

Bodenhorn, Barbara and Richard Irvine (University of Cambridge) - Anthropology, Christianity, Conversion

S2 Religion and Politics

Anthropology, Christianity, Conversion

Barbara Bodenhorn & Richard Irvine. Co-convenors

Mondays 3:30 - 5:00, Seminar Room, Weeks 5-6, Lent 2013

These two seminars will provide a supplement to the lectures on world religion given during Michaelmas term; they are designed to encourage engagement with textual extracts from primary source materials in order to generate discussion. We are focusing on conversion to specific forms of Christianity as historical processes that invite both particular and comparative analysis. In part we are asking if there is anything substantially different if the conversion process involves the shift to Christianity, or shifts within Christianity. And in part, we are asking how the idea of 'conversion' might be implicated in political processes in distinct ways.

In both seminars we will divide into two groups in order to discuss different aspects of the same process. Each group will be given four extracts from source materials to read, after which there will be a discussion to draw out the main themes and points of interest. We will then recombine in order to discuss the overall questions, and to encourage comparison between the materials looked at by the two separate groups.

Students should be reassured that questions reflecting the content of lectures as well as seminars on Christianity will indeed appear on this year's exam. Detailed reading lists are provided here for those who want to take these topics further in supervision essays, revision etc. We will ask students to select particular readings to prepare for the second class, so that we can ask them to bring insights from those readings into the discussion.

Week 5: First Contact

It is occasionally asserted that the Reformation is the first moment in Europe when religious 'truth' is considered debatable - a moment, it is felt, that contributes to the growth of rationality and the separation of faith from the knowledge of the world called science. Such assertions should be considered very carefully indeed. In week 7, we consider conversion to Christianity as a confrontation of belief systems before the Reformation in Europe, and in the 'new world'. One overarching question to ask is whether conversion assumes a radical rupture with existing belief? Or whether it is assumed to embody simply a continuity in more perfect form? This first week uses two zones of conversion to ask, in those particular instances,

- what the conversion process itself was assumed to be;
- whether this included assumptions about changes in ways of thinking;
- how we can 'anthropologise' our understanding of what the actors in these interactions thought they were doing; and
- in what ways these engagements were implicated in contemporary political and economic processes.

General Reading (see also readings from Cannell lectures)

*Fenella Cannell ed. 2006. *The anthropology of Christianity*. Duke UP

*Joel Robbins 2007. "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity", *Current Anthropology* 48:5-38.

Robert W. Hefner ed. 1993. *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*. University of California Press.

Group one: Europe (Richard Irvine)

How did Christianity spread in Europe, and under whose agency? Was the process coercive or adaptive, and how far did it lead to a break away from older cultural forms?

Extracts from:

Bede [c. 731]. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (English translations available in Oxford World's Classics and Penguin Classics editions)

Gregory of Tours [c. 594]. *The History of the Franks*. (as above, a range of translations are available)

Karen Louise Jolly 1996. *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context*. University of North Carolina Press.

Ephraim Emerton, ed. (and translator) 2000. *The Letters of Saint Boniface*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Background reading on the spread of Christianity in Europe

* Jack Goody 1983. *The development of the family and marriage in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (especially chapter 3)

Karen Louise Jolly 1985 "Anglo-Saxon charms in the context of a Christian world view", *Journal of Medieval History* 11:279-293.

Peter Brown 2003. *The Rise of Western Christendom* 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell.

Henry Mayr-Harting 1991. *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Group two: the 'new world' (Barbara Bodenhorn)

One of the justifications of early European expansion was the spread of Christianity. Does that mean missionaries were inevitably agents of colonialism?

Extracts from:

Lewis Hanke 1994. *All mankind is one: a study of the disputation between Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Seplveda in 1550 on the intellectual and religious capacity of the American Indians*. Northern Illinois University Press.

Pagden, Anthony, ed. (and translator) 1986. *Letters from Mexico/Hernán Cortés*. Yale University Press.

Inge Clendinnen 1987. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. CUP.

Ann Fienup Riordan 1988. *The Yup'ik eskimos: as described in the travel journals and ethnographic accounts of John and Edith Kilbuck who served with the Alaskan Mission of the Moravian Church 1885- 1900*. Kingston: Limestone Press [in SPRI]

Background reading on the spread of Christianity in the 'New World'

* Anthony Pagden 1982. *The Fall of Natural Man*. CUP.

Ann Fienup Riordan 1991. *The Real People and the Children of Thunder: the Yup'ik Eskimo Encounter with Moravian Missionaries John and Edith Kilbuck*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Christopher Rowland, ed. 1999. *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. Cambridge UP.

Gustavo Gutierrez 2001. *A Theology of Liberation: History, politics, and salvation*. London: SCM.

Comparative material on the spread of Christianity in Africa (not discussed directly in the seminars, but may be of interest if you wish to do further work on this topic; these texts are useful for giving a range of perspectives (anthropological, missiological, theological, etc.) on the processes at work - students interested in working on this material should consult with their supervisors to supplement these readings with ethnographic case studies)

J. Comoroff 1985. *Body of Power; Spirit of Resistance*. University of Chicago Press. Edwin Smith 1927. *The Golden Stool: Some Aspects of the Conflict of Cultures in Modern Africa*. London: Edinburgh House Press.

Edwin Smith 1936. *African Beliefs and Christian Faith: an introduction to theology for African students, evangelists and pastors*. London: United Society for Christian Literature.

John Mbiti 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Kwame Bediako 2000. *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*. Yaoundé: Regnum.

Preparation for the final seminar. Read at least one of the starred articles from the next set of readings; and have a look at one of the edited collections.

Week 6: Weber revisited?

Much of the anthropology of conversion has examined the 'first encounter', so to speak, with Christianity - in whatever form. Recent work has included a specific focus on the growth of evangelical Protestantism. One strand of this work is often grounded in implied, or explicit, assumptions that such muscular evangelical

movements are a reflection/artefact of modernisation/globalisation, that is, Weber was right. Others analyse the growth of fundamentalisms as an expression of anti-modernism. This may provide evidence that the secularisation thesis (and Weber) was profoundly mistaken. The role of communications technologies in the Christian evangelical project forms a distinct subset of these arguments around modernity. What do you think? Is there anything particular about fundamentalist Christian movements that separates them from other fundamentalist movements? Once again, we will divide into two groups to consider a set of source materials in light of these questions.

General Reading

* Max Weber *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Peter van der Veer ed. 1989. *Conversion to modernities: the globalisation of Christianity*. London: Routledge.

Group one: evangelical Christianity as an aspect of late modern capitalism? (BAB)

In many of the serrana communities of Northeastern Oaxaca, people may complain that they 'have to give too much' to maintain their proper status in the dominant Catholic community. Conversion to one of the evangelical sects is often accompanied by an increase in the amount of investment converttees are able to make in their small businesses. As the proportion of the population shifts, fewer people turn out to complete the collective labour required of them. Individual self-interest seems to prevail over a commitment to communality. Does this suggest an inevitable move from Catholicism to Protestantism?

Scott Bruce 1998. The charismatic movement and the secularization thesis. *Religion* 28

Simon Coleman 1998. Charismatic Christianity and the dilemmas of globalisation. *Religion* 28.

* Simon Coleman 2004. The charismatic gift. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2)

R. Hackett 1998. Charismatic Pentecostalist appropriation of media in Nigeria and Ghana. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 41: 537-70.

* J. Kiernan 1988, *The other side of the coin: the conversion of money to Religious*

Purposes in Zulu zionist churches. *Man* (NS) 23(3):453-468.

T. Csordas 2007. Global religion and the re-enchantment of the world", *Anthropological Theory* Vol. 7(3):295-314

Richard H. Roberts ed. 1995. Religion and the transformation of capitalism. London: Routledge.

Karla Poewe ed. 1994. Charismatic Christianity as a global culture. University of South Carolina Press.

Group two: fundamentalisms as reaction to modernity? (RI)

We will consider extracts from the Scopes trial, from contemporary American fundamentalist testimonies, and from interviews with African Evangelical Protestants in order to see (a) whether fundamentalism is a useful category to analyse the ideas expressed and the positions taken in these sources, (b) what the attitudes expressed in the extracts tell us about Christianity in the contemporary world, and (c) whether there is anything specific or characteristic about Christian 'fundamentalisms', or whether they can be fruitfully compared with similar developments in other world religions. Particular attention will be paid to the use of scripture as a critique of the contemporary world.

Vincent Crapanzano 2000. *Serving the Word: literalism in America from the pulpit to the bench*. New York: New Press.

George Marsden 1980. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Brian Malley 2004. *How the Bible Works: An Anthropological Study of Evangelical Biblicism*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

* Susan Harding 1987. "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: the rhetoric of fundamental Baptist conversion", *American Ethnologist* 14: 167-181.

Susan Harding 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton University Press.

* Rijk A. van Dijk 1995. "Fundamentalism and its Moral Geography in Malawi", *Critique of Anthropology* 15: 171-191. Judith Nagata 2001. "Beyond Theology: Toward an Anthropology of 'Fundamentalism'", *American Anthropologist* 103:

481-498

Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. 1991. *Fundamentalisms observed*. University of Chicago Press.