



## CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

### HISTORY OF MISSIONS

#### PART 1

### HISTORY OF MISSIONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



By Bishop Warwick Cole-Edwardes

Footprints into Africa

## **CONTENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. The Early Church**

1. The spread of Christianity
2. Ideal circumstances for its spread
3. Evidence of growth
4. Persecution of the early church
5. The end of this vibrant evangelism
6. Notable missionaries of the early centuries
  - i. Apostle Paul
  - ii. Polycarp
  - iii. Justin Martyn
  - iv. Perpetia
  - v. Ulfilas
  - vi. Patrick

#### **B. Roman Missions**

1. Roman Catholic missions
2. Gregory the Great
3. Boniface
4. Anskar
5. Monastic Orders
6. Nestorians
7. Raymond Lull
8. Las Casa
9. Francis Xavier
10. Matthew Ricci
11. Late medieval period

#### **C. The Moravian Advance**

1. Protestants
2. 18<sup>th</sup> century
3. Moravian Brethren
4. Count Zinzendorf
5. Christian David
6. George Schmidt

#### **D. American Indian Advance to North America**

1. First missionaries to North America
2. Protestant missionaries
3. John Elliott
4. The Mayhews
5. David Brainerd
6. Eleazar Wheelock
7. David Zeisberger
8. Isaac McCoy
9. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman
10. Reasons for the lack of success

### **Conclusion**

## INTRODUCTION

1. From the very beginning, Christianity was different from all other religions. The command to go forth with the good news was the very heart of the faith.
2. “Christianity is the only true universal religion in the world. Yet its , Founder was born in a stable, lived in obscurity, and died on a wooden cross in a remote province of the Roman Empire ... although His untimely death at the age of thirty three years sent His disciples into confusion, His resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day revived their Messianic hopes, rejuvenated their flagging spirits, and sent them out to win the world...

Their task was formidable; their chances of success almost nil. They had no central organization, no financial resources, no influential friends, and no political machine. Arrayed against them was the ecclesiastical power of the Sanhedrin, the political and military might of the Roman Empire, and the religious fanaticism of the Jews. Moreover, their Leader, whose life and teachings were to constitute their message, was unknown outside His small circle of friends. He had written no books, erected no monuments, and endowed no institutions. The task looked hopeless ...” (Kane)

3. Yet it was the post-Pentecost generation that turned the world upside down – spreading Christianity beyond the borders of Palestine as far west as Rome and into virtually every major urban centre in the entire eastern empire.

Herbert Kane: What began as a Jewish sect in A.D. 30 had grown into a world religion by A.D. 60.

### A. THE EARLY CHURCH

#### 1. The spread of Christianity

- At Pentecost Jesus’ frightened and doubting disciples were empowered with the Holy Spirit, and the missionary movement was born.
- Tradition: Matthew went to Ethiopia, Andrew to Scythia, Bartholomew to Arabia and India, Thomas to India, as well as great men like Peter and Paul (to be discussed later)
- The preaching and teaching of trained evangelists – driven abroad by persecution (and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70)
  - I. Lay preachers – When the synagogues closed their doors to them, they continued their preaching and teaching in private homes.
  - II. Travelling evangelists – sold their goods, gave to the poor and then left their homes to evangelise those that hadn’t heard the gospel yet.
- The personal witness of believers – “In that age every Christian was a missionary” (John Foxe). “Nothing is more notable than the anonymity of these early missionaries – yet they were some of the most effective ones of all times” (Stephen Neill).
  - I. Verbal – the soldier witnessed to his recruits, the slave girl to her mistress, the wife of her husband, etc.
  - II. Nonverbal testimony – love and concern for others Acts of faith and charity.
  - III. Faith shown in persecution and death – until the 4<sup>th</sup> century (when Constantine publicly professed Christianity), no Christian could ever feel entirely safe from official



retribution e.g. stoning of Stephen. Many pagans were converted through witnessing persecution. Tertullian: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

- The intellectual reasoning of the early apologists, e.g. beginning with Paul in Athens, also Origen, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr.

