

TRRS4010 – CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM
5. GLOBAL MISSION AND THE CHRISTIAN SOUTH

Western Christianity dominated the world until the last half of the twentieth century. This was due to the primacy of Rome in religious matters and the dominance of Europe politically, with several European nations – Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal in particular – expanding their Empires throughout the world. As the Empires expanded, so the particular form of Christianity which existed in Europe (and in the ‘mother’ countries) was taken to other parts of the globe.

The political aspect cannot be underestimated. Christianity was initially firmly established in the middle-east and, even in the year 1200, estimates suggest that around half the people claiming to be Christian lived in that region and in north Africa, which had been a particularly important region in early Christianity, especially Egypt. Indeed, the Metropolitan of Alexandria was considered second in importance only to the Bishop (Pope) in Rome. Alexandria was the setting for a number of early theological debates about the nature of the person of Christ and is associated with Church ‘Fathers’ such as Clement (c.150-c.215) and Origen (c.184-c.254). Alexandria remains the home of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, though Christianity is a minority religion in Egypt, Islam being dominant since the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 641. Indeed, Christianity lost much of its early territory in the Middle East to Islam as the latter expanded from the seventh century.

Catholic Expansion

The Catholic Church established the Commission *Sacra Congregatio De Propaganda Fide* (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) in 1622. Pope John Paul II renamed it *Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione* (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples). The *Congregation* coordinates missionary work on behalf of the Church and its original task was to provide both missionary and pastoral agencies in the lands which were annexed as part of European empires. The Dutch and British Empires were expanding at this time and there was concern among Catholics that Protestantism would spread throughout the world in the wake of these Empires’ economic activity.

The Catholic Church organized its evangelism through a number of religious orders, including:

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits), an order founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in 1534. Ignatius was a soldier who had been wounded in battle and experienced a religious conversion. He composed a work called

Spiritual Exercises which is considered a classic in the world of spirituality and has been used widely by Christians for personal devotion ever since. Ignatius's loyalty to the Catholic Church was demonstrated in a vow of absolute obedience to the Pope. In 1534, he and six others (including Francis Xavier – see below) took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and the Society of Jesus was born. In Latin the order is known as *Societas Jesu*, and members append the initials SJ to their name.

The Franciscan orders are comprised of groups of men who follow the Rule of St Francis. The Catholic Franciscans are usually those who belong to the Order of Friars Minor (Latin: *Ordo Fratrum Minorum*) and who append the initials OFM to their name. The Order is a Mendicant Order, which means that it is solely dependent for its existence on charity. (There are Franciscans within other Christian traditions, but they do not concern us here.)

The Dominican Order was approved in 1216. It was founded by Saint Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) in France as an order of those dedicated to preaching the gospel and combating heresy. The official title is the Order of Preachers (Latin: *Ordo Praedicatorum*) which gives rise to members of the order adding OP to their names. The tradition of wearing a black cloak over a white habit gives rise to their nickname – the Black Friars (as opposed to the Grey Friars such as Franciscans, or White Friars, Carmellites). Dominicans are Mendicants and are committed to living out religion in the world rather than behind the walls of a monastery.

Protestant Expansion

There is no single Protestant Church and thus the missionary endeavours of Protestants, and the expansion of Protestantism throughout the globe, is the result of a number of events and a number of organizations rather than a single, centralized institution. Some of the main events and organizations include:

In the seventeenth century, there was a mass movement of Puritan Christians from England and from Europe to the Americas which spread Christianity into that region of the world. This is particularly significant, because the Puritans saw the Americas as a kind of 'promised land' where they could establish their own kind of Christian practice and, in some senses, establish a 'godly commonwealth' where God's laws regulated civil society as well as the Christian communities. Subsequently the United States of America declared itself to be secular and enshrined in its constitution the idea that government would not favour any religious expression. This arose from the need to establish a society in which

religion could be practised freely according to conscience (a right denied the Puritans in England and in Europe at that time). However, a remnant of this can still be discerned in US policy which sees the nation itself as fulfilling a vocation given to it by God to establish democracy throughout the world. This lies behind much US policy post 9/11, its activity in Afghanistan and its intervention in Iraq.

The Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century – associated primarily in the UK with the emergence of Methodism – also gave new impetus to missionary activity. This occurred for a number of reasons. The Methodist Revival – led by George Whitefield and John Wesley – asked questions about the indiscriminate offer of the gospel to all. It concluded (in general) that the gospel should be preached to all even if not all will ultimately be ‘saved’. For our purposes, it is important to note that the Evangelical Revival resulted in renewed activity in the Americas (especially through Whitefield, but also through Wesley, while there was also a Revival in North America associated primarily with the name of Jonathan Edwards) as well as in Southern Africa, India and the territories of the South Pacific.

As a result of the Evangelical Revival, a number of Missionary Societies were formed. The first was the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), formed during a meeting in Kettering. It was initially called the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen. Initially it sent missionaries to India, but later also sent them to Asia (especially China), the Caribbean, Africa (especially the Congo), South America and into Europe. It still exists, though it is now known as BMS World Mission and supports over 300 workers in 40 countries. The London Missionary Society was founded in 1795. It was intended to be non-denominational and was founded by an alliance of evangelical Anglicans and Nonconformists (largely Congregationalists). Its missionary focus was on the islands of the South Pacific and Africa, especially Southern Africa, and Madagascar. In 1966, the LMS merged with the Commonwealth Missionary Society to form the Congregational Council for World Mission (CCWM). When most Congregationalists united with the Presbyterian Church of England to form the United Reformed Church in 1972, CCWM became the Council for World Mission (Congregational and Reformed). In 1977 it dropped the brackets. The Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799, is a group of missionary-focused societies within the Anglican Communion. It has engaged in missionary activities in Palestine, Hong Kong, India, New Zealand and Africa (especially west and east Africa).

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America began to be colonized by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century. Franciscan missionaries arrived in Mexico in 1522 and established schools, model farms and hospitals. The Spanish passed laws demanding that the indigenous people learn Spanish and listen to Christian preaching, though it fell short of demanding conversion. The Jesuits were particularly significant in the Catholic missions and they moved north into what is now known as California, New Mexico, Texas and Arizona. By the eighteenth century the area was Christianized with a particular bias towards Catholicism.

In the last fifty years or so, a particular way of doing theology has emerged from Latin America which has impacted on Christian thinking throughout the world. It is called 'Liberation Theology'. The origins can be traced to a meeting of the Latin American bishops (Catholic) in Medellin, Colombia in 1968 (called CELAM II). During that meeting, the bishops acknowledged that the church had tended to side with the oppressive governments in the region rather than with the poor. The confession was given thorough theological treatment by Gustavo Gutierrez in his 1971 publication *Theology of Liberation*. There are a number of other prominent liberation theologians including Leonardo Boff (b. 1938), Juan Luis Segundo (1925-96), Jon Sobrino (b. 1938).

The main tenet of Liberation Theology revolves around the idea of the 'Poor'. The 'poor' is a technical term. While initially it referred to the economically poor, over time it came to represent anyone who suffered oppression. Thus it was extended to include those who suffered from racism, sexism and so on. According to Bonino, 'God is clearly and unequivocally on the side of the poor'. They occupy a special place in the interpretation of the Christian faith. Thus Liberation Theology claimed that Christian faith would be best appreciated 'from below', from its practitioners, rather than from the doctrinal standards set by the church (especially the Roman Catholic Church). As a result, Christianity begins with an account of where people actually are, an analysis of their condition in life, and a critique of the forces which oppress them. This was expressed by Bonino in these terms: 'Theology has to stop explaining the world, and start transforming it'.

While still fairly dominant in the area, the Catholic Church has been seen to lose its grip on Latin America, with the emergence and popularity especially of evangelical and charismatic churches (Pentecostal churches) in the years since the 1960s. This has arisen for a number of reasons:

1. Latin America has shifted its focus towards the USA with its political and economic policies. Catholicism was associated too much with the

oppressive and hierarchical regimes of Latin America and a quite significant dissatisfaction has been expressed about both.

