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From Christianity to World Christianity

Introduction

Every now and then I notice stunned faces and sometimes even receive overt protests from students when I mention that Jesus was not a Christian and that he did not go to Sunday Masses or participate in Holy Communion. Of course, the more informed will immediately blurt out that he was a Jew and so a follower of Judaism, the Jewish religion. But those who know next to nothing about the Christian faith automatically presume that Jesus must have been the exemplary Christian whom Christians of all generations are called to follow in discipleship. Christians, after all, take their name from Jesus Christ and have been taught, as the lyrics of the hymn goes, "to follow Christ and love the world as he did." It is difficult to imagine a Christ who is not Christian or that he is not a member of our own Christian denomination.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the Jewish roots of Christianity, shedding light especially on the context and theology that gave rise to the Christian movement. It then examines Christianity's growth and development, mainly in its initial years, highlighting the challenges the emerging community had to confront from the external world. That the Christian tradition is by no means homogenous is then presented, particularly in the context of Christian divisions over the centuries. The origins and characteristics of the different Christian denominations are delineated, pointing to theological as well as socio-political causes for the splits. Finally, the advent of the notion of world Christianity will be interrogated in the light of the demographic shift of the Christian world from the global North to the global South.

Jewish Roots of Christianity

Christianity has its origins in Jesus of Nazareth who clearly inspired a following that, after his death, went on to establish themselves as a religious community independent of the Jewish religion that they all hailed from. To be sure, Jesus, like most Jewish people in Galilee and Judea of the first century, was a faithful Jew who adhered to the basic tenets of Judaism, including its laws and customs. They observed the teachings of the faith as revealed to them through the Hebrew Scriptures, which is also known as the Jewish Bible. The various books that make up the Bible (the Torah, Prophets, and Writings) developed over roughly a millennium, the oldest sections believed to have come from around the tenth century BCE. A lot of the most important texts were edited while the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, an ancient Mesopotamian city located in present-day Iraq.

The Bible begins with the two stories of creation in the book of Genesis that depict God as creator of heaven and earth and all that dwells therein. Unlike the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish* (with its depiction of earthly creation in the context of the battles and murders among deities), the first chapter of Genesis speaks of creation in the context of God's blessings and of human beings as the apex of creation, created in God's own image (Gen 1:26-27). Just before God rested at the end of creation, human beings were instructed to be "fruitful and multiply" and were bestowed with the responsibility of being co-creators with God on earth (Gen 1:28). While God saw that the whole of creation "was very good" (Gen 1:31), creation is by nature not perfect and, therefore, subject to making mistakes, being weak, and even committing sinful and evil acts. A condition of finitude is what it means to be created, and it is in this context that the second creation account relates the story of Adam and Eve, highlighting humanity's sin and the Fall (Gen 2–3). The theological anthropology presented by the Bible is that of a God who is omnipotent love and mercy amid the brokenness of the created world and despite human frailty. Such is the nature of God and, more important, such is the nature of creation and humankind. The biblical creation myths serve as the foundation for all of Israel's theology, shaping the history of the people, speaking to their faithfulness as well as sinfulness throughout the centuries.

The accounts of the first eleven chapters of Genesis are actually in the realm of prehistory. The history of the Jewish people generally begins

in Genesis 12, with the call of Abram (whose name God changed to Abraham): "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing' " (Gen 12:1-2). Abraham and his family moved and eventually settled in the Promised Land of Canaan, which is variously referred to as Israel, Judea, or Palestine. God later enters into a covenant with Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you" (Gen 17:7). This covenant becomes the basis for the later theology of the Jews as God's chosen people and Israel as the land promised them by God. Abraham and his descendants made Canaan their home until a famine struck when his grandson Jacob—whose name God changed to Israel (Gen 32:28)—brought the whole family down to live in Egypt (Gen 46).

While initially the people of Israel were living in Egypt as guests of Pharaoh, with time they served as slaves and suffered oppression for many generations. Hearing their cries (albeit only after four hundred years!), God calls on Moses to liberate them from the bondage in Egypt and lead them back to Canaan, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:17). The exodus from Egypt and the journey back to the Promised Land are constitutive components of the theological history of the people of Israel. Beginning with the ten plagues that befell Egypt and the Passover meal, the Israelites escaped the pursuing Egyptian army by crossing the Red Sea and then wandered around the desert of the Sinai Peninsula for forty years. It was from Mount Sinai that Moses brought down the Ten Commandments and renewed the people's covenant with God. The Mosaic covenant or Law of Moses is recorded in the first five books of the Bible, collectively called the Torah. The Israelites eventually made their way back to Canaan, where the land was carved out and given to the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. They were subsequently organized into a confederacy of the twelve tribes of Israel and ruled by a series of military rulers called judges.

After several hundred years in the Promised Land, the Israelite monarchy was established under Saul and continued under King David and his son Solomon. Jerusalem became the national and spiritual capital, and it was there that King Solomon built the First Temple. Upon his

death, however, war erupted between the tribes, which led eventually to the united kingdom being split into the kingdom of Israel (consisting of ten tribes in the north) and the kingdom of Judah (consisting of two tribes in the south). The neighboring Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in the eighth century, resulting in the dispersion of the ten tribes of Israel. The Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom in 587 BCE, destroyed the First Temple, and exiled many of the Israelites to Babylon. It was in Babylon where the Israelites engaged in much soul searching and interpretation about God's covenant with Israel: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion" (Ps 137:1).

It was therefore while they were in exile that the people of Israel reflected on and redefined their preexisting ideas about the theologies of monotheism, election, divine law, and covenant; these ideas eventually evolved into a strict monotheistic faith. When the Persians defeated the Babylonians the Israelites were allowed to return to their homeland in 537 BCE, and the Second Temple was built later. The Macedonian Greeks under Alexander the Great conquered Israel in the fourth century, and in 64 BCE the Promised Land came under Roman rule. It was in the context of being dispossessed from the Promised Land that the Jewish people developed the theology of the messiah. He was to be the anointed leader who would liberate them from foreign rule and oppression and reestablish the one united kingdom in fulfillment of God's covenant with the people of Israel.

Birth and Development of Christianity

Jesus of Nazareth was born in the messianic age when Judea was under Roman rule and the people of Israel were subjugated. His teaching ministry in Galilee attracted a small group of Jewish disciples, some of whom might have believed that he was the long-awaited messiah who would liberate them from foreign occupation. But the horrific torture and crucifixion of their leader and master forced the disciples to rethink and reflect on his life and message against Hebrew Scriptures. Prophetic texts such as Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Suffering Servant of Israel—who was "despised and rejected by others" (v. 3), "wounded for our transgressions" (v. 5), as it was "the will of the LORD to crush him with pain" (v. 10),

and "yet he bore the sin of many" (v. 12)—helped in their appreciation of who Jesus really was. Collapsing Isaiah's theology of the Suffering Servant with that of the Jewish theology of the messiah, they saw Jesus as representing the "Suffering Messiah." This was a profoundly new doctrine the nascent community of Jesus' disciples developed that was not found within the Jewish tradition. The shameful suffering and death of Jesus then not only made sense but also empowered the disciples. The death on the cross was not the end as Peter, the head of the disciples, asserts: "God raised him up, having freed him from death" (Acts 2:24). This Jesus who was crucified and died is now experienced by his followers as the risen Christ. It was the experience of the resurrection that gave birth to the Christian movement.

The Christian disciples' new understanding of messiahship then transformed to seeing Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, who had been resurrected by God and who would return to earth again at the end time to usher in the kingdom of God that was promised. All the other messianic prophecies would then be fulfilled. So, rather than being just the Jewish messiah, Jesus was now seen as the Messiah for the whole of humankind. He was also believed to be God's self-revelation here on earth: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). The early Christians believed that in the person and life of Jesus, God had revealed God's self in human form to humanity. That is the only way the finite human can ever know the infinite God: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18). This new understanding of the identity of Jesus was liberating as well as empowering, leading the disciples not only to believe but also to take seriously the command that they should "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20).

The early Christians' understanding of Jesus and their own role in history are reflected in how they then looked at Hebrew Scriptures. Being the only scriptures that they had ever known and believing that some of the prophecies within had been fulfilled by Jesus, they adopted the Jewish Bible as their own. They, however, renamed it "Old Testament" (old covenant), implying that a new covenant had already been inaugurated by Jesus, whom they believed is Son of God. They changed the order of the books in the Bible to reflect this. While the Jewish Bible concludes

with the book of Chronicles, which carries the accounts of the Babylonian exile, the Christian "Old Testament" ends with the minor prophetic books (Malachi, Zechariah, Haggai, Zephaniah, etc.) that made reference to the coming of the messiah. The early Christians applied these references to Jesus. For example, the prophecy in Micah—"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel" (Mic 5:2)—was seen by the early Christians as referring to where Jesus was to be born. Haggai's "I am about to shake the heavens and the earth" (Hag 2:21) is interpreted as having been accomplished in Jesus as the book of Hebrews of the early Christians makes this reference to him: "At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven'" (Heb 12:26). Likewise, Malachi's "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" (Mal 3:1) is believed to refer to John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, respectively. Many of these prophecies can be found lavishly integrated into the texts of the new scriptures that the early Christian community developed. They called this the New Testament, with the gospels focusing on the life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus, the book of Acts giving an account of the early church's expansion, the epistles revealing the developing theology, doctrine, and practice of the various Christian communities, and the book of Revelation depicting the teachings related to the apocalypse or end times. Like the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Scriptures or New Testament were meant to inspire the disciples of Christ to order their lives accordingly and to persevere in their faith despite the challenges incumbent on a new religious movement.

The challenges the early Christians encountered were many, especially from the external community. They began as a small sect of Judaism in a religiously plural, culturally diverse, and philosophically rich Mediterranean world. The Jews regarded the Judaic Christians as no more than apostates of the monotheistic faith, misled by a false messiah who blasphemously claimed identity with the absolute God. With time, the Judaic Christians became increasingly marginalized and unwelcome in the temple, and many were practically driven out of town on account of years of persecution. They in turn became more and more hostile toward the Jews and the practices of Judaism. When the Jews were revolting against the Romans beginning in the year 66 CE, culminating in the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the Judaic Christians were nowhere

to be seen and so were regarded as unpatriotic and traitors. Besides, the Good News or Gospel that Jesus taught encouraged them to make peace and not war. Christianity eventually developed an identity separate from Judaism, and the two traditions went their separate ways.

If the majority of the Jews rejected Christianity, the Gentiles were more receptive of the Gospel that was being preached. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, played a significant role in their conversion and also in explaining basic Christian beliefs in terms the Greco-Roman culture could appreciate. Christianity adapted to the Hellenistic and pagan world of philosophy and ideas by developing a more philosophically robust theology. Jesus' message of love and concern especially for the least and the lost appealed to the poor and those living at the margins. The impoverished and dispossessed found meaning and hope in the Gospel to the poor and the promise of an afterlife reward in heaven. With the inclusion of more Gentile Christians into the fold there was the question of whether they had to be circumcised and taught to keep the Mosaic Law. The decision taken at the Council of Jerusalem held around the year 50 CE instructed that the law was not necessary for salvation. It was predicated on the conviction, in the words of the Judaic Christian Peter, that "we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15:11).

Another major challenge that confronted the early Christian community was the fact that they were emerging from within the Roman Empire. While its organized and sophisticated system of government helped with the expansion of Christianity, the early Christians had to deal with the reality of an emperor who claimed divine status and ruled by decree. In times of turbulence, Christians were easily made the scapegoats and persecuted as atheistic because they refused to worship the pantheon of Roman gods, including the emperor. The Romans charged that it was the Christians' refusal to offer sacrifices that caused the gods to be angry and not bestow blessings on the empire. Christians who refused to participate in what they regarded as the idolatry of emperor worship and who witnessed to the truth until death by torture are regarded as martyrs for the faith. Those who submitted and gave in to the authorities are known as *lapsi* or people who lapsed in their faith. Despite the persecutions, Christianity continued to attract new converts. By the beginning of the fourth century CE they constituted about 10 percent of the population of the Roman Empire. The persecutions ended when Emperor Constantine officially legalized the

practice of the Christian faith with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE. Twelve years later, in 325 CE, amid the threat of doctrinal division, he convened the Council of Nicaea—the first of the ecumenical councils—to streamline Christian beliefs. It was Emperor Theodosius who, in 380 CE, established the Christian movement that adhered to the Nicene Creed as the official imperial religion, causing a surge in the conversion rates. By the end of the fourth century, Christians made up about half the population of the Roman Empire.

Christian Diversity and Denominations

Christianity, then and now, has never been a monolithic tradition. It was by no means a unified coherent religious movement, and this was evidenced even in the apostolic age. Christianity was and continues to be a pluralistic and diverse movement. This is in part because there was no real singular center or magisterium that controlled its development. Instead, there were many different centers established by small groups of the initial disciples of Christ and their followers. To be sure, there was diversity in how each group understood Jesus or practiced their new Christian faith. The four canonical gospels and the many more apocryphal gospels testify to this diversity. Mark's community probably had no idea what Luke or John's community believed about Jesus or how they were worshiping or what their concerns were in relation to Christian living. Pauline Christianity would have differed radically not only from Judaic Christianity but also within itself, in the different Pauline local churches spread throughout the Roman Empire. Many of Paul's epistles were written precisely to correct misleading doctrines or false practices. There was no set of agreed-on teachings, governance structures, or even sacred texts. The Bible was finally canonized only at the end of the fourth century, even if sets of established books had been gradually accepted by the many different Christian communities earlier. Despite the diversity between the communities of early Christianity, there was a general sense that they all belonged to the very same fellowship or *koinonia* (communion) of faith. It was a unity in diversity as there was a common acceptance of and expression of the apostolic faith. While each local church had its own particular identity, all the early Christians shared in the same faith of the one universal church.