## 2. Ideal circumstances for its spread

- There was great opportunity for mobility within the Roman Empire – the Roman roads were well-constructed and much-used. They were "paved, well-engineered, running undeviatingly forward over hill and dale ... travel was safer and more rapid than at any later time till the 19<sup>th</sup> century". (Neill)
- There was relative peace in the Empire – travel therefore was easy.
- Greek was the universal language of the Empire – resulting in free communication of the Gospel wherever they went.
- Availability of synagogues – There was "the presence of Jews in large numbers in every part of the Roman Empire" (Neill). The synagogues were public forums in which the Christian message was preached and Christian ideas disseminated.
- A spirit of openness to new ideas – people were craving for something more than the impersonal and impotent mythical religion of the pagan gods.

## 3. Evidence of growth

- By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian century, the gospel had already touched some in the highest circles of society in Rome, the capital of the Empire – by 166 A.D. the number of Christians surpassed that of the Jews, and from 251 A.D. the Christian population in Rome alone was at least 30 000.
- Epistles of Ignatius (A.D. 110) show that the churches were already settling down to a pattern of close-knit fellowship organised around the local bishop (Neill).
- Letter from Pliny (governor of Bithynia) to Emperor Trajan in 112 A.D. – feared that the shrines of the pagan gods would come to be wholly deserted due to the rapid growth of the Church.
- In the time of Chrysostom (at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> century), population of Antioch (Syria) was about half a million (half of them Christian).
- There are many other reports of Christian communities being established in all parts of the then known world (e.g. Egypt, Ethiopia, India, etc.)

## 4. Persecution of the early church

- Christians under the Roman Empire had no legal right to existence – Emperors like Nero, Domitian, etc. ordered their persecution.
- Because they did not conform to the law, they were persecuted, leading to martyrdom.
- This made a deep impression – many pagans were converted as they witnessed the condemnation and death of Christians.

## 5. The end of this vibrant evangelism – during Constantine's reign in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century.

- Christianity became a state religion (by 313 A.D.) – the churches were flooded with nominal Christians, Christianity became the "fashion" – Christians population rose to about 10% of the 50 million in the Empire (Neill).
- Changes: elaborate structures, not house-churches, creeds, not spontaneous testimonies and prayers – "faith became superficial ... identified with the acceptance of dogmatic teachings rather than with a radical change of inner being" (Neill).
- The year 500 marked the beginning of "The Thousand Years of Uncertainty" (Latourette) – these were characterised by the struggle with the barbarians and the unending battle with

Islam – yet the years 500-1200 A.D. are regarded as being the years of the “Christianization of Europe” (Kane).

- Untamed barbarians – threatened stability of the Roman state. Evangelists sent to them to convert them e.g. Martin, Bishop of Tours (in France), Ulfilas (Arian), and Patrick and Columba (Celtics).

6. Notable missionaries of the early centuries

- The apostle Paul

- I. Viewed by many as the “greatest missionary of all times” – “the prototype, model and inspiration of thousands of successors” (Latourette).
- II. Within 10 years, Paul had established the Church (planted congregations) in four provinces of the Empire – Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia.
- III. Concentrated his work in strategic population (trade and political) centres – reached people from all levels of society.
- IV. He endured incredible persecution (2 Cor. 11:25-28), faced many interpersonal conflicts (e.g. with Barnabas over Mark), dealt with cultural and religious traditions of the day (e.g. eating meat offered to idols).
- V. Martyred under Emperor Nero (A.D. 64)
- VI. He “was the greatest ...most systematic ...of all early missionaries. It was his aim to work rapidly through all the Gentile countries to the utmost ends of the world ...to Spain” (the end of the then inhabited earth) (Neill).

- Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

- I. Sat at the feet of the apostle John (last link with Jesus in the flesh).
- II. Had a thriving congregation in Smyrna by early 2<sup>nd</sup> century – for 50 years. A gentle and humble man.
- III. Forceful ministry against paganism – denounced as the “atheist ...the destroyer of our gods” (Bruce).
- IV. At 86 years (A.D. 156 – period of persecution, he was called upon to recant, but proclaimed: “For 86 years I have been His servant, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” – consequently he was burnt alive – resulting in cessation of persecution.

- Justin Martyr

- I. Converted as a young man, became one of faith’s ablest defenders.
- II. Forceful writer – intelligently presented Christianity to pagans, openly denounced persecutions, in Rome taught believers in private homes.
- III. Beheaded with six others.

- Perpetua (202 A.D.)

- I. Lived in Carthage with her infant son and personal slave Felicitas – attended catechism classes under Saturus.
- II. Emperor Septimus Severus (202 A.D.) – forbade teaching or making converts to Christianity or Judaism.
- III. After much persecution at her execution (before being beheaded), she cried: “Give out the Word to the brothers and sisters; stand fast in the faith, love one another, and don’t let your suffering become a stumbling block to you.”

