

Confronting Christianity – Part 2

Doesn't Christianity Crush Diversity?

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Sept 4th, 2022

Intro:

- Wouldn't the world be better off if we observed and appreciated other cultures and religions and did not impose Christianity on them? This belief has gained a foothold in the minds and hearts of many in our world. But we must also ask, "Is Christianity a 'white, Western' religion?" This morning we will ask and answer these questions as we look at Christianity's past, present, and future through the lens of its theology and reality.
- "For many, the idea that Christianity is a white, Western religion, intrinsically tied to cultural imperialism, stands as a major ethical barrier to considering Christ. We celebrate diversity and lament the ways religion has been used by Westerners to destroy indigenous cultures" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity*, p. 33).
- It is true that in the past, Christianity was used as moral ground to conquer, destroy and oppress people and cultures. For example, "after the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in the fourth century, Western Christianity went from being the faith of a persecuted minority to being linked with the political power of an empire, and power is perhaps humanity's most dangerous drug. But, ironically, our habit of equating Christianity with Western culture is itself an act of Western bias" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 45).
- There is truth in the reality that often, the kingdom of Christ has come wrapped in the culture of the West. Case in point, last month, we were in rural Kenya, and men walked miles through the bush to a pastor's meeting wearing a full suit and tie. Nowhere in the Bible is a suit and tie mandatory dress for Christians, but there it was, looking at me square in the face.
- "But while Christianity held a monopoly on Western culture, Western culture never held a monopoly on Christianity" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 34). The real truth is that Christianity has always been and always will be multicultural, starting with its theology.

Christianity's theology is multicultural

- The whole world has always been on God's mind and heart. From His covenant with Noah not to flood the world again (Gen. 8:21-22), to His covenant with Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 17:4-6), to the praise of David that "all the families of the nations shall worship before you" (Ps. 22:27), to the prophecies of Isaiah who declared a time will come that God will gather "all nations and tongues and they shall come and shall see my glory" (Isa. 66:18), to God declaring that He "so loves the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish and have everlasting life" (John 3:16), to Jesus commanding us to "go make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), to the apostles giving their lives to spread the gospel to the nations (Rom. 1:5), to Paul teaching "here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11), to the glorious scene around the throne of God, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9-11).

- From the beginning of the Bible, all throughout, and at the very end, all people and every nation have always been in the heart and mind of God and in the heart and mind of Christianity.

Christianity's start is multicultural

- According to the Bible and confirmed by geneticists, life began in the Middle East. Christianity began in the Middle East as well, Israel, to be exact. Jesus was Jewish, and He did not speak English, and He wasn't white. Most countries have their own version of what they thought Jesus looked like. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic (again, not in English).
- When the church was launched, when the Holy Spirit descended on the 120 believers in the upper room (none of them was European), what was the sign? “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). “God’s Spirit enabled them to proclaim Jesus’s message in different languages. Those who heard were ‘from every nation under heaven,’ including people from modern-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Italy (Acts 2:5–11)” (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 35). “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” (Acts 2:9-12)
- God’s plan to launch the church was to enable and empower the church to declare the mighty works of God in the languages of the world. That was the sign, and that was the main reason for the empowerment of the Spirit.
- The first places reached with the message of the gospel were the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Christianity did not first reach Africa by white missionaries in the colonial era. The gospel reached Africa before it reached Rome. (Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch Acts 8:27). The same is true for India; historians record the apostle Thomas brought the gospel there.
- “Contrary to popular conceptions, the Christian movement was multicultural and multiethnic from the outset” (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 35). “As cultural anthropology professor and proud Naga tribe [India] member, Kanato Chopfi put it, ‘We must abandon this absurd idea that Christianity is a Western religion.’” (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 34).

Christianity's present is multicultural

- Current Christianity statistics: In 1900, 82% of Christians were living in the global north, 18% were living in the global south. In 2020, 33% of Christians are from the global north and, 67% of Christians are from the global south. (Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019 p. 4). The majority of Christians in the world today are non-white and non-western.
- Current missionary statistics: “The United States (135,000) continues to send the bulk of long-term cross-cultural missionaries today (with over half coming from North America and Europe), but Brazil (40,000), South Korea (35,000), the Philippines (25,000), and China (15,000) each send large numbers as well” (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2396939319880074>) And also notice where missionaries are be sent to. The US receives 38,000, Russia 25,000, Brazil 20,00.
- In the US, the biggest times for our nation to send missionaries out were after World War One and World War Two. There are many people today “portraying immigration as an erosion of

America's Christian identity. In fact, the opposite is true: most immigrants to the US are Christians, and the racial demographic that is eroding Christianity in America is white." (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 44).

- "As Yale law professor and leading black public intellectual Stephen Carter has observed, there is 'a difficulty endemic to today's secular left: an all-too-frequent weird refusal to acknowledge the demographics of Christianity.' Carter points out that in the US, black women are by far the most Christian demographic, while 'around the globe, the people most likely to be Christians are women of color.' He warns, 'When you mock Christians, you're not mocking who you think you are.' Those of us who grew up in the West must adjust to the fact that our culture does not own Christianity. In fact, quite the reverse." (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 43).

Christianity's future is multicultural

- "By 2050, it is expected that 77 percent of all Christians will live in the global south (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2396939319880074>). Conservative estimates in 2010, put China's Christian population at over sixty-eight million, and the number of Chinese Protestants has grown by an average of 10 percent annually since 1979. Experts like Fenggang Yang predict that there will be more Christians in China than in the United States by 2030, and that China could be a majority-Christian country by 2050" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. p. 42).
- "The last book of the Bible paints a picture of the end of time, when 'a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages' will worship Jesus (Rev. 7:9). This was the multicultural vision of Christianity from the beginning. For all the wrong turns made by Western Christians in the last two thousand years, when we look at church growth globally today, it is not crazy to think that this vision could ultimately be realized. So, if you care about diversity, don't dismiss Christianity: it is the most diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural movement in all of history" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 46).

Conclusion and Communion

- "The idea that Christianity is a diversity-resistant, white Western religion of privilege is utterly irreconcilable with the New Testament, history, the present, or the future. Christianity is the most ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically, and racially diverse belief system in all of history" (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 37).
- The truth of the gospel is for all cultures and is transformative for all people. We must go. We must be involved. And if we say we follow Christ, we need to have the heart of Christ, and the heart of Christ is for the whole world. This is written in the DNA of the Bible and it is written in the DNA of this church, as "we exist to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations."
- Bring the gospel and look to leave our cultural trappings and expressions at home. Put on your loin cloth or your turban (or whatever is culturally appropriate). This is why Paul said, "**I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.**" (1 Cor 9:22-23 ESV).
- Give the gospel and receive the gospel. Teach about Christ and learn about Christ. Embrace other people and cultures and uplift Christ in all things. Worship Him and enjoy Him with all people and all tribes and all nations.

*This sermon series is guided by the book *Confronting Christianity – 12 hard questions for the world's largest religion* by Rebecca McLaughlin.