

EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: The Early Church's *Missio Ad Gentes*
 Convener: Alexis James Doval, Saint Mary's College of California
 Presenters: Michael Slusser, Duquesne University
 "Did the Early Christian Mission to the Jews Really Succeed?"
 Francine Cardman, Weston Jesuit School of Theology
 "Martin of Tours, Gregory the Great, and Models of Mission:
 ad or contra gentes?"

The most provocative claim in Rodney Stark's 1996 book, *The Rise of Christianity*, according to Slusser, was made in chapter 3: contrary to the picture usually presented, the early Christian mission to the Jews really succeeded. As a consequence, according to Stark, Christians with Jewish roots were influential for a long time, and the to-and-fro movement lasted through the fourth century. Slusser's presentation laid out the evidence for this claim and asked to what extent Stark may be right.

Slusser began by clarifying that "success" in the mission to the Jews in the first centuries meant only that at first most converts to Christianity came from Judaism—diaspora Judaism in particular—and even after Gentile converts became more numerous, the influx of Jews continued. In contrast to the more usual methods where documentary data and theological presuppositions guide the inquiry, Stark takes a sociological approach and considers first what *ought* to have happened and then examines the data to see if they are compatible with these expectations or not. He uses the following generalizations: (1) people will attempt to escape or resolve a marginal position, (2) new religious movements mainly draw their converts from the ranks of the religiously inactive and discontented and those affiliated with the most accommodated (worldly) religious communities, (3) people are more willing to adopt a new religion to the extent that it retains cultural continuity with conventional religion(s) with which they are already familiar, and (4) social movements grow much faster when they spread through preexisting social networks.

Having summarized what Stark claims *ought* to have happened, Slusser showed how historical data offers support. Notably, the Acts of the Apostles gives no indication that the gentiles were a primary object of mission, Marcion's anti-Jewish version of the scriptures (in the 140's) was quickly rejected, and Chrysostom's fifth-century warning against succumbing to the attraction of Judaism is best understood as addressed to Christians of Jewish extraction. Demographic evidence also supports a significant presence of Jewish converts.

Slusser then addressed concerns of some of Stark's critics who argue that the mission to the Jews was unsuccessful, most notably those who deal with the topic of Jewish identity and degrees of acculturation and assimilation. Deciding in favor of less fixed boundaries in these areas, based on a number of recent

studies, Slusser concludes, in agreement with Stark, that Christianity continued to be very Jewish up into the third century and beyond.

In the second presentation, Cardman showed how Martin of Tours and Pope Gregory the Great represent two major models of mission *ad gentes* in late antiquity and the early middle ages in the West and how they became prototypes for later Roman Catholic practice. Historical analysis of these models is pertinent to contemporary efforts to reimagine mission.

Martin of Tours evangelized "pagans" (the inhabitants of the countryside) in Gaul in the latter part of the fourth century by means of miracles, exorcisms, and preaching. But his dominant missionary strategy, after he became bishop in 371, was the destruction of pagan shrines, temples, and idols. His missions of destruction often met with violence, which Martin deflected with divine assistance. At times he was able to convince his hearers to destroy their own temples. Wherever pagan buildings were destroyed, Martin built churches or monasteries. Many were awed by Martin and the power of his God and became Christians. In contrast to his unrelenting opposition to pagans, Martin took a surprisingly more tolerant approach to Christians associated with the recently condemned heresy of Priscillianism. He opposed the execution of Priscillian, the first instance of capital punishment for heresy, and successfully argued against the emperor's order to seek out and condemn followers in the Spanish provinces. In this and other instances, he was strongly critical of his episcopal colleagues for their cozy relationship with the emperor.

Gregory the Great initiated and oversaw the mission to the Anglo Saxons in Britain, sending Augustine (later of Canterbury) from Rome in 596. Gregory's mission strategies are evident in three areas: his replies to Augustine's nine questions about his episcopal and pastoral responsibilities; an apparent clash between Gregory and Augustine on the degree of adherence to Roman practices to be required of the old British and Celtic bishops; and a change of strategy in regard to pagan places of worship and the role of coercion. In his replies, Gregory takes a flexible and commonsense approach, respecting cultