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Catholicism in Asia: Annotated Bibliography

Speciale, Alessandro. "[Catholic growth rates widen between Asia and Europe.](#)" *UCANews.com*.

14 May 2013.

"[Vatican stats show continued growth in Africa, Asia.](#)" *Catholic News Agency*. 13 May 2013.

These articles on the changing demographics of the Catholic Church represent two of the many reports published in the days after the Vatican released its latest census data in May 2013. Compiled annually, the Pontifical Yearbook gives detailed statistics on the world's Catholics and trends of growth and decline in different regions across the globe. As the titles of the articles confirm, Catholicism is surging in Asia as much as it is struggling in Europe and the rest of the Western World. According to the *UCANews* article, "Catholicism is spreading faster in Asia and Africa than anywhere else in the world," especially compared to Europe, Oceania, and the Americas where it is "stagnating and even declining." Asia in particular seems especially receptive to the Gospel, with the number of Catholics increasing by a full two percent from 2010 to 2011—easily surpassing the worldwide growth rate of 1.2 percent over the same period. In addition, the *Catholic News Agency* article cites the explosion in the number consecrated religious in Asia, a "whopping" 44.9 percent increase over the past ten years. The number of priests in Asia increased 32 percent over the same time period.

From a numerical perspective, these statistics prove that the future of the Catholic Church in Asia is bright. They also demonstrate the relevance of my project, and I seek to unearth the reasons for this growth through my research. At the same time, this increase does not necessarily

mean that the region does not face its own unique problems and challenges. In particular, it will be very interesting to see how issues relating to politics, inculturation, and evangelization impacted, impact, and will impact the past, present, and future situation of Catholicism in Asia.

[“A Vibrant Reality: The Catholic Church in India.”](#) *Salt and Light*. YouTube video published 27 July 2011.

This YouTube video, published by a popular Catholic media outlet, discusses the Church in India and the strong faith of its adherents despite formidable obstacles. Catholics only make up about 2 percent of India’s population, but even this tiny fraction is very significant in a country of over a billion people. From my perspective, the most important part of the twenty-minute video is an interview with Archbishop Albert D’Souza of the Archdiocese of Agra in northern India. In particular, Bishop D’Souza relates some of the persecution faced by Christians in the region, talks about interfaith dialogue, and discusses the many signs of hope he sees for Catholicism in India.

In listening to the interview, I was a bit disturbed by what the bishop said about persecution and interfaith dialogue. Persecution is nothing new for Christianity, but it seems in India it is greatly affecting the Church’s ability to effectively evangelize. While many Indians seem attracted to Christianity, the bishop related his hesitancy to baptize them for fear of a backlash from leaders of the Hindu majority. This is problematic because baptism is what initiates people into Christianity and is necessary for salvation. The bishop also mentioned what he saw as the important role of interfaith dialogue in keeping the peace, but this too appears to have drawbacks. One example is that prayers of other religions are recited in diocesan schools,

thus compromising the integrity of Catholic doctrine. These will certainly be issues that I discuss more in depth in the parts of my project pertaining to inculturation and evangelization.

Xavier, Francis. [Letters 15, 55, 96](#), in *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, translated by M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 45-51; 135-144; 326-343.

St. Francis Xavier was a co-founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and arguably the greatest missionary since St. Paul. Known as the “Apostle to Asia,” Francis Xavier is credited with converting hundreds of thousands to Catholicism in his sixteenth-century travels across Asia. These letters, written by Francis Xavier himself, describe his evangelization efforts in India and Japan. It is thanks to the Jesuit order’s strong emphasis on written correspondence with its foreign missionaries that we are able to read a first-hand account of how the Catholic Faith was first brought to many regions throughout the world, especially Asia.

In his letters, Francis Xavier describes many aspects of his mission: the year-long voyage from Portugal to India, his experience in the already-Christian city of Goa, his conversations with some Muslims, and his impressive success in converting the native peoples of India and Japan. On the journey to India, for example, he recounts visiting the island of Socotra off the coast of Yemen and encountering people who already called themselves Christians. From the tone of the letters, this scenario leaves Francis Xavier both surprised and suspicious, and in describing the inhabitants’ practice of Christianity seems to imply that they do many things wrong. An editor’s footnote supports this conclusion—these Christians would have been Nestorians, heretics in Rome’s eyes.