Over the centuries, however, the ideal of unity in diversity was challenged, resulting in explicit breakaways of splinter groups from the mainstream on account of a variety of reasons. These differences included their views on doctrinal and ministerial issues such as the nature of authority, understandings of Jesus, the place of devotional practices, and the role of the papacy. Some breakaways resulted in an explicit break from the Christian tradition, such as Arianism (which denied the preexistence of Christ, thus subordinating the Son to the Father), which was condemned at the Council of Nicaea and regarded simply as a heresy. Others that were equally anathematized include Gnosticism (which emphasized the God-world or spirit-matter dualism) and the Ebionites (those who denied the divinity of Jesus). Most of these movements have all but disappeared and are generally not regarded as legitimate expressions of the Christian movement. The major divisions that are generally acknowledged within Christianity today are the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholicism, and the various denominations formed during and after the Protestant Reformation.

Eastern Christianity

The first significant breakaway was more or less a follow-up on Arianism. Influenced by the teachings of Arius, Nestorius (patriarch of Constantinople) emphasized the distinction between the human and divine natures of the one person of Christ. His school of thought rejected the practice of bestowing the title of *Theotokos* (God-Bearer) on the Blessed Virgin Mary, arguing, rather, that she should only be known as the *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ). Nestorianism was denounced at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, as well as at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, leading to a schism. The schismatic movement is more commonly known as the Nestorian Church, the Assyrian Church, or the Church of the East.

The next significant breakaway was a reaction in the opposite direction of Nestorianism. Pope Dioscorus (patriarch of Alexandria) felt that the Council of Chalcedon had caused ambiguity to arise when it advanced the christological dogma of Jesus possessing two natures, one divine and one human. The Alexandrian School of Theology advocated that any teaching should insist on the unity of the incarnation. It was emphatic that after the union of the divine and the human in the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ, there was only a single nature that was either divine or

a synthesis of the divine and the human. The teaching became known as *monophysitism* (one nature), and the group that developed from it is better known as Oriental Orthodoxy. The Oriental Orthodox communion today consists of six groups: Coptic Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Eritrean Orthodox, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and Armenian Apostolic Churches.

The third significant breakaway was a major one. This time it was a division between the entire Western and Eastern churches. These churches developed independently of one another and were largely shaped by the socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic developments within their own respective Western Roman and Byzantine empires. While the West used Latin as its lingua franca, the East used mainly Aramaic and Koine Greek. The transmission of theological thought and other ecclesial practices happened primarily within each tradition as there was little translation and sharing from one tradition to the other. The Westerners were more emphatic about legal ecclesial structures and approaches to the sacraments while the Easterners were more mystical in approach to their faith life and focused mainly on inner spirituality. Thus, the West's concern was more in the realm of people's sin and salvation while the East's concern was about becoming more God-like and the eventual deification of persons. These differences in perspectives shaped much of their Christian life and praxes.

While there were certainly political and cultural reasons for the schism between the Western and Eastern churches of the Roman Empire, the one theological controversy that served as the last straw was the inclusion and acceptance in the West of the *filioque* (and from the Son) clause into the Nicene Creed. The Eastern Church viewed this as erroneous. The other issue is with regard to the definition of papal primacy. While both the West and the East are in general agreement that the patriarch of Rome had "primacy of honor" among all the other patriarchs (those of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem), the West also expected that this primacy extended to jurisdiction. This was vehemently opposed by the Eastern patriarchs. Things came to a head and finally in 1054 the patriarchs from both traditions mutually excommunicated one another in an event that earned the label the "Great Schism." Since then "Greek Orthodox" or "Greek Catholic" have been used to identify churches that are in communion with Constantinople in the East and "Roman Catholic" used for churches in communion with Rome in the West.

Protestants and Reformed Churches

After 1054 the Western and Eastern churches went their separate ways. The next big fallout was within the Western Church when the Protestant Reformation took off. While the trigger was finally pulled in the sixteenth century, the reform spirit was already building in the fourteenth century. The issues this time were no longer just religious or theological but included political, intellectual, and cultural aspects as well. With the invention of the printing press and greater access to education, a new consciousness emerged among the people. This developed into the spirit of humanism of the Renaissance, leading to the establishment of a new questioning middle class. There was also the upwelling in nationalistic spirit and the rise of national rulers who were independent and strong. Society was more critical of institutions, especially the church, as new religious leaders, teachers, and preachers rose from the rank and file.

The religious leaders, mainly clergymen [sic], responsible for the Protestant Reformation had initially intended to only attempt reform within the Western Church, not cause a schism. They took issue with what they regarded as ecclesiastical malpractices, first, with issues such as the sale of indulgences and the selling and buying of clerical offices, and then later extended to concerns over false teachings about purgatory, papal authority, devotion to the Virgin Mary, devotion to the saints, the sacraments, mandatory clerical celibacy, monasticism, and so on. Essentially their problem was with the corrupt practices of the church's hierarchy, including the pope. Their demand was for a purification of the church and faith in the Bible (not in the church's teaching office) as the sole source of spiritual authority.

The trigger that set off the Protestant Reformation occurred when, in 1517, the Augustinian monk Martin Luther circulated his *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*. His aim was to invite a debate on church teachings and practices for the purpose of freeing the Gospel exercised over it by the church's hierarchy. He wanted to enable individual believers to have control over their own destiny by faith in Christ or "by justification by faith alone," not through obedience to another human authority or the teachings of the church. The biblical text to support his position is from Romans: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith' " (Rom 1:17). When the institutional church responded by excommunicating Luther in 1521, it served only to harden

his position. The German princes backed Luther's reforms as they saw it also as an opportunity to be independent of the emperor and papal authority. The resultant breakaway group, known as Lutheranism, was established as the state religion in Germany, Scandinavia, and the Baltics.

The Reformation spread very quickly throughout many parts of Europe. The Swiss reformers were Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin in Geneva. Like Luther, their central claim was that it is *sola scriptura* (through scripture alone) or *sola fidei* (through faith alone) that we are saved. The church and its priests and their teachings, interpretations, and traditions are not necessary. Calvinist theology teaches that God's providence governs everything, and every person on earth is in God's hands. Since God is all knowing, the theories of divine election and predestination are advocated. The churches subscribing to these teachings are called the Reformed Tradition or Presbyterian Churches.

The next breakaway happened among some of the Protestant reformers who thought that the movement did not go far enough. They wanted a return to the root of the apostolic faith and pushed for a complete break from the Roman and papist traditions so as to live the way Jesus lived. This included distancing the Christian community from the world and its affairs. They also preached personal commitment, which meant infant baptism was invalid. A group who rebaptized those who had already been baptized as infants was called Anabaptists. Other smaller breakaways include the Hutterites, the Mennonites, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Disciples of Christ.

A fourth offshoot of the Reformation took place in England. While Lutheranism and Calvinism broke away for doctrinal, liturgical, or disciplinary reasons, the precipitating cause of the Tudor (Anglican) Reformation was personal. King Henry VIII wanted to be free from papal control in order to divorce his wife to marry another woman. Henry then declared that the king was head of the church, not the pope. Despite the royal primacy over papal primacy, Anglicans kept a lot of the teachings and practices of Catholicism. They embraced a sort of *via media* (middle road) between Catholicism and Protestantism, acknowledging the role of scripture, tradition, and reason and not so much the doctrine of by scripture alone.

The Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation is sometimes called the Counter-Reformation. This took place during the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Instead of addressing the faults pointed out by the

reformers, Trent reasserted church authority and insisted on its teaching that tradition was co-equal in authority with scripture. Two offices or structures within the church to ensure conformity were established: the *Inquisition* (to attend to charges of heresy) and the *Index* (to list forbidden books). But the Catholic Church did renew itself somehow and curbed corrupt practices related to the abuse of power denounced by the reformers, especially practices such as simony (buying/selling of ecclesiastical privileges), absenteeism (church leaders neglecting their duties), and nepotism (elevating relatives to positions in church). Moreover, it also initiated the foundations for seminary training of priests and reform of religious life by returning to the spiritual roots of their foundations.

Free Churches and New Christian Movements

The Protestant Reformation set off a spark that turned out to be a continuous movement. After the sixteenth century many more Christian denominations were founded all over Europe. This was multiplied greatly by the disintegration of medieval Christendom as well as the rise of the spirit of nationalism. Numerous Free Churches and new Christian movements grew out of the many Protestant movements that had already established themselves. Through missionary activity and also the movements of peoples across countries and continents, the new churches then spread to North America. Colonialism and the so-called discovery of the New World played an integral role in bringing not only Christianity to the Americas, Africa, and Asia but also the structures and enmity that had initially sparked off the Christian division in Europe.

The Puritans were a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century reform movement that sought to purify the Church of England. Two offshoots of the English Puritan movement were the Baptists and the Congregational Churches. When the Puritans were persecuted in England many sought refuge in Europe, especially in the Low Countries such as Holland. When it was safe enough to return to England, led by John Smith and Thomas Helwys, they made their way back and founded the Baptist Congregation. Like Anabaptists, they reject infant baptism. The Congregational Churches trace their roots to the English separatist and theologian Robert Browne. They advocate self-governing and independent, autonomous local churches that are free to choose their own ministers, administrative structures, liturgies, prayers, and so on. Some of their members who

migrated to North America in the seventeenth century were the ones who founded Yale and Harvard Universities. The Unitarian Church later took control of Harvard in the early nineteenth century and advanced a more liberal, open, and ecumenical Christian faith. Today, the Congregational Churches have merged with the United Churches.

