

# Today's Christianity (Part One): Christianity Goes Global

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Christianity is derelict, a deserted, rat-infested hulk moored in some stagnant, putrid back-waters of modernity, a spectacle of

ghastly decay. In time, it will become more scorned for its incapacity to improve the human condition than esteemed for the promise it offers. Incompatible with Western civilization, it will become defunct, a mere artifact of history.

So declared with jaunty glee the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the pundits of the Progressive Era later, and the despots of socialism still later. And so maintain the sages of today's post-modernism. How sweet it is, as Gleason had it, to be finally unfettered from the moral restraints of irrational superstition, mysticism, and myth. God is dead, Nietzsche claimed—probably with a tear in his eye. With what insufferably arrogant nonchalance do today's agnostic materialists exult that Christianity is too!

*How wrong has the march of events proven them all!* For Christianity (which is used in this article to refer to Satan's counterfeit of the way of life Christ taught) is very far from dead. The liberal media, enamored as it is of secular humanism—the doctrine that mankind, using his powers of reason in a religion-free environment, can resolve his problems—refuses to broadcast that fact. Deeply troubled that Christianity remains persistently a viable force in modern culture, the media has chosen to spread the lie that Islam is the religion of this century, and, like all religions, constitutes a clear and present danger to Western civilization. That is only a dishonest subterfuge to conceal the real story.

## Just the Facts, Ma'am

The real story is Christianity's dynamic and widespread *growth* in the last century—particularly in the last five decades. Whether measured objectively (by its raw number of adherents) or subjectively (by their fervor), a candid observer cannot gainsay Christianity's growth. Let the facts speak for themselves.

» In Africa at large, often thought to be a Muslim stronghold, the number of Christians has grown 360% in the last 100 years. That translates to 3.6% per year. In 1900, there were 10 million Christians there; today, the number is 360 million.<sup>1, 2</sup>

» This striking growth is even more evident in the Orient than in Africa. In Korea, for example, the number of Christians has grown from 330,000 in 1900 to 12 million today, about 25% of the total population.<sup>3</sup>

» Even more impressive is the case of China. Since 1948, the number of practicing Christians continues to grow spectacularly. Today, there are "tens of millions" of Christians there.<sup>4</sup>

» In the Philippines, one Christian group alone, El Shaddai, has 7 million adherents.<sup>5</sup>

» By 2050, only 20% of the world's Christians will be non-Hispanic whites.<sup>6</sup> A full 80% will be of Gentile stock spread worldwide.

Look at a map and you will see that the locus of this growth is the global *south*. That is why this phenomenal upsurge in Christianity has come to bear the name "Southern Christianity." As one Kenyan scholar puts it, "The centers of the church's universality [are] no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila."<sup>7</sup> There is a lot to that: So extensive has been this spread of Christianity that the West's claim to be the heartland of Christianity is becoming less and less defensible each day. In fact, "the great plain of irreligion" serves as a far more accurate descriptor of northern Europe today than does the soubriquet, the "city of God." This is true in spite of the fact that northern Europe—Israelite Europe—was the geographic fountainhead of Protestantism. This re-orientation of the hearts of northern Europeans from God to godlessness is one of the most remarkable changes in our time.

### **The Face of Southern Christianity**

Let us sketch a composite portrait of Southern Christianity.

- » Unity does not at all describe Southern Christianity at this time; rather, it is fragmented, with a "bewildering array of sects and splinter groups."<sup>8</sup> These fragments, however, have much in common.
- » Almost by definition, Southern Christianity is made up of "born-again" individuals.
- » Again, almost universally, Southern Christianity is charismatic and Pentecostal in orientation, as well as evangelistic in vision.
- » Many groups are markedly fundamentalist. They tend to be Trinitarian and Calvinist—that is, in the Reformed tradition of Protestantism, rather than Catholic or Lutheran. (We will see, though, that many are Catholic.)
- » Many teach the imminent return of Christ. Some variant of pre- or post-Millennialism is a common doctrine. Many Southern Christians are prophetic hobbyists.
- » Adherents are noted for their zeal for their faith.
- » The many groups tend to emphasize private revelation over pastoral teaching, feelings over doctrine, emotionalism over formalism. Their liturgies, where they exist at all, tend to be "contemporary." Soft rock replaces *The Rock of Ages*.
- » Charismatic individuals often lead them. In almost all cases, that leadership is indigenous, composed of locally educated nationals rather than European or American prelates.
- » Syncretism is prevalent. Southern Christian groups often blend local pagan practices with fundamental Christianity. In this regard, it is important to recognize that Southern Christianity is not a direct offshoot of the missionary initiatives of 19th- and 20th-century Western denominations. It may be better to call it a *mutation* of mainstream

Christianity, for in many ways it is quite different. It is "homegrown," indigenous, displaying local cultural traits.

