I. Characteristics of Christianity in Global South (J 125)

A. Enthusiastic

B. Concern with supernatural (prophecy, visions, ecstatic utterances, & healing)

C. Enthusiastic Africans sometimes viewed by North as involved in pagan practices. This question will increase as southern Christianity becomes more common (J 126)

D. Inculturation – interpreting the Christian proclamation in a form appropriate for particular cultures. Adapting religious practice to local conditions. (J 126)

E. Dancing as a communal activity among African Christians (J 126)

F. Core beliefs of Christianity vs. cultural accidents (J 127) Historical examples where the church struggled to discern this distinction:

   1. Chinese Rites controversy of 17th c.
   2. Victorian southern Africa, Bishop J. W. Colenso refused to order Christian converts to renounce polygamy since it was integral to African culture and the practice deterred adultery
   3. Pope Gregory the Great – reuse pagan temples after cleansing with holy water, adapting pagan holidays for Christian use (129)
   4. Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico (c. 1531) recognized as patron of Mexico, originally identified with Aztec goddess Tonantzin (J 129)

G. Liturgy and Language

   1. Newer Christian societies adapt religious language to local settings (J 131), including translating scripture in vernacular. Forcing people to speak the language of the colonizer forces them to internalize colonial worldviews and to accept their own submission as they speak (J 132).
   2. Through use of local terms and concepts, scripture is made relevant to their individual cultures (J 132) and translates the biblical characters into national figures for the hearers.
   3. This process of domestication (telling Bible stories in an indigenous context) also occurs in prayers and praises such as indigenous telling of the feeding of the 5000 as a focus for prayer or praise.
   4. Vernacular prayers and liturgies come to be associated with new holy places with shrines drawing on local traditions (J 133)
5. Greater freedom in developing native liturgies whereas some restrictions imposed on translation of Bible due to sense of obligation to sacred text.
6. Vatican II encouraged the use of vernacular language and practice in liturgies (J 134)

H. The Law of Believing

1. *lex orandi, lex credendi* – the law of prayer is the law of belief. How we worship shows what we believe. When worship patterns change, so do underlying beliefs (J 134)

2. Modern Africans identify more with viewing Jesus as great Ancestor, giving the image of love and care (J 135). Other images of Jesus – prophet, healer, Great Physician

3. African churches call Holy Spirit – Earthkeeping spirit, a term with ecological implications (J 135)

4. Latin American theologies concerned with liberation, suffering, social justice and issues of race (J 135). Mestizaje – mixed blood – a concept that is used to speak of transcending traditional racial hierarchies. Concept used to draw on diverse cultures. Virgilio Elizondo presents Jesus as a mestizo son of Galilee’s mixed and marginalized society (J 136)
   - For Elizondo, world’s poor part of divine plan. His Galilee Principle – what world rejects, God chooses as his own.

5. Popular religious practices in Latin America called folk Catholicism by some.
   - a) Gives rise to veneration of Virgin Mary. Mary portrayed as the feminine face of God. Marian devotion might serve as bridge to ancient Christian communities (J 138)
   - b) Example of ancient theological adaptation to meet local needs – the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed by western Christians as a defense against Arianism (J 139)
   - c) Pt.: Emerging church formulates its beliefs and basic theology in response to immediate local needs and pressures.

I. Syncretism vs. enculturation

1. When cultural assimilation begins to transform core elements of faith, it becomes syncretism – the adulteration of Christianity by elements of other religions (J 140).

2. While accretions to religious practices by intellectuals affect small numbers, larger groups influenced by traditional practices such as
polygamy, divination, animal sacrifices, initiation rites, circumcision, and veneration of ancestors. Healing and prophecy more common beliefs.

