

Lecture 20- There Went Forth a Stream: The Growth of the Christian Church

That the end of the Hellenistic-Roman phase of Christianity “did not lead to the slow strangulation of the total Christian presence in the world was due to the slow, painful, and far from satisfactory spread of Christian allegiance among the tribal peoples beyond the old frontiers...”

Andrew F. Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History, p. 19

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.

Revelation 14: 6

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—No reading assignment for this lecture

Key Terms

Goths, Franks, Cyril & Methodius

Objectives

- Discuss some of the reasons and methods for conversions during this time in history

Class Prayer

*“O Christ, our King, Creator, Lord,
Saviour of all who trust thy word,
To them who seek thee ever near,
Now to our praises, bend thine ear.”*

*“Thou didst create the stars of night;
Yet thou hast veiled in flesh thy light,
Hast designed a mortal form to wear,
A mortal’s painful lot to bear.”*

*“When thou didst hang upon the tree,
The quaking earth acknowledged thee;
When thou didst there yield up thy breath,
The world grew dark as shades of death.”*

*“Now in thy Father’s glory high,
Great conqueror, nevermore to die,
Us by thy mighty pow’r defend,
And reign through ages without end. Amen.”*
Gregory the Great

The Growth of the Christian Church: Age Number Three, Medieval Missions

I. Missions and Missionaries

A. Unknown men and women

1. “Rome had fallen into the hands of barbarians, but those barbarians were Christian. Already the Syriac, Ethiopian, Armenian, Gothic and Coptic languages had been pressed into the service of Christ; and the Gospels were translated into tongues whose very alphabet it had been necessary for missionaries to compose. At Nicea, at Ephesus,

at Chalcedon, the delegates of churches over which the emperor had no authority appeared, to show that Christ claimed not the Roman but the human race” (F. J. Foakes Jackson, *History of the Christian Church to AD 461*, p. 564).

2. John of Damascus (c. 675-749): “The Gospel of the knowledge of God has been preached to the whole world and has put the adversaries to flight not by war and arms and camps. Rather, it was a few unarmed, poor, unlettered, persecuted, tormented, done-to-death men, who, by preaching One who had died crucified in the flesh, prevailed over the wise and powerful, because the almighty power of the Crucified was with them.”

B. Conversion of the Goths (4th century)

1. Ulfilas (310-383)
2. Spread of Arian Christianity

C. Conversion of the Franks (around 500)

1. Clotilde and Clovis
2. Defeat of the Arians

D. Christianization of Great Britain (5th-7th centuries) (see lecture 21)

E. The Nestorian (Persian) mission to China (7th century) (see lecture 19)

F. The mission of Cyril and Methodius to the Slavic people of Moravia (9th century)

G. Anskar (d. 865), archbishop of Hamburg, and missionary to Scandinavia

“Anskar is a memorable and prophetic figure, not because of what he achieved, but because of the patience and devotion with which he pushed against a door which was not yet ready to open, and because he is the first of a great succession of bishops who worked outwards from a well-established Christian centre into the regions beyond which were still pagan.” (Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, p. 70)

H. The Conversion of the Russians in 988 (Prince Vladimir of Kiev)

II. Reasons for the Conversions to Christianity

- A. _____ conversions
- B. Perceived advantages
- C. The “power encounter”
- D. Genuine faith
- E. God’s providence

Divine providence “made ready the Roman Empire, whose growth has reached such limits that the whole multitude of nations are brought into close connection. For the Divinely-planned work particularly required that many kingdoms should be leagued together under one empire, so that the preaching of the Word might quickly reach to all people.” (Pope Leo the Great, *Sermons* 49, NPNF 2: 12:161)

III. The Results: Age Number 3

- A. Age number 1: Jewish Christianity
- B. Age number 2: Christianity of the Roman Empire
- C. Age number 3: Conversion of the pagan peoples of Northern Europe

Question for Consideration

How does Christianity change people’s culture?

For Further Study

Walls, Andrew F. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. 1996.

Outstanding chapters on missionary history by a former missionary to Sierra Leone and Professor Emeritus of the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh.

Read the pages entitled “The ‘Primary’ Source of the Millennium ‘Legends/Historical Events,’” describing the conversion of Russia/Ukraine around the year 1000. According to these accounts which apostle visited Russia? This apostle is claimed as the patron saint of two other countries. Do you know what they are? According to the tradition who was the first Russian to be converted to Christianity? How did this happen? How according to the tradition did Prince Vladimir make his decision as to the type of religion he would embrace?