- Ulphilas

- I. In the early 20's spent 10 years in Constantinople, under the influence of Bishop Eusebius (Arian heresy).
- II. At 30 years, made Bishop to the Goths (north of Danube) A.D. 341 – evangelism among barbarians for next 40 years, hampered by persecution. One of the greatest foreign missionaries of early church – to the Goths.
- III. Translated the Bible into their native tongue.
- IV. Died at 70 years, his ministry continued by faithful successors. “Their doctrine, perhaps, was defective; their hearts were not. They sought service, not security; comradeship in Christ, not a cathedral; discipleship, not domination” (Edman).

- Patrick

- I. Born into Christian family (389 A.D.) – in mid-teens, sold as slave (for six years) – was converted. Escaped back to his home in Ireland.
- II. Ireland's great 5<sup>th</sup> century missionary – began in 432 A.D. By 447, much of Ireland had been evangelized – continued for 30 years.
- III. Great emphasis on spiritual growth – converts given intensive training in the Scriptures.
- IV. Planted about 200 churches, had 100 000 converts – tremendous success, yet very humble.

- Columba

- I. After Patrick, the Irish (Celtic monks) had great passion for foreign missions (especially central Europe, to Iceland and Britain).
- II. Columba born in 521 .A.D. became Celtic Abbott-missionary – established many churches and monasteries in Ireland.
- III. At war with the King – fled from Ireland (563 A.D.) – made tremendous impact on Britain and Scotland. Established monastery for training of evangelists.

B. ROMAN MISSIONS – BAPTIZING THE MASSES

1. Roman Catholic missions were always closely tied to political and military exploits – mass conversions were a major factor in church growth – it was this method that converted Europe!
2. Gregory the Great (540-604)
  - One of the most able and influential Bishops of Rome during whole Medieval period – truly concerned about Christian missions.
  - His priority – Britain (sent Augustine and other monks to establish R/C church in England) – opposition concerning pagan traditions, so Gregory established missionary policy standards (pattern used for centuries).
3. Boniface (Winfried)
  - “One of the most remarkable missionaries in the entire history of the expansion of Christianity,” and “a man who had a deeper influence on the history of Europe than any Englishman who has ever lived”.
  - It was he who began to emphasize the church more than Christ, the Sacrament more than Scripture – resulting in the lowering spiritual tone of England and the Continent.
  - He was the apostle to Germany. His aim was to “turn the hearts of the heathen Saxons to the Catholic Faith.”

4. Anskar

- Missionary to Denmark, then Sweden.
- Conversions mostly politically motivated.
- In spite of all his efforts, he was unable to establish a permanent base for Christianity in Scandinavia.
- After his death, the people reverted to paganism – only after the 10<sup>th</sup> century did the R/C church gain a sure foothold in this area.

5. Monastic Orders

Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Jesuits – gained foothold in every continent.

6. Nestorians

- “The most missionary church the world has every seen” (John Stewart) – great Christian heritage.
- From Asia Minor to Persia and Arabian Peninsula (to avoid persecution).
- To central Asia, India, Afghanistan, Tibet (“men of great faith, mighty in Scripture” – schools established to train young full-time evangelists).
- China (by 9<sup>th</sup> century), Korea, Japan, South-east Asia.
- Rapid decline after opposition from Islam – era of Christian missions over and forgotten.

7. Raymond Lull

- The Crusades – the Church’s greatest expansionist effort – a 200-year movement (1095-1291) to win back the Holy Land, to expand the territory controlled by Christians (not to convert the Muslims!) – a bloody ordeal, and 10’s of 1000’s of lives were lost!
- Francis of Assisi – proposed Muslims should be won by love and not hate. Attempts to evangelise them.
- Followed by Lull – at first, life of debauchery – “born again” around 1260 – became reclusive monk, missionary to the Muslims at 40 years – in Tunis (North Africa) his doctrine was evangelical and orthodox. Martyred in 1315. R/C church condemned him as a heretic.

8. Las Casas

- New era for R/C foreign missions in late 15<sup>th</sup> century (age of discovery in the New World – the Americas)
- Sent by e.g. Queen Isabella of Spain – mass conversions e.g. Mexico (up to between 8 000 – 14 000 people baptized in a day).
- Cruelty to Indians – Las Casas “became the greatest champion of the Indians during the Spanish colonial period” – pleading for their cause with government officials, etc.