3. 1998 Lambeth Conference – Anglican bishops voted against liberal statement concerning homosexuality. Liberals like Bishop John Spong accused conservative African bishops of superstitious Christianity or religious extremism (J141-2)

4. Traditional religions seen as preparation for the gospel.
   a) Belief in supernatural spirits and ancestors.
   b) Korean shamanism – belief in universal spirits prepare them for Christian faith (J 143)
   c) In traditional African society, divination was used to seek cause of evil and to identify a wrongdoer as the first step toward neutralizing his/her evil power.
   d) Different perspectives between North and South re ancestor worship - South saw veneration to past generations who continued to be a spiritual presence (144). In spite of modernization, concerns about witchcraft continue to be an issue for African Christians. Accusations increase during times of economic slump or political crisis and lead to murders and witch hunts.
   e) Emphasis on healing
   f) Spiritual warfare
   g) Catechumenate revived in many African and Asian societies (J 155)

J. Max Weber’s classification of church and sect

1. Church – formal bodies that intellectualize religious teachings and restrain emotionalism in services (J 157), have formal liturgies and set prayers.

2. Sects – emotional, spontaneous, encourage individual mystical experience, tend toward fundamentalism, shun intellect, believe divine is present in everyday life (J 158).

K. Ernst Troeltsch – upstart quality of sects v. deeper roots of churches

1. Sects - voluntary membership, lives controlled by organization so sect becomes small exclusive fellowship of people seeking spiritual perfection. Charismatic leadership using spiritual gifts

2. Churches – larger, better established, members born into the organization. Attract members of higher social status and educational level. Formally trained ministers who operate in bureaucratic framework. (J 158)
3. Sects/churches tend to move in cyclical fashion. Sects become more bureaucratic, demanding education of its leaders as it moves towards church status, but will later spawn new sects (J 159)

L. Finke & Stark explain success of American Christianity using Rational Choice Theory:

1. Sect-church process related to choices humans make about religion
   a) Humans want potent religion - miracles, order and sanity
   b) Religious groups that maximize desired aspects in religion also demand more from individual participants of the religion
   c) Over time, religious adherents backslide due to demands of religion, forcing leaders to reduce the demands of religious faith.
   d) Eventually, the lessened demands of religious faith leads to worldliness of its adherents and less rewards, thus less members.

M. Church-Sect Typology – an explanation for the Global North, but can it explain the Global South?


2. Church-sect typology – method of examining the development of religious movements (originally Protestant Christianity) along a continuum in terms of their degree of complexity and relationship to society.

   a) Sect – initial countercultural religious group, often breaking away from institutional religious group or church. Exhibits following characteristics:

      (1) Charismatic leadership
      (2) Countercultural
      (3) Egalitarian – often allows women & marginalized others to lead.
      (4) Emphasis on gifts (charismata) rather than formal education.
      (5) Otherworldly character
      (6) Eschatological/apocalyptic character
      (7) Sometimes lower socioeconomic status

   b) Church type characteristics:

      (1) Emphasis on religious roles/offices.
      (2) Educated/paid clergy.
      (3) Formal liturgy and religious practices.
      (4) Move away from spiritual gifts.
(5) Accommodates society
(6) Worldliness or greater concern with present world, rather than world to come.
(7) Greater emphasis on Christ as a model rather than savior
(8) Emphasis on orthodox doctrine as criterion for membership.

N. Routinization of the charismata – the move toward institutionalization (White 366-368)

1. First generation of sect led by charismatic leader exhibiting above characteristics.
2. Second generation of sect – leaders are trained and appointed by original charismatic leader, recounting founding narratives with many members remembering excitement of the earliest days of sect.
3. Third generation of sect – begin to standardize leadership in the form of roles/offices. Increase in hierarchy, training for roles, more accommodation to culture and formalization of religious practices, limiting of women in leadership roles.

O. Given the above patterns – sect-church typology & routinization of the charismata – which aspects are true of Global churches and which aspects seem to lack relevance?

1. Charismatic origins & figures
2. High demands, high involvement,
3. Search for relevance in daily lives
4. Emphasis on supernatural experiences
5. Ultimately the crossover into the institutionalization or routinization of religious roles doesn’t happen because of the different nature of society – even standardized roles maintain degree of spontaneity and persistent emphasis on supernatural experiences, so that “sect” characteristics persist.

For Further Reading:


