I. Historical Review of Global Christianity

A. Catholic Expansion c. 1500 from European powers

1. Spain and Portugal initiated global expansion – S. America, Philippines, Christian civilization and conquest. Conversion was consistent but its depth questionable (J 35). Native converts were rarely admitted to communion and seldom ordained to priesthood (35-6). Ordination only allowed for pure-bred Europeans until end of 18th c.

2. Latin-American people concentrated on aspects of faith that didn’t need clergy (organized lay bodies such as confraternities cofradias). Catholicism became integral part of cultural identity of Latin Americans.

3. Kongo accepted Christianity in 1500s; first African slaves to Virginia in 1619 may have come from this area and may have been baptized Catholics (J 37). Note: other scholars contradict this view – cf. Bennett, Before the Mayflower 28-48 – first Africans were indentured servants, not slaves).

B. Catholic missionaries in far east lacked imperial backing, so they entered into local societies (esp. Jesuits). The missionaries had to redefine the relationship between Christianity and being European (J 37). How far should orthodoxy be negotiated to gain success in missions? Distinction between church’s accepted practices and European customs (J 38).

C. Accommodating local customs and practices (acculturation)

1. India – Jesuit Robert De Nobili posed as Hindu guru to instruct in mysteries of Christianity – wore local dress and respected Indian caste system (J 38). Implications – acknowledging caste system meant refusing poor as equals.

2. Japan – question of priests wearing silk or cotton. Missionaries wearing cotton identified with poor, but silk associated them with the elite. Silk strategy led to significant conversions by 1600, but led to nationalistic reaction vs. Christianity and persecutions (J 39).


4. In 1692, Christians were given edict of toleration from Chinese emperor Kang Xi. First Catholic bishop of Chinese origin in 1685

5. Jesuit compromise failed early 18th c. when Jesuits’ enemies turned pope against them. Jesuits came under attack for permitting Chinese converts to worship ancestors and using names of pagan gods in their translation of scriptures – led to Chinese Rites controversy. Vatican prohibited Chinese rites and suppressed Bible translations, required mass to be held in Latin
and stressed the authority of the pope (1704). Result: Chinese govt. banned Christianity (J 41).

6. Church began to demand similar uniformity in other regions of missionary work (J 41).


E. Charles Lavigerie –formed systematic vision of converting all of Africa to Catholicism, viewing it as continuation of ancient Christian faith (J 43). By 1950s, US supplied 2/3 of Protestant missionaries.

F. 19th c. concessions by missionaries to native cultures:

1. Faith communicated in local languages, Bible translated in local tongues (J 44)
2. Cultural problems – missionaries relied on imperial protection in dangerous areas, but it limited their success in making converts since it created paternalistic clergy separated from the indigenous people (J44).

G. Henry Venn’s Three Self policy (1850s) – proposed end of missions, leading to native church, native pastors, and native episcopacy (J 45). John Nevius’ Three-Self policy later wrote about this approach in China and applied it in Korea:

1. Self-government
2. Self-support
3. Self-propagation

H. Missionary impulse led to paternalism – stereotypical view of Victorians spreading morality to more liberated native population (J 49).

I. Core question about missions – why did Christianity expand as quickly as it did and how did it survive the end of European political power? (J 51) Appeal of Christianity linked to desire to emulate West in some cases.

J. Contrast was that Christianity grew as grassroots movement in many societies, often reaching persons marginalized – (J 51). In Africa – it began as a youth movement (in 19th c.). Christianity accepted because it was seen as true. African Christianity spread because of networking effect and they saw it as best means of explaining world around them (J 52).

L. Jenkins - The rise of prophetic or charismatic Christian movements suggests internalization of Christian belief in a culture (J 55). Supernatural beliefs resonated with 2/3 worldview. These include prophetic movements in Africa such as Kimbanguism and Aladura churches or the Conselheiro movement in Brazil. Some of these movements developed into independent movements.

M. This is contrasted with the quality of spirituality in western churches as described by Rodney Stark. His use of sect/church model suggests rise of charismatic movements precede institutionalization.

N. Common pattern of prophetic indigenous African Christianity – individual converted through mission churches, estranged division occurs over issue of church practice usually related to integration of native practices, individual receives revelation from God, prophet begins to preach independently, leading to a new independent church (J 57).

1. Example of this in Africa – William Wade Harris, Liberian, had vision from angel Gabriel seeing himself as Elijah. He began preaching across West Africa wearing a bamboo cross, taking Bible, and a gourd rattle. His message taught 10 commandments, sabbatarianism, and dealing with Africans concerns with ancient cult-figures or fetishes. He combated these by burning them since Africans believed these objects had spiritual power (J 58). He practiced polygamy.

2. Simon Kimbangu – Belgian Congo. Had visions to be a prophet and healer. He preached orthodox Christianity, but his invocation to ancestors and focus on himself as a charismatic leader and mediator between God and his people (messianic claims). He also preached an African political message (J 59).


4. Alice Lenshina in Northern Rhodesia in 1953 – visions led to formation of a utopian community awaiting 2nd coming of Christ (J 60).

O. African Independent Churches (AIC) – also known as African Initiated Churches or African Indigenous Churches – sprang around late 1880s in response to racial segregation in European-founded churches causing Africans to leave them. (J 61)

1. One of the earliest AICs - Ethiopian church in Pretoria, South Africa (1892) – not from Ethiopia but rather gains its name from Ps. 68 and emphasis on a pan-African Christian identity.

2. Prophetic churches – those which follow modern charismatic leader like Kimbangu or Harris (J 62). Most important – Zionist churches which
grew from Northern American charismatic sects in late 19th c. They adopted some African customs such as polygamy and ritual taboos, belief in exorcism, witchcraft, and possession (J 62).

For Further Reading:


