

Is Christianity a White Man's Religion?

By David de Bruyn

Today we look at a touchy subject. Is Christianity a white man's religion? Often this statement is made by unbelievers who are non-white. Christianity was brought to Africa by white missionaries, in a white man's language. Jesus is often portrayed as white in pictures. If God is portrayed as white, surely Christianity is a white man's religion? Well, let's examine these facts.

Firstly, Jesus Christ was Jewish. He was born of Mary, and both Matthew and Luke trace His genealogy back Abraham through Mary, His physical mother and Joseph, His legal father. Jesus was Jewish. The Jewish people, especially at the time of Christ were a completely separate ethnicity from the Europeans or Africans. They were Semitic, like the Arabs. Genesis recounts how the various nations came from the three sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth. Notice that Scripture does not classify people according to race, but according to nationality. That is more accurate, because often one nationality can have different people of differing races in it. At any rate, what we call the Caucasian race appears to have come from Japheth, the African race from Ham and the Semitic and Mongoloid race from Shem. Jesus was Semitic, not African, not European, but Asian! We don't know how He looked physically, as the Bible does not place an emphasis on that. It's completely irrelevant, He came to die for all.

What about the pictures of a blonde, blue-eyed Jesus? Well, remember that in the period 600-1500, Christianity essentially remained in Europe. Whites began to think, 'this is our God'. Michelangelo portrayed Jesus as white. Interestingly, the church in Ethiopia (yes, there was one, we'll see that in a moment), portrayed Jesus as black in their paintings! See, both were creating God in their own image. We want to 'own' God, make him one of 'us'. Undoubtedly, Jesus must have looked like other Jews, swarthy, dark hair and eyes.

However, Scripture specifically tells us not to think of Jesus as a mere man any more. 2 Corinthians 5:16: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more." Jesus Christ is God, exalted forever as the God-man. To think of the Risen Lord Jesus as white, black or any other colour comes dangerously close to violating the second command, do not make an image of God.

Jesus was Jewish. He was from the Semitic race, which was Asian. When God was manifest in the flesh, He chose to do so through His chosen people, the Jews. Don't let paintings or films of Jesus confuse you. We no longer know Him after the flesh.

Secondly, what about those who say, Christianity came with white missionaries, therefore it's a white man's religion?

Well, let's get the facts from Scripture. Remember Acts 1:8? "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Who was Jesus talking to when He said these things? Jews- Hebrew Christians, Saved Asians! God had been up to that point focusing primarily on Israel. Because Israel had

failed to be that light, and had rejected the Messiah, God chose to set them aside for a period and work through the church. The church at this point was made up of Jews: Asians. The founder of Christianity was not white, and its first representatives weren't white either. Nor were they black, they were Jews.

Now, a little later, the Christian church was beginning to return to its Israel-like ways, just sitting around. So Acts 8 tells us that persecution came and they were scattered abroad. The Samaritans were saved. And guess who becomes the first recorded non-Asian convert? A black man. Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch returning to his land. The account in Acts 8:26-39 tells us that Philip witnessed to him, he believed, and was then baptized. He returned to Ethiopia and no doubt shared his conversion experience with others. Do you know what this means? It means the Gospel reached Africa **before** it reached Europe!

It is only after that that the Gospel goes to Europe in Acts 16. There Paul goes to Philippi and was persecuted. He found the whites there worshipping Diana, Zeus and other pagan gods. But the Gospel triumphed, spread and churches were planted.

It's important to realize that up till the 6th century BC the Gospel was spreading not only through Europe but also through Africa. So whereas some think the Gospel started in Europe and went into Asia and Africa, in actual fact it started in Asia and went into Africa and then into Europe.

People tend to think of missionaries as white. Well, church history tells us of black missionaries names Exuperantius, Felix and Regula who took their faith from Africa to Switzerland. Christian churches had begun in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Morocco. Early church leaders like Augustine and Cyprian were Africans. So Christianity was very much a black man's religion too up till the sixth century.

So what happened in the sixth century? Well, at that time Mohammed developed and wrote out the Islamic religion. One of the tenets in Islam is jihad, or holy war. Though some debate this today, there was no doubt in the minds of early Muslims, conversion was to be by the sword. Islam spread quickly into Africa, conquering Sudan, Somalia, as far afield as Morocco. One nation that Islam failed to conquer was Ethiopia. Ethiopia is still recognized as the oldest Christian nation on earth. In fact, when European missionaries arrived there, they were shocked to find Bibles and churches. But for the majority of other African nations that had been following Christ, Christianity was eradicated and replaced with Islam. That is why many black people today say that Islam is the true black man's religion.

Also, during this period, churches in Europe, Egypt and Ethiopia stagnated. Small pockets of born-again believers were heavily persecuted by the mainline church which had not interest in Biblical evangelism. Its only concept of evangelism was the wicked crusades that killed thousands. Only in the 17th century did missionaries again bring the Gospel to Africa. By this time, the church was strongest in Europe, and consequently the missionaries were white. But the Gospel had been in Africa longer than it had been in Europe. Acts 10:34: "Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons"

So is Christianity a white man's religion? Yes. It's also a black man's religion and an Asian man's religion. God has no favourite race. Christianity has been in Africa for a long time. It's time to stop hiding behind culture and race. Jesus Christ died for all men. All men must hear. Soon the time must come for black missionaries to go to America and Europe, where many churches are weak, dying and compromising. African Christians taking the message of salvation to other Africans to Asians, to South Americans. Many would like to confuse the Gospel by adding cultural traditions, both white and black. They are trying to say, the Gospel is for us only. Both are wrong, and we've seen why.