

CHRISTIANITY IS DYING!

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I am currently reading a book called *The Lost History of Christianity* by Philip Jenkins. So far the book has been lacking in details, as the author makes statements and theories with very little information to support his position. I am hoping that the remainder of the book will be more satisfying with detailed information. The author brings out that at one point in time Jerusalem was the center of Christianity as it spread through Turkey, Greece and into Europe, it equally spread across the Asian and African continents. It was during the Middle Ages that the Asian and African legs were lost, while the European leg continued. He points out that religious scholars and historians make a common mistake of studying only the European leg of Christianity without balancing that history with the other two legs. His book calls on religious historians to fill in the gaps and provide the details of loss of Asian and African legs of Christianity. He declares a greater need, for scholars and historians, is to study the impact of such a great loss.

Mr. Jenkins provides a series of explanations to the loss of these two legs of Christianity. The first and more common factor is the violent takeover of large regions by other religious groups. The most commonly advertised group, for conversion by the sword, would be the Islamic faith. Who caused whole regions to be taken over by Muslims, thus converting most of Africa and the Middle East to Islamic societies? Historians do recognize that Islam ruled these areas for hundreds of years co-existing with Christianity and Judaism in peace. What often is not acknowledged is that peace ended by the Crusades. The peace ended because Christianity began a violent and bloody war to capture the "Holy Land from the Infidels". These acts directly and indirectly caused the eradication of Judaism and Christianity from Muslim territories, labeling them as "infidels" and instituting the new policy of religious intolerance. However, the Muslims were not the only religious group with violent takeovers, this was also conducted by Buddhist, followers of Shinto and even Christianity at times.

As much as the violent takeovers are used as an explanation it is often exaggerated, many regions simply voluntarily converted to the new religion. Some converted due to the mass change in population, making them the minority so they converted to the current form of religion. Some groups converted by simply following their leaders into the new religion. As the author rightly points out, looking at these varying religions back then the religious change over is often not as radical as we might believe.

The last explanation to the death of Christianity in African and Asian Continents would be change. In other words, Christianity in these areas deviated so far from the "truth" it ceased to be Christianity. I believe this to be the most dangerous form of death, because it provides the greatest form of damage; corruption. In Islamic areas, there were areas where women didn't convert, due to the cultural status of women they were able to hide their continued belief in Christianity. Evidence of this condition would be seen by families that still insisted that their children were baptized despite being Muslim. In the Japanese and Chinese regions they had underground churches to still practice their faith despite the persecution. The isolation allowed for deviations with no checks and balances. The danger is that the new religion and their changing culture would be allowed to have a greater impact on their belief system, thus

corrupting it. Even though they believe they still held the truth, they unknowingly drifted so far from the truth it ceased to be Christianity. One glaring example of this is provided in Mr. Jenkins's book as he re-counts a documentary in 1990. He says, "Even after the overwhelming persecution that uprooted the Japanese Church, thousands of 'hidden Christians' somehow maintained their clandestine traditions in remote fishing villages and island communities. This catacomb church strayed far from mainstream Catholicism, and many of its practices make it look almost like a Shinto sect: their Eucharistic elements are rice, fish, and sake."

This form of corruption is extremely dangerous for believers today. By having so many sects who have deviated from the original form, brings confusion to believers today. A person looks at the different sects of Christianity and stands in confusion, which one is right. With no spiritual or scriptural education to discern who is following the scriptures and who is not, they choose not to believe at all. It's easier. This condition brings doubt and confusion to all of Christianity. Additionally, literature from groups that have deviated in the past are treated as equal in authority to the scriptures today, even though they are inconsistent to the sacred text. One example of this is the Gnostic Literature. Scholars and students study these documents treating them with the same authority as the scriptures have. It is the study of this literature that many non-believers are resting their conclusion that Jesus was just a man and not God in the flesh. Jesus married the prostitute Mary Magdalene (as declared by the Pope) and had a daughter (the Holy Grail). Both of these types of corruption have driven so many potential believers away from God, and is striking at the very core of our belief system; the validity of the Bible and deity of Jesus.