The Quakers or Religious Society of Friends also have their roots in England. Led by George Fox, they believed that a person's experience with Jesus Christ can happen directly, unmediated by the clergy. Convinced of the priesthood of all believers, they called themselves "seekers" and distanced themselves from creeds and ecclesiastical structures. Being Christian simply meant possessing the "inner light" and being "born again" in the Holy Spirit. Quakers are renowned for their antiwar and humanitarian campaigns. Likewise, the Methodists also emerged from the Church of England. Inspired by the life and teachings of John Wesley, who had led a very strict and methodical life, the movement began as a reform within the Anglican Church but later separated and became an independent denomination. Sanctity of the believers, a strict and rigorous life of prayer and holiness, and the impact of faith on one's character are the principal characteristics of Methodism.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw even more breakaways from the mainline Protestant churches. In part as a response or reaction to the rise of scientific development, modernity, and liberalism, many of these breakaways are revivalist Evangelical or Restoration movements, aimed at reinforcing personal piety and faith or returning to the faith of the first Christians. The Brethren Church began as a reform movement of the Church of England and eventually broke away under the leadership of John Nelson Darby. They are apocalyptic in spirit and desire to unite Christians of all denominations in anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ. The Salvation Army is an offshoot of the Methodist Church in England and focuses on mission work to the poor in the slums of London. They later organized themselves along military lines and adopted uniforms, flags, titles and ranks, and a discipline system very much akin to those found in the army.

In North America, the Seventh-Day Adventists emerged in the nineteenth century as part of a universal apocalyptic revivalist movement. Founded by the Baptist preacher William Miller who was convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was happening soon, the followers eventually broke away or were expelled from their denominations and

established their own community. They are known for their strict observance of the Sabbath on Saturday, and they adhere to some of the puritanical practices of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially with regard to diet.

Two other movements that emerged from North America in the nineteenth century are the Mormons (or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) and the Jehovah's Witnesses. While self-identifying as Christian, other Christians have questions as to whether they can indeed be called Christian churches. The Mormons have as their founder Joseph Smith, who believed that Jesus went to preach in America after his resurrection. Smith claimed to have received visions revealing a new sacred text called the *Book of Mormon* and, on the basis of its teaching, reestablished the original church of Jesus Christ. The church's detractors charge that the community cannot be Christian as they do not accept the creeds and confessions of the post–New Testament church or believe that Christian Scriptures consist of only the Holy Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses are an offshoot of the Adventist movement. Led by Charles Taze Russel, it spread its message mainly through mass publications, especially with the foundation of The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Believing that the end of the world is imminent, the movement espouses a theology that is basically otherworldly, pessimistic, and puritanical. Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the Trinity but rather in the Jehovah of Hebrew Scriptures. They also reject the divinity of Jesus and believe he is the Archangel Michael. It is for these reasons that they are often not regarded as Christian.

The most significant movement to have emerged in the early part of the twentieth century is Pentecostalism. Founded on the charismatic experiences of different groups of Christians, the movement does not really acknowledge any particular founder. Two names, however, are often associated with its beginnings. The first is Charles Fox Parham, who started a special Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, where he preached that a clear sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is when Christians begin to speak in tongues. The other is one of Parham's students, an African American preacher named William J. Seymour who began preaching in Azusa Street in Los Angeles. This set off the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, which has since come to be regarded as the beginnings of Pentecostalism as a movement. The movement is made up mainly of independent churches that are founded and led by a variety of Christian leaders and consider any organization beyond the local as unbiblical. Pentecostals look on their movement as a restoration of the apostolic age and the early Christian

community and believe that their practice of divine healing and speaking in tongues are manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. They, therefore, often use terms such as "Apostolic" or "Full Gospel" to name their churches. In the twentieth century, Pentecostalism has been a major influence in the development of many churches around the world, especially in the global South, and is regarded as the fastest growing denomination of Christianity today. Its development has been crucial to the growing awareness of what has come to be called world Christianity.

The Advent of World Christianity

The phrase "world Christianity" was first used in academic circles in the earlier part of the twentieth century, particularly in reference to the study of the global missionary movement as well as the Christian ecumenical movement. The former explores the expansion of Christianity throughout the globe, while the latter refers to the efforts at forging unity between the numerous divisions of the Christian family. Together they were aimed at bringing about a more united Christian front for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel and evangelizing all peoples living in the entire inhabited world. In more recent decades, however, world Christianity has come to mean something totally different. A look at how it is being used today will shed some light on what it means.

First, consider the advent of the *Journal of World Christianity* as well as the journal for the *Studies in World Christianity*. The former is published by Pennsylvania University Press and the latter by Edinburgh University Press. Second, note also the recent proliferation of academic centers dedicated specifically to the cause of world Christianity: the Nagel Institute for World Christianity of Calvin College in Michigan; the Centre for World Christianity and Interreligious Studies of Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands; the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in Edinburgh; and the Centre for World Christianity of the University of London. An obvious point to note is that all of these journals and centers arose from or are located in the North Atlantic. They are also very new initiatives and were founded only in the last ten or twenty years. Thus, one can conclude that the phenomenon of world Christianity is something very new for Christian scholars, but only if Christianity is considered primarily from the Western perspective.

World Christianity's ascendancy may be attributed to two realizations. First was the realization that Euro-American Christianity is in decline, prompting scholars to posit the thesis of secularization as well as engage in conversations about the end of religion. But when viewed from a global perspective, the thesis is simply mistaken. To be sure, Christianity as a whole is not in decline, even if it may be so in the Western world. This led to the second realization, which is that Western Christianity is not the only one there is. Christianity exists in many forms. Its growth is happening in territories outside the West or the global North. Hence, a greater appreciation for the non-Western forms of Christianity, in particular that of the global South or Southern Christianity. Previously, even if Asian Christianity, African Christianity, and the other contextual forms of Christianity were in existence for centuries and millennia, Euro-American Christianity considered itself normative. It audaciously presented itself as "Christianity," devoid of any adjective or qualifier. But now that the focus has shifted from the West to the rest of the world, a distinction needs to be made of this "new" exploration of Christianity that is found outside the West and so the phrase "world Christianity" was coined. World Christianity, therefore, refers primarily to the global reality and awareness that the center of gravity of Christianity has shifted from the global North to the global South. Its interest is in how Christianity is expressed in the global South, usually in comparison with the West or global North.

This change in the global ecclesial landscape is well documented. Perhaps the most comprehensive empirical work on this is the one done by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston.[1] According to its analysis, sometime between 1970 and 2010 the global South exceeded the global North in Christian population. While in 1900 more than 82 percent of the world's Christian population was found in the global North, by 2010 about 61 percent were already residing in the global South, and this is projected to increase to 72 percent by 2050. By then Africa will be the most populous Christian continent, followed by South America and then Asia. Europe, which had about 68 percent of the world's Christian population in 1900, reduced its share to 40 percent in 1970 and then to about 26 percent in 2010; this figure is expected to go down even further by 2050 to about

1. *World Christian Database*, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/.

17 percent (refer to table below). By 2050, Brazil, Nigeria, the Philippines, D. R. Congo, Mexico, and Tanzania will have more Christians than any European country. Likewise, when referring to Christian cities one will more likely cite Manila, Dar Es Salaam, or Rio de Janeiro than Paris, New York, or Madrid. Thus, it would no longer be accurate to label Christianity as a European religion or the faith of the global North.

The changing distribution of Christian believers (across continents)

Year Region	1900	1970	2010	2050
Africa	10 million	143 million	493 million	1,031 million
Asia	22 million	96 million	352 million	601 million
North America	79 million	211 million	286 million	333 million
South America	62 million	270 million	544 million	655 million
Europe	381 million	492 million	588 million	530 million
Oceania	5 million	18 million	28 million	38 million
TOTAL	558 million	1,230 million	2,291 million	3,188 million

Source: World Christian Database: www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/

Walbert Bühlmann's *The Coming of the Third Church* was among the first books to explicitly discuss the rise of the church of the global South.[2] He regards the church of the first millennium as being dominated by the concerns of Eastern Christianity and the second millennium by the hegemony of Western Christianity. He posits that the third millennium will see the rise of Christianity of the global South. He uses the term "Third Church" somewhat analogously to how the term "Third World" has been used to designate developing countries. It is thus a sociological term referring to what is also known missiologically as the "younger churches," the churches that were located in mission territories and that were on the receiving end of one-way missions. These churches have now come of age and are even blossoming, especially since the end of colonialism, which put a halt to the era of missionary activity from the West. Pope John XXIII made reference to this in an encyclical titled *Princeps Pastorum*, subtitled "On the Missions, Native Clergy, and Lay Participation," issued on November 28, 1959:

2. Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977).