For my project, these letters will be invaluable for my section on evangelization in Asia. There is no equivalent to hearing about the conversion of Asia in the very words of the missionary doing the converting. It is also very inspiring to hear about the great sacrifice and suffering he underwent to bring souls to the Catholic Faith. As one of his letters relates, even his difficulties brought him peace and joy: "I believe that those who truly love the cross of Christ our Lord find rest when they encounter these trials...how peaceful it is to live by dying each day, by going against our own will in seeking not what is our own but what is of Jesus Christ!" (51) In this regard, St. Francis Xavier can serve as a model for present and future evangelization efforts in Asia, something I'll be sure to detail in my paper.

Higashibaba, Ikuo. "[Apostasy, Underground Practice, or Martyrdom](#)," in *Christianity in Early Modern Japan : Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 126-160.

Ledyard, Gari. "[Kollumba Kang Wansuk, an Early Catholic Activist and Martyr](#)," in *Christianity in Korea*, edited by Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 38-71.

Endo, Shusaku. [Silence](#). Trans. William Johnston. (New York: Taplinger Press, 1969).

These three sources—two scholarly papers and a novel—best relate to the “politics” section of my project. For Catholicism in Asia, the political atmosphere in several countries was a double-edged sword. In order to have as big an impact as possible, the common practice of missionaries such as St. Francis Xavier was to go directly to the ruling class upon arriving in a foreign land. After having gained favor with the cultural elite, such missionaries believed the Gospel could be more easily spread among the common people.

This “top-to-bottom” method of conversion worked extremely well in some areas, such as the Philippines, but was much more risky in areas with a volatile political atmosphere, such as Japan and Korea. As a result, the overthrow of an existing political structure could be a death sentence to Christians if the regime that replaced it were hostile to the Faith. As recounted by Higashibaba’s paper and the historical novel *Silence*, this is precisely what happened in Japan during 1630s in the aftermath of the Shimabara Rebellion. Denounced as foreigners conspiring to “change the government of the country and own the country,” Christians were violently persecuted, and those who continued to practice their faith underground became known as “Kakure Kirishitan” or “Hidden Christians” (139). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, changing political situations led to a similar fate for Catholics in Korea. Forced to choose between apostasy, secret practice of the Faith, or martyrdom, many opted for the latter. Ledyard’s *Christianity in Asia* gives a detailed description of one of the most prominent such women, Kollumba Kang Wansuk, who for six years before her death was responsible for hiding one of the few Catholic priests left in the country. In my capstone project, I hope that including accounts such as these will make for some thrilling—not to mention inspiring—reading.

Johnson, Ian. “[Ordination of Bishops Increases Tensions Between China and Vatican](#).” *New York Times*. 10 July 2012.

Norman, Jane. “[Crackdown on Catholics blamed for Vietnam exodus](#).” *UCAnews.com*. 16 July 2013.

[The New Evangelization: Asia](#), *Eternal Word Television Network*.

Following the theme of persecution, these recent news articles demonstrate that it is not a thing of the past for Christians in Asia. Similar to the past situations in Japan and Korea, today’s

hostilities toward Christianity largely come from the state—in these cases the communist governments of China and Vietnam. According to *EWTN*, when the communists came to power in China in 1949, “Missionary and pastoral work were outlawed, foreign missionaries expelled, Church officials arrested, schools and other institutions closed, and the people denied free access to religion. Priests, religious and lay people were put to slave labor.” In 1957 the government established its own “Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association,” forcing Catholics loyal to the pope in Rome to take their faith underground. This situation of parallel churches has led to repeated tensions between China and the Vatican, especially over the ordination of bishops. In 2012, for example, the government church once again ordained its own bishop without approval from the Vatican. As the *New York Times* article reports, he was “immediately excommunicated.” The *UCAnews.com* article reveals that the situation of Catholics in Korea is not much better. Recently the communist government has been increasing its persecution of religious minorities, forcing a record number of Catholics to flee to nearby Australia. Indeed, as my project will detail, religious persecution is just as much alive in the twenty-first century as it was in the imperial dynasties of old.

