of Rio began collecting funds from the people that led to the start of construction in 1922. The cost in 1920 dollars was \$250,000 (more than \$3.2 million today).

Suggestions to build either a huge cross or a figure of Jesus with a globe in His hands were discarded in favor of depicting the role of “Christ the Redeemer.” That designation of God stems from the belief shared by Catholics with other Christians that the sins of Adam and their descendants were of infinite character because the God whom they offended is Himself infinite. No finite man, believers claim, could atone for an infinite offense. In time, therefore, God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and, as a member of the human race, offered Himself as mankind's redeemer.

Including its pedestal, the reinforced concrete statue is 130 feet tall with the finger tip to finger tip span measuring 98 feet. The Statue of Liberty in New York harbor is more than twice its height. Both it and Rio's famous landmark are dwarfed by the Spring Temple Buddha in Henan, China.

Over the past 10 years, the addition of escalators, elevators and walkways has made easier the climb to the statue's base. Completed in 2006, a chapel built at the base has become the site of Catholic baptisms and weddings. The chapel is named after Our Lady of the Apparition, the patron saint of Brazil.

“Christ the Redeemer” has not escaped attention from Hollywood movie producers who have used photos of the famous structure in a 1942 film starring Bette Davis and in a 1946 Alfred Hitchcock production featuring Ingrid Bergman. Various videogames have also depicted the statue in uncomplimentary ways. In 2010, a vandal sprayed graffiti on the statue's head.



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on June 21, 2012

Named one of the “New7Wonders of the World” in 2007, “Christ the Redeemer” is listed alongside India’s Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, Peru’s Machu Picchu, the Chichen Itza pyramid in Mexico, the Colosseum in Rome, and Jordan’s Petra Temple. The Swiss-based New7Wonders Foundation, established in 2001, has been the recipient of both praise and condemnation for its choices and exclusions.



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