> It was, therefore, with good reason that Our predecessor Pius XII was able to affirm with satisfaction: "Once upon a time it seemed as though the life of the Church used to prosper and blossom chiefly in the regions of ancient Europe, whence it would flow, like a majestic river, through the remaining areas which, to use the Greek term, were considered almost the periphery of the world; today, however, the life of the Church is shared, as though by a mutual irradiation of energies, among all individual members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Not a few countries on other continents have long since outgrown the missionary stage, and are now governed by an ecclesiastical hierarchy of their own, have their own ecclesiastical organization, and are liberally offering to other Church communities those very gifts, spiritual and material, which they formerly used to receive."[3]

Bühlmann's use of the term "Third Church" is not confined to a geographical concept. It also refers to communities within the global North that have been marginalized by the dominant group. In North America the "Third Church" refers to the Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, among others. But in terms of the demographic shift in Christian communities it is the Hispanics who have been on the increase and the Euro-Americans on the decrease. The findings of the Public Religion Research Institute's 2016 American Values Atlas, a survey of American religious and denominational identity, confirm this demographic shift. It states that in 1976 Americans who identified as white and Christian constituted 81 percent of the population. By 1996 it was down to 65 percent, and in 2016 its representation is only 43 percent, that is, less than half the total American population. Within the Catholic community, in 1991, about 87 percent of all US Catholics were white, non-Hispanic, but in 2016 Catholics who identify as white, non-Hispanic represented only 55 percent, while 36 percent of all Catholics identify as Hispanic.[4]

3. Pope John XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum: Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on the Missions, Native Clergy, and Lay Participation* (November 28, 1959), par. 10; http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_28111959_princeps.html.

4. Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, "America's Changing Religious Identity," *Public Religion Research Institute* (September 6, 2017), https://www.prri.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/.

Another dimension of the Southernization process, which is changing the face of Christianity in the West, is that many Western churches are today recipients of missionaries from the global South. This is the phenomenon of "reverse mission," where countries that were previously mission territories are now sending missionaries to their mother churches in the global North. Thus we see today Nigerian evangelists preaching on street corners in London, Korean sisters working in nursing homes in Baltimore, Mexican brothers teaching in Catholic schools in Dublin, and Filipino priests celebrating the Eucharist in Sydney. Of course, the very election of the Latin American Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to the highest position of the Catholic Church as Bishop of Rome is very clear evidence of this new face of world Christianity. To be sure, the universal church is gradually embracing Southern features.

Christianity as World Religion

While the term "world Christianity" is sometimes used interchangeably with "global Christianity," a distinction needs to be made between the two. Global Christianity was what we had for centuries before the new awareness of world Christianity came about. It refers to how the Christian faith of Europe had expanded throughout the globe, partly through colonialism and missionary activity, with the faith of the mother churches basically replicated in the mission territories. Thus we had Spanish Christianity in the Philippines, French Christianity in Madagascar, Portuguese Christianity in Brazil, and British Christianity in Sri Lanka. World Christianity, on the other hand, is the appropriation of the Christian faith, often through local agencies and expressed in cultural forms and traditions more adapted to its local contexts. Church activities and ministries in favor of enabling the contextualization and localization of the church are given priority in view of transforming the imported church into a local entity.

The interrogation of world Christianity, therefore, has primarily to do with examining the different forms of Christianity around the world, especially in the global South. Its concerns are with the pluralistic expressions of Christianity in its various dimensions: language, community, structure, liturgy, theology, etc. This pluralism resonates well with the postmodern ethos where diversity is not only a given but appreciated as

well. Hence, that Southern Christianity betrays all the hallmarks of pluralism is looked on with some degree of fascination and interest. Many of the churches in the South today are led by leaders inspired especially by Pentecostalism. Pentecostal churches are usually homegrown, locally born, led, financed, and propagated. The fact that it is primarily homegrown suggests that each "home" produces its own brand of Christianity. This is another characteristic of world Christianity; there is little uniformity across them. That is why it might be more accurate to speak of world Christianities in the plural. One is reminded here of the early church, especially during the New Testament era, where the Christian communities were characterized by their diversity and yet there was a certain unity between them. It looks like contemporary world Christianity is returning to the Christian origins of contextualized expressions of the faith.

Conclusion

World Christianity also means that Christianity can no longer be perceived through the lens of Christendom, with the power of the state and its concomitant bureaucratic tradition behind it. It ceases to have hegemonic advantage over others in society. Instead, it stands alongside the other religious and cultural traditions as a world religion among the many world religions, serving the local peoples in their quest for the fullness of life. Implied in this is the need and, indeed, obligation of Christianity to be in dialogue and engagement with the other religions of the world. This is not only to enable the various religions to work together for the common good and a better society but also to enable Christianity to discover its rightful place in the world of the many religions.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

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