» While many groups are made up of disaffected Catholics, most of them "seem determinedly Protestant" in outlook.<sup>9</sup>

Some groups are attached to mainstream Western denominations, albeit often tenuously. But the bulk of Southern Christianity is comprised of splinter groups pure and simple, claiming no affiliation with mainline denominations. In fact, many shun links with Western orthodoxies. This leads to some interesting arrangements indeed. For example, El Shaddai, mentioned above, was founded by, and is led by, lay-Catholics but lies largely outside the control of the Roman hierarchy. It is highly Pentecostal, so much so that its contemporary "liturgy" makes its mass meetings "look like nothing so much as a 1960s rock festival."<sup>10</sup>

Another strange combination, of a totally different nature, is that of American Episcopalians and South African Anglicans. A number of American Episcopalians, unhappy with the liberalism of their leadership, found common cause with a group of highly conservative Anglican bishops in South Africa.

### **Conservatism: A Defining Characteristic**

This affiliation, which appears to be a lasting one, is an example of one of the most important areas of commonality among Southern Christians. Their syncretism aside, and in spite of vast diversities in nationality, race, culture, and language, they are overwhelmingly *conservative* in their moral stance. Their leadership as a whole rejects the doctrinal and moral liberalism that has come to infect much of European and American mainstream religion.

As a rule, Southern Christians are far more traditional than their mainstream coreligionists in the West. They refuse to "compromise on issues like homosexuality, the ordination of women, the acceptance of divorce and the tolerance of abortion—practices that many in the West have either advocated or tacitly accepted."<sup>11</sup> They almost ubiquitously speak for strong family values and totally abjure the culture of death practices of abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia.

Anecdotes speak louder than statistics. Consider the amazing Lambeth conference in the summer of 1998. Leading Anglican—Church of England—bishops from around the world convened to hammer out a resolution on homosexuality and the ministry. Mainstream Anglicanism in England "had been ordaining active homosexuals into the ministry for years."<sup>12</sup> The European bishops used this conference to advocate the advancement of this practice worldwide. All seemed to be going their way—until it came time to vote on a resolution. Then, quite suddenly, the (largely) Gentile bishops from Africa and Asia hijacked the conference and voted overwhelmingly for a resolution that strongly condemned homosexuality, to the point that it declared same-sex relationships, consensual or otherwise, to contradict the tenets of Christianity and to be abhorrent.

The "progressive" bishops left the conference furious. One, John Shelby Spong, noted for his threadbare claptrap that Christianity must either "change or die," whined that the Gentile (African) bishops had "moved out of animism into a very superstitious kind of Christianity." Reflecting on the course of the conference, he concluded, "I never expected to see the Anglican Communion, which prides itself on the place of reason in faith, descend to this level of irrational Pentecostal hysteria."<sup>13</sup>

Spong's comments invite commentary. *Animism* is the belief that all objects (especially natural ones, like trees or animals) have souls. Cultural anthropologists categorize animism as little more than pure superstition. One generally finds this type of religious activity—basically, nature worship—among the most primitive of peoples. For instance, most 18th- and 19th-century North American Indian tribes practiced animism.

Unlike the American aborigines, however, Lambeth's Third World Anglican bishops were educated in the best schools of the former British Empire, some in Oxford and Cambridge; they were not illiterate, unsophisticated, simple-minded country bumpkins who just fell off the turnip truck. Assuredly, they do not worship oak trees, something, incidentally which the current Druid leader of the Anglican Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, *does* do. Spong's patronizing remarks verge on the worst sort of condescending chauvinism. Indeed, since most of these Third World bishops were Gentiles (that is, non-white), his vitriol smells of outright racism. It seems that at least this liberal churchman—and he probably speaks for legions of others—is convinced that Old Testament morality is puerile superstition, that the fruits of man's reason supersede the truth of God's revelation, and that that revelation is both irrational and hysterical.

How far has Israel fallen! In Isaiah 43:10, God calls the people of Israel "My witnesses." The world ultimately could not help but see these witnesses and "hear all these statutes," the great law of the great God, as Moses writes in Deuteronomy 4. The nations shall then say,

"Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? (Deuteronomy 4:6-8)

National Israel was to set a godly example, by which it would teach the nations the value of God's way of life. This was a basic role of ancient Israel, and indeed remains a key job of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Members of today's true church bear the responsibility to be exemplars, as the apostle Peter asserts in I Peter 2. Peter, echoing Paul's comments in Philippians 3:20 that we have our citizenship in heaven, not in this world, reminds God's people that they are pilgrims in this world. As real as our alien status is, however, it does not abrogate our responsibility to walk morally before the peoples of this world.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (I Peter 2:11-12).

But, today, national Israel lacks knowledge of her identity and has come to reject God's law. The tables have turned! Now, God raises up *Gentiles* to teach the Israelites of His law; He uses Gentiles to instruct the pagan churchman, vacuous hirelings in high places who refuse to accept God's clear revelation.