2. Liberation Theology was associated with the emergence of 'ecclesial base communities' which were groups of ordinary people meeting to consider their plight in light of the Bible. These 'Base Communities' in time became their own, self-regulating church communities.
3. The impact of Pentecostalism in the Latin American context cannot be underestimated. Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on baptism of the Spirit and immediate contact by God appealed to indigenous forms and practices.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

1521 saw the 'discovery' of 3,141 islands in the region now known as the Philippines by Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521). Evangelization subsequently occurred by Franciscan and Dominican missionaries who converted the area to Catholicism. The Philippines remains the only country in the region which is predominantly Christian.

1549 saw the arrival in Japan of Francis Xavier (1506-52). Born in Navarre, Spain, Francis Xavier was one of the original members of the Society of Jesus. Xavier was active in missionary work in India and in Japan. He learnt Japanese, abandoned the commitment to poverty, and used Shinto words for the Christian God. Such 'enculturization' (where the Christian message is dressed in local terms and concepts) would later become a strategy on the part of Catholic missionaries. Nevertheless, Xavier was not particularly successful in attracting the Japanese.

China was infiltrated by Christian missions at least by 781. In 1294 Franciscan missionaries reached China, but the country was soon closed to western influences. James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was a significant influence, demanding that single women should be accepted as missionaries and that missionaries wear Chinese rather than western dress. He established the China Inland Mission and worked in China for fifty-one years, being there through the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) which saw demands for foreigners to be expelled from China and resulted in an invasion force including British, German, Russian, French and American troops to quell the uprising (largely to secure European trade interests, especially surrounding the trade in Opium). The establishment of the Marxist (Communist) People's Republic of China in 1949 saw the country closed to western missionaries and this continued to at least 1979.

KOREA

Korea has been traditionally a closed country. It opened up in 1883 as a result of a treaty signed with America. After that Presbyterian missionaries entered the country. In 1910, Japan invaded and imposed Shintoism on the land. After the Second World War, and the emancipation of Korea from Japanese rule, missionary activity resumed and saw immense growth. Currently, around 35-40% of the population profess Christian faith. The Korean Church is mainly Presbyterian, though there are a host of breakaway Presbyterian denominations in the country. Unlike other areas in south-east Asia, in Korea the association with Christianity with the West is not an issue. The 'west' liberated the land from Japanese rule and tyranny, and Christianity, as a result, is associated with liberation. There are currently about 18 million Christians in South Korea (from a population of around 50 million) of whom around 15 million are Protestant and around 10 million belong to one or other of the 100+ Presbyterian denominations.

AFRICA

Christianity spread into North Africa in the early years of Christian expansion, possibly even during the first and second centuries of the Christian Era. In what we now know as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and in Egypt, significant Christian communities were established. In the early years of the spread of Christianity, Egypt was singularly important, especially the community based in the city of Alexandria. These territories were gradually lost following the Arab invasions of the seventh century, though communities of Coptic and Orthodox Christians remain in Egypt, for example. By the sixteenth century, North Africa was predominantly Muslim and has remained so until the present day. Southern Africa relied more on indigenous religion.

Missionary activity increased as a result of the establishment of Catholic missions in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the expansion of the European Empires, Belgium, England, France and Germany. South Africa was also influenced by the immigration of a number of Dutch Reformed settlers, who came into conflict with the British (who had controlled the region as part of its Empire from 1795) and led ultimately to the Boer Wars (1880-1881; 1899-1902).

The end of colonialisation, after the Second World War led to the African churches breaking links with the churches in the 'motherland' and establishing their own organization.

From southern Africa, the concept of Ubuntu has emerged as a strictly African contribution to philosophical and theological thought. The word can be translated as 'human-ness' or as 'human kindness'. It became popular during the 1950s with thinkers calling for the Africanization of Africa following the collapse of the major Empires and the gaining of independence by former colonies. It was propounded in Zimbabwe and South Africa as the countries moved to black-majority rule and the suggestion was that it exists only in blacks and is lacking in whites.

The concept is difficult to define and explain, but it basically sees society as giving human identity; in other words we are who we are with and alongside others. In one sense it rejects the kind of individualism seen in the West where people self-define or seek some kind of transcendent justification for their identity. Desmond Tutu (b. 1931), first black Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, founder and co-chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up after the dismantling of Apartheid in order to try to avoid any reprisals by the majority black population on the minority whites, says that 'Ubuntu' is the essence of being human.

INDIA

Tradition has it that Christianity was brought to India by the disciple Thomas, sometimes known as 'doubting Thomas' because of his absence from the group of disciples at the resurrection appearances and his insistence that he would not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead unless he could see him and place his hands into Jesus' wounds. The India Mar Thomas Church claims that it was established by the disciple. This cannot be verified, but we know that traders passing through the area as early as the fourth century came across communities of Christians.

The Portuguese were in India from around 1481 and missions took on a greater significance with the arrival of Francis Xavier on 6 May 1542. The Dutch, English, French settled in the land. Missionary movements suffered from being too easily associated with the government, and some opposition emerged under the belief that Christianity was a western imposition. This led to the so-called 'Indian mutiny' in 1857, for example.

There were a number of attempts to syncretise Christianity with indigenous Hindu belief. Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) is an early example of this, though his conviction that the Hindu would never accept Trinitarianism or the notion of the Atonement, led to him suggesting that a Christianity that was Unitarian, and which emphasized a moral code, would best suit the Indian context.

1947 CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA – established as a union of the south Indian dioceses of the Anglican Church, the South India United Church (union of Congregationalists and Presbyterians) and the South India District of the Methodist Church. First scheme of its kind, seeking church reunion, in the world

DALIT THEOLOGY – Dalits are the untouchables according to the Hindu caste system and they make up around 70% of India's Christians. Arvind P. Nirmal (1939-95) a Dalit member of the Church of North India was prominent in establishing the movement. He criticized the Brahmin (high-caste) dominance of Christian theology in India and called for a theology which was based on the 'Nazareth Manifesto' of Luke 4 (16-21), where Jesus proclaimed that Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled because good news was being proclaimed to the poor, the blind receive sight and the captives are released. Nirmal concentrated on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in order to identify Jesus as a Dalit. As Jesus was a Dalit, the Church should concentrate on Dalit concerns. There are some similarities with Liberation Theology, though Marxism is rejected, as is syncretizing Christianity with indigenous practices, as these are seen as giving force to the caste system.

The Global South

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that Christianity was always a global phenomenon, highlighting the spread of Christian missions from the earliest days of the movement and the renewed vigour of missionary activities from around the sixteenth century and the expansion of the European empires. Alongside this, the discussion has also highlighted certain aspects of global Christianity, emanating from the global 'south', which have contributed to Christian theology.

Scholars such as Philip Jenkins, have observed a shift in Christianity's 'centre of gravity' from the West to the global 'South'. He characterizes this as 'The Next Christendom' where the West, with its traditions of ecclesiastical order and authority as well as its traditions of scholarship, liberal theology and biblical criticism, will be eclipsed by the sheer size of the Christian population in the southern hemisphere.

Southern Christianity is characterized by a more literal approach to the scriptures, a degree of compromise with indigenous beliefs and practices, a dependence on the Charismatic and its immediate apprehension of God and a tendency to be more overtly social and political. In future, then, Jenkins argues that Christianity will increasingly find its global leaders, its theological character and its church order from African, Asian and Latin American contexts and because those contexts are socially, culturally, politically and religiously different

from those of the West, so too the nature of Christianity in the future is likely to be different. To some degree we can see the effects of this already in the appointment of John Sentamu as Archbishop of York, the second most senior position in the Church of England, in 2005, and the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis on 13 March 2013, the first non-European to occupy the papal office.

Jenkins also highlights that the shift of the centre of gravity in Christianity will lead to what he identifies as the 'next crusade', which will comprise real and potential conflicts in a world polarized by religion. This is especially highlighted in the current context as the battle between Islam and Christianity is particularly clear in the global South.