Pope John Paul II. [*Ecclesia in Asia*](#). Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Asia. Nov. 1999.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. [*Dominus Iesus*](#). On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. 6 Aug. 2000.

Chia, Edmund. “[The Asian Church in Dialogue With Dominus Iesus](#).” *SEDOS Mission*. March 2002.

The first of these official Vatican documents is a letter of the late Pope John Paul II to the Church in Asia is intended to be a blueprint for the Catholic Faith in this region for the third

millennium. In the letter's opening, the pope expresses his hope that "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (1). The exhortation is quite lengthy and detailed, but it addresses several of the issues my paper will examine. Starting in paragraph 21, the pope explains how inculturation and evangelization "are naturally and intimately related to each other." With regard to the former, he says "The test of true inculturation is whether people become more committed to their Christian faith because they perceive it more clearly with the eyes of their own culture" (22). He also calls the liturgy "a decisive means of evangelization" (23). These words of the Holy Father will certainly be helpful as I assess the current state of Catholicism in Asia and make predictions regarding its future.

The second official document is a declaration from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. While it does not directly mention Asia, its content is very pertinent to the Church there. In the wake of some confusion caused after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the purpose of the declaration was to reassert the absolute truth of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Faith against "relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism." (4). As the document states, "There is a historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: "This is the single Church of Christ" (16). Other Christian denominations "are not Churches in the proper sense" and other religions "are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation" (17, 22).

Far from merely extolling its own greatness, the Catholic Church has the duty to bring others to the truth entrusted to it by Christ. In this regard, *Dominus Iesus* serves as a timely reminder

for today's missionaries that the ultimate end of their work is the salvation of souls. St. Francis Xavier would have never traveled halfway around the world if he was not convinced that the eternal fate of countless souls depended upon the Faith he would bring. Unfortunately, missionary activity today is sometimes limited to charitable works, and the conversion aspect is often obscured by an excessive focus on interfaith dialogue and ecumenism. The cool reception to *Dominus Iesus* in Asia, as suggested in Chia's paper, demonstrates the urgency of recovering the Catholic understanding of mission if the continent is to fulfill Pope John Paul II's vision for the third millennium.

Panganiban, Patricia G. "[Inculturation and the Second Vatican Council](#)." *Landas* 18:1 (2004) 59-93.

Yuen, Mee-Yin Mary. "[Doing Local Theologies in the Asian Context— Implications of Inculturation since the Second Vatican Council](#)." *Journal of Catholic Studies* 1 (2010): 113-156.

"[Cardinal Arinze cautions Asian bishops against false inculturation, liturgical dance](#)." *CatholicCulture.org*. 2009 Aug. 17.

Inculturation is the process by which the Catholic Faith is inserted into a non-Catholic culture. Owing to Catholicism's universal character, inculturation has been occurring in some form since the time of Christ. As noted by Panganiban, "inculturation" is distinct from "enculturation," which originated in cultural anthropology. Her 35-page paper, which I have not yet had the chance to read in full, discusses what she views as the Second Vatican Council's "expression of a renewed ecclesiology that implicitly recognizes the need for inculturation" (60). Quoting passages of the Council's documents *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes*,

Panganiban argues that the Council sought to change how the Church viewed itself in relation to a pluralistic world. In her words, Vatican II marked a departure from the Church's "classicist notion of culture which considered a particular cultural to be normative universal." Yuen's similarly-lengthy paper appears to make the same point, with a specific focus on how inculturation has affected theological thought in Asia.