Christianity in America is already experiencing this form of death today; the form of corruption. Christians today are facing vast changes to what was once the "norm" or "truth". We are seeing changes amongst all sects of Christianity that are warning signs to those who are willing to see them.

One such indicator is the lack of teaching of the Old Testament. Churches and Christians today do not spend much time learning or teaching the events of the Old Testament. The "children" stories are still popular in Sunday School, but the meat of the Old Testament is too often ignored. We can go to the "Bible Store" and purchase the "sacred scriptures" that contain only the New Testament; 1/3 of the whole Bible. Many Christians see no purpose to the Old Testament, and many see it only as a connection between the Judaism and Jesus. Without teaching the Old Testament we lose the continuity of God's message to man. Without teaching the historical context and the cultural understanding of the Jews, we misapply the scriptures. The message becomes corrupt and/or incomplete.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”* (King James Version)

Another indicator is the change in sermons today. I recently read a sermon written by B.H. Carroll from a book entitled 25 Great Sermons. In comparing the content of the sermon to

the content of a sermon given in a "mega church" today, we find a huge disparity between them. Messages presented today are focused on our feeling good about the life we live and contentment with ourselves. Sermons you would find at a seminar for bettering one's self or a leadership class. Preachers today can speak for a whole hour based on one or two verses from the Bible. They tell one story after the other and a few jokes in between. **Where's the beef?** How can we take a verse from a passage of the Bible, without discussing the context of the verse, the context of the passage and the historical background and expect the Christian message to not change? Sermons used to focus on Theology which means the study of God. The sermons focused on the vastness and greatness of God the Father, and the plan that God incorporated from the beginning of time and the fulfillment of that plan. Today we learn how God is here to make our lives better and give us strength to overcome the challenges we face at work. God does that, but He is not here to be at our beckoning call, we are to submit to him. We have been called to conduct His plan and His ministry. God never promised to make our lives better, but said the opposite - it would be tough. Our worship service is not a time to entertain, but to prepare ourselves to face God, as the anointed messenger of God presents a message from God the Father; whether it is rebuke or edification.

John 15: 18-20 *“If the world hates you , ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”* (King James Version)

Another indicator is the cultural infiltration into Christianity. In today's America we see the acceptance of Homosexual marriage. Across the United States, state after state is passing laws for same sex marriage. Although it is sad to see America drift from its religious roots, this is NO EXCUSE for these cultural changes to change Christian doctrine. We are seeing more and more Christians and Pastors accept and participate in such lifestyles. How can we turn to the sacred text, reading Romans 1, and believe that such a lifestyle is acceptable service to the Lord. These cultural changes go beyond Homosexuality, but include Women Pastors, Evolution, Marijuana, Tithing, Assisted Suicide, etc. What makes these cultural changes worse is society believes it has a right to enforce these cultural changes upon the Church. Already we have seen several denominations taken to court because of their stance on Homosexuality and Women Pastors, not being qualified to serve in their denomination. This is just another form, of convert by the sword.

Romans 1:21-32 *“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God...For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...”* (King James Version)

If there ever was a time that true believers should spend more time studying and defending the faith, it is now. Questioning ever statement and doctrine with the mindset it is corrupted and we need to find the truth, it is now. If God-fearers, fear the government and society more than God, it will not be long before Christianity is a dead religion in America. If

you have ever seen the bumper sticker, "COEXIST" where each letter is a different religious symbol, you know what Christianity is converting too. The new form of Christianity will be universal in nature, tolerance for any belief system whether consistent or inconsistent with the sacred text. Any action that is socially unacceptable is a sin and an action that is socially acceptable is acceptable to the Lord. God fearers will have a choice, convert or be sued.

Luke 18:6-8 *“And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?”* (King James Version)