Perhaps the clearest sign of this reversal—and of the West's moral decadence in general—is the evangelization of Europe by *Africa*.<sup>14</sup> Some conservative Southern Christian groups in Africa actually send *missionaries* to that vast "plain of irreligion" to re-evangelize the birthplace of Protestantism, to restore there the faith of God. While we in God's church understand that these missionaries do not preach the true gospel, they do serve as a witness against the pagan Western

world, the world that has forgotten God and wandered far from Christian ethics and morality. Often, these missionaries teach principles of God's law that Americans and Europeans have forgotten.

## Implications

The advent of Southern Christianity has a number of important implications.

A movement of this scope and size certainly carries economic ramifications, which of course have not been lost to the Babylonish merchants who hire workers in Singapore to fabricate necklaces of gold crosses, so popular today among "born-again Christians" around the world. If Christianity has gone global, so have the merchants who pander to the faithful.

If history is any guide to the future at all, Southern Christianity certainly has its geopolitical implications as well. After all, more than a few wars have had their roots in religious differences. There is no reason to believe that the idea of the church militant is a dead idea. It is alive and well.

Of all the physical laws of nature, it is the Third Law of Motion, formulated by Isaac Newton, that seems most consistently to have application in the social and civil affairs of mankind: *For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction*. Every political or economic force has its counterpoise: Counterbalancing conservatism is liberalism; against capitalism is socialism; against nationalism is internationalism; and so on. This pattern of dichotomies seems to be the nature of things.

Historically speaking, against Islam there has been Christianity. *Today, fundamental Southern Christianity seems to be growing as a counterpoise to the rise in fundamental Islam. Will the tension between the two become violent?* Some think so. The Islamic movement led by Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines directs its terrorist activities at the Christian establishment there. The internecine war between Islamic Nigeria and Sudan may be just the start of a *series* of wars between fundamentalist Islamists and Southern Christians. Some commentators forecast a war between Islamic Nigeria and Uganda or the Congo. Others see in the wings a war between the Philippines (Catholic) and Indonesia (Muslim).<sup>15</sup>

Could such regional wars intensify to become continental or inter-continental in scale?

The answer to that question largely pivots on the issue of *unity*. For the present, Southern Christianity is anything but unified. Rather, bearing the malaise of this age, it is highly fragmented. There are literally hundreds of groups, some small, some large. There is no commonly recognized leader at this time, one with the ability and prestige to unite Southern Christians. None appears to be on the horizon. As conservative as Pope John Paul II has been in the issues of the ordination of woman, abortion, and such, he has not been able to win the hearts and minds of most Southern Christians. In fact, Southern Christianity is, in many ways, a reaction against the hierarchy and formalism of the Roman Church he leads.

If the current pope will not unite Southern Christians, who will? When?

These are just two of many questions that could be asked but cannot be answered, right now at least. Will Southern Christianity, with its characteristic missionary zeal, unite to mount a large-scale (perhaps worldwide) crusade against Islam, as the Roman Church did on a smaller scale centuries ago? Will it unite to mount a crusade against liberal Christianity in the North—in America and

Europe? Will Southern Christianity recruit the soldiers of the 200,000,000-man army that marches on the Middle East, perhaps in defiance of the False Prophet? Is some charismatic leader, who finally unites Southern Christianity into a worldwide force, destined to become the famous "king of the South" who pushes at the "king of the North?"

To answer these questions now would be to speculate. Let us face it, most people do not even recognize Southern Christianity to be the worldwide movement that it is, much less comprehend its potential. Thus, it is just too early to determine what course Southern Christianity will take, too soon to perceive the role it will play as prophecy inexorably works itself out to become history. We will have to wait and see.

One thing, though, is absolutely clear. The conservative zealots who make up the bulk of Southern Christianity will brook no compromise with the lawless liberalism of the North, whether it emanates from Europe or America. The South will continue to see that liberalism as the calumny and the tripe it is, to resent that lawlessness as incompatible with Christianity, and to resist what it perceives as the West's apostasy with all its being. At the very least, then, Southern Christianity bodes to grow into a powerful anti-Western cultural phenomenon that grits its teeth against Western economic and cultural globalism.

But the portrait of Southern Christianity has another very important dimension. The United States' Immigration Reform Act of 1965 has brought it to America. Next month, in the second part of this three-part series, we will see how Southern Christianity is rapidly moving north.

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## Endnotes

1 Douthat, Ross, "The Christian Future," *Policy Review*, February/March, 2003, p. 89. Mr. Douthat, an editorial analyst for the *Atlantic Monthly*, brings these facts out in his review of *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* by Philip Jenkins.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, p. 90, as quoted by Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, p. 91, as quoted by Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 93.