Whether or not the classicist view is an accurate caricature of pre-Vatican II theology, I find myself disagreeing with many of the arguments made by Panganiban and Yuen. They seem to see Vatican II as a complete rupture with the Church's past, almost as if the Council sought to change Catholic belief on the nature or mission of the Church. This reading of Vatican II in discontinuity with the Church's tradition is precisely the hermeneutic repeatedly condemned by Pope Benedict XVI. Although they do not explicitly state it, Panganiban and Yuen seem to imply that truth can change and that the Church's theology needs updating to make it more "pastoral" and compatible with the modern world. In other words, inculturation for them places precedence on the local culture over the Church's universality.

In contrast, I believe that the relationship should be the opposite—the emphasis should be placed on the Church's universality over local customs, especially those that could obscure the Church's doctrine. The word "catholic" means "universal," and while cultural differences are bound to exist, they should not overshadow—in theory or in practice—the oneness of faith which all Catholics are called to profess. This "false inculturation," as described by Cardinal Arinze, manifests itself in liturgical dancing and other widespread violations which disregard universal norms in favor of local practices less in harmony with the Catholic Faith. Thus, due to these abuses, my paper will advocate caution in issues related to inculturation, especially with regard to the liturgy.

Neill, Stephen. "[Europe and Asia: Contact and Conflict](#)," and "[Beginnings of Mission](#)," in *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 87-99; and 111-133.

Ricci, Matteo. "[Introduction](#)," and "[A Discussion on the Creation of Heaven, Earth, and All Things...](#)" in *The True Meaning of the Lord in Heaven (T'ien-chu Shih-i)*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-Chen, S.J. (Taipei: Luangchi Press, 1985).

These readings also address the issue of inculturation, not from a modern viewpoint but from the perspectives of some of the first missionaries to bring the Catholic Faith to Asia. Neill's paper highlights the two "c" words—contact and conflict—that inevitably came together during the Age of Exploration. Continuing the alliteration, Neill sums up the Portuguese expansion into the New World and Asia with the following terms: "Crusade, Curiosity, Commerce, Conversion, Conquest Colonisation, in that order" (87). In short, Portuguese missionaries saw their principal duty as converting the natives to Catholicism, and as a result had little concern for the existing culture. In contrast, later figures such as the Jesuit missionary to China Matteo Ricci absorbed himself in the Chinese culture he was attempting to evangelize. His *True Meaning of the Lord in Heaven* sought to portray Christianity in terms easily understandable to the Confucian philosophy he encountered. While he believed such an approach would aid the conversion of the Chinese intellectual elites, others were scandalized by the length to which he went to reconcile Christianity to Confucian beliefs. This issue erupted in the so-called Rites Controversy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which centered upon whether certain Confucian practices were compatible with Christianity. With regard to my project, these two sources demonstrate that, similar to the recurring persecution of Christians in Asia, the issue of inculturation is also not a new consideration for the Church in the region.

Phelan, John. Chapters Four and Five: “[The ‘Spiritual’ Geography](#)” and “[The Imposition of Christianity](#)”, in *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses 1565-1700* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 41-52 and 53-71.

This paper details the process by which the Philippines became Catholic after being discovered by the Spanish during the sixteenth centuries. The conversion of Philippines is often viewed as a “success story” for Christianity in Asia due to the astonishing rapidity at which it occurred. Today, the Philippines boasts the largest number of Catholics in the world, a stunning testimony to the successful efforts of the missionaries who came centuries before.

Just how did this “success story” come about? Phelan points to centralization as a key factor. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the native peoples on the islands were greatly dispersed, making missionary efforts difficult and inefficient. As a result, the Spanish undertook “an ambitious program of resettling the Filipinos into compact villages” so that they could be more easily be instructed in the Catholic Faith (44). The Filipinos greatly resisted this centralization, but it was slowly accomplished, less by force and more by enticing them through the “colorful ritual of the Church.” In this way, the Filipinos congregated in small chapels, which could then be visited regularly by clergy. The reading also discusses the efforts made to catechize the natives in their own language and the importance placed on administering the sacraments of baptism and confession. Thus, this paper highlights what will be a central theme of my project’s evangelization section—the importance of the Church’s liturgical life in spreading the Faith. As the popular Latin saying goes, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. The law of prayer is the law of belief is the law of life, and this maxim taken to heart helped to produce a rich harvest of faith in the Philippines.