9. Francis Xavier

- 16<sup>th</sup> century dominated by Protestant Reformation – counteracted by Catholic Reformation – missions to New World, India and the Far East (mostly by the Jesuits, the most famous of whom was Xavier).
- 1541 sailed for India – concentrated on the children (“to memorise and share the Christian doctrine”). Also performed many baptisms – all very superficial.
- To Japan in 1549 – by close of 16<sup>th</sup> century, 300 000 professing Christians – Catholicism a notable influence for more than 2 centuries.

10. Matthew Ricci

- Late 16<sup>th</sup> century Matthew Ricci (and 13 other Italian Jesuit priests) arrived in India.
- China very resistant to Christian missions. Nestorians had influence from 6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, then prohibited.
- Ricci entered China through Portuguese port Macao – expertise in maths, astronomy and geography – great influence through his secular learning – he later became “the most respected foreign figure in Chinese literature”.
- Dressed firstly as Buddhist monk and later as a Confucian scholar – (said his primary aim was to bring the gospel, yet compromising and very controversial!) – resulting in Chinese Rites Controversy, which raged for centuries – never really being resolved.
- Died 1611 – during his ministry a significant number of government officials and scholars had professed faith in Christ, (one man passing it on to his family for generations) – although relatively few, these men had great influence (Christianity continued to grow in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries).
- Same dogma and practice as Medieval Catholicism in Europe.

11. Late medieval period

- Tremendous growth for R/C missions – continued through the Renaissance and Reformation.
- Became more and more diversified and decentralized – the Vatican consolidated their missionary outreach during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- Propaganda established (the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith) – mainly French missionaries slow start, thriving in 18<sup>th</sup> century, but steep decline by 1800.
- Began rebuilding foreign evangelism in 19<sup>th</sup> century – increase by 1850, especially in women’s work (Anne-Marie Javouhey).
- By 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly 100 000 professionals and lay missionaries serving throughout the world (e.g. Mother Teresa).

C. THE MORAVIAN ADVANCE: DAWN OF PROTESTANT MISSIONS

1. Protestants

- During 16<sup>th</sup> century, mission not a major concern (little time, personnel and opportunities).
- Luther felt missions unnecessary because Christ was coming back soon.
- Calvin outwardly missionary-minded – evangelists to France, Huguenots to Indians in Brazil.
- 17<sup>th</sup> century – more scattered mission efforts e.g. Quakers in America, Lutherans to S. America.

2. 18<sup>th</sup> century – first great thrust of Protestant missions

- Lutherans (Jacob Spener, August Francke) – turned University at Halle into centre of continental Pietism and evangelism and foreign missions – called heretics.
- Danish-Halle Mission born – Danish missionaries sent to S.E. coast of India (Henry Plutschau, Frederick Schwartz) – declined by end of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

3. Moravian Brethren

- Influenced by Pietism at Halle, under leadership of Count Zinzendorf
- Paved way for modern missions – stations in Virgin Islands (1732), Greenland (1733), N. America (1734), Lapland and S. America (1735), S. Africa (1736) and Labrador (1771).
- Proportion of missionaries to lay people – 1:60.



- All missionaries were self-supporting (took their trades with them) – great example to the locals (upgraded economy).
- Their emphasis: “Every Christian is a missionary and should witness through his daily vocation”.
- Were single-minded – their ministry came before anything else.

#### 4. Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf

- Missionary-statesman for 33 years, pioneered ecumenical evangelism, founded the Moravian church, wrote many hymns, launched a world-wide missionary movement – which set the stage for William Carey and the “Great Century” of missions that would follow.
- Studied at Halle and then Wittenberg (law). Longed to enter Christian ministry.
- Gave up life of nobleman in 1719 – sheltered religious refugees in 1722 (Herrnhut), became thriving community. Revival occurred 1727, new passion for missions (chief characteristics of Moravian movement)
- Went to the field himself, but not successful (too arrogant and conceited).

#### 5. Christian David and Hans Egede

- Christian David, co-founder of Moravian church (brought exiles from all over Europe to Zinzendorf’s estate)
- 1717 (at 27 years) converted, became travelling lay preacher, helped Zinzendorf established Herrnhut in 1722.
- 1733 – missionary to Greenland to replace Hans Egede – leading to conflict between David and Egede.
- Hans Egede (Norwegian Pietist) to Greenland 1721 – slow progress due to language barrier – greater interest in spiritual matters after smallpox outbreak (1733).
- 1738 – revival under Moravians. Jealousy. Egede returned to Copenhagen, his ministry continued by his sons.

#### 6. George Schmidt

- Moravian, dispatched to South Africa to work among Hottentots (1737) – established school, worked among the people on the farms.
- Many setbacks, lethargy from Hottentots, opposition from Dutch residents and colonial authorities.
- Ordained and given authority to baptize, but nevertheless sent back to Europe in 1744.
- 50 years later (1792), Moravians returned, found remnants of Schmidt’s ministry.
- Now under Hans Hallbeck the mission work thrived – by mid-twentieth century, 38 missions stations and 50 000 professing Christians.

### D. AMERICAN INDIAN MISSIONS: SEEKING THE “NOBLE SAVAGE”

#### 1. First missionaries to N. America

- 16<sup>th</sup> century – Spanish Roman Catholic priests (Franciscan order) to Pueblos (SW United States) – only nominal Christians, retaining ancient religious traditions.
- 17<sup>th</sup> century – French Jesuits to the Hurons (St. Lawrence valley), until military attack.

#### 2. Protestant missionaries

- made a lasting impact on N. American Indians – with colonialism came the calculated zeal to evangelise and convert the Indians.

- Colonial charters emphasized Indian evangelism – but only hollow words, because the Indians became a threat and hindrance in their greed for more land – the work of missionaries openly despised.

### 3. John Elliott

- Greatest of all missionaries to the Indians, yet his primary vocation = minister to Roxbury Congregational Church.
- Born and studies for the ministry in England. A non-conformist.
- 1631 to Massachusetts – only 1644, at 40 years, did he start his missionary endeavour. Took 2 years to learn Algonquin language.
- 1646 first sermon (Waban's wigwam) – catechism for children and evangelistic sermons for adults – good response.
- Natick territory given to Christian Indians – biblical form of government. Indians expected to fall into line with European culture (weakness).
- Elliott's primary concern - spiritual welfare and maturity of Indians. Was slow and meticulous. First baptism only in 1651, first church only when Indians ready to take on responsibilities.
- Translated catechism and N.T. into local language.
- Trained 24 Indian evangelists by 1660 to minister to their own people, many ordained Indian ministers, school established.
- War (King Philip's War) resulted from land encroachment, dishonest bargaining and ill-treatment of Indians – 1675. Many families and settlements in N.E. were utterly devastated. Many of Elliott's praying Christians exiled to Island in Boston Harbour. Those who remained were indiscriminately murdered.
- After war, Elliott attempted to rebuild, but life was never the same – weakened numerically and spiritually.
- Died in 1690 at 85 years.

### 4. The Mayhews

- 1630's – Thomas Mayhew Snr. To America, settled on Martha's Vineyard. Son, Thomas Jnr., ordained as minister in early 20's to serve at Martha's Vineyard.
- Mayhew Jnr. (same as Elliott) had burden for Indians – evangelised with Hiacoomes (his first convert – 1643) – 10 years later, 300 converts.
- Died on trip to England. His work continued by his father (till he died at 92 years of age), his grandson and great-grandson.

### 5. David Brainerd

- Heir of New England Puritanism and product of the Great Awakening – bringing the gospel to scattered wandering tribes of Indians was his single mission.
- Died at 29 years of age as a result of his strenuous labours, after only 5 years of missionary work.
- His personal life was a great inspiration to men like Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, Henry Martyn etc.
- He lost his parents at an early age, was expelled from Yale.
- 1742 responded to call from Ebenezer Pemberton to work among the Indians – went out on his own with no knowledge of language, unprepared for life in the wilderness of Kaunaumek.
- Worked with the Forks of the Delaware River, and along the Susquehanna River – his preaching had little success – he suffered illness and depression. Then in 1745 to Crossweeksung – Indians more eager, revival broke out – he was exhilarated!

- Church established at Cranbury – 150 converts. Died of T.B. in the home of Jonathan Edwards in 1747.
6. Eleazer Wheelock
- In New England – educated Indian youth in his home for 4 years.
  - His plan: To bring whites and Indians together for training in missionary service – to learn each other’s cultures (in Lebanon, Connecticut – 1754).
  - Failure due to white domination and Wheelock’s contempt for Indians and their civilization.
7. David Zeisberger
- Most famous Moravian missionary to the Indians – laboured for 63 years amid tragedy and hardship and opposition.
  - Helped establish Gnadenhuetten (1746) – prosperous Christian Indian farming community of 500 people.
  - Gnadenhuetten was attacked in 1755. Finally he secured a permanent tract of land in Ohio in 1770 – peace shattered by the American Revolution (1781) – Indians murdered.
  - 1792 settled in Ontario – established mission station.
  - 1798 returned to the Indians in Ohio and remained there till his death 1808.
8. Isaac McCoy
- Many years after the American Revolution – lull in Protestant missions. Many Indians had perished from wars and diseases, those who survived moved westward, away from civilization.
  - Denominations showed renewed interest in missions to the Indians – Methodist preacher John Steward (black man) and interpreter Jonathan Painter (a converted runaway slave) – preached in Upper Sandusky area.
  - Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy – opened a mission in Fort Wayne (1820), then 2 years later Carey mission in Michigan (1822), then once again 2 years later a colony “west of the state of Missouri” (wanted the Indians segregated from the whites).
  - McCoy initiated contact with the government, which became deeply involved in Indian missions – involved with the controversial removal of Cherokees from Georgia (1837 – one of the great injustices committed by the US government).
9. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman
- Opening of the West for settlement – gave birth to new breed of missionaries (inspired by 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening - felt that evangelizing had to go hand in hand with “civilizing” the Indians – this proved to be a great obstacle for missions!)
  - Their marriage was a “business arrangement” so that Narcissa could go to the mission field (no single women were allowed!) – went to Oregon, travelling with Henry and Eliza Spaulding (worked with different tribes when they reached their destination – personality differences and jealousies).
  - Much disunity, yet Whitman built the mission into a thriving farming enterprise – it became a receiving station for new missionaries and other immigrants, as well as a school for Indian and white children.
  - Cayuse people resented his prosperity and influx of white immigrants – massacred Whitman and others in 1847 – 5 Indians were tried and hung.

Spauldings:

Concentrated on missionary activities – preaching and teach; reach many souls (despite opposition).

- After his wife's death, Spaulding returned to Nez Perce (the original tribe he had come to) – witnessed a revival – tribe members began evangelizing other tribes.
- Decrease in mission at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

10. Reasons for lack of success in Indian missions

- intense conflict between 2 cultures for supremacy over the land.
- Deep-seated belief of white Americans that Indians were racially inferior, and that their culture was not worth saving.

CONCLUSION

1. In the year 500, the Church could look back on 5 centuries of miraculous success. As yet it knew almost nothing of the ancient and stable civilizations of India and China, but it had constituted itself the greatest civilising force in the Western world. It had drawn into itself the best of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. It had shown its ability to survive the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. It had manifested a versatility that could adapt itself to the needs of peoples on very different levels of civilization (Neill).
2. Why then, was there a gradual decline? – What happened to the glorious prospect which the Church had at first? What stopped the Christian faith in its steady advance, and disappointed the fond hopes for its ultimate conquest of the whole world? Why had it become almost exclusively a European faith 1000 years later, with only a few pockets elsewhere?

4 reasons:

- a. Incursions of the Barbarians – the strength of Christianity was centred in the Roman Empire, and that Empire slowly disintegrated during the early Middle Ages under successive waves of barbarian invasion (Goths, Huns, Saxons, Jutes, Norsemen and Vikings etc.)
  - b. The rise of Islam – 100 years after Mohammed's death in 632 A.D., fanatical followers took this faith abroad (Middle East, North America, Spain, France and Asia Minor etc.)
  - c. Alliance with the State – increasing identification of the Christian faith with political power. After persecution ceased, Christianity became respectable, and advanced to a position of power. Christianity "... no longer persuaded men; it commanded" (Cook).
  - d. Internal changes
    - growing distinction between clergy and laity
    - church membership became the "accepted thing" – nearly everyone became a Christian in name.
    - increasing stress on rules and ceremonies, insisting on conformity (regardless of your spiritual condition).
3. The key to Christian success in the earlier years lay in the inherent value of its message and the lives of its followers. Its only power was spiritual, and the authority of the church organization extended only to those who voluntarily recognized it.
  4. How we pray that the Church of today would recover its zeal and enthusiasm for evangelising the unreached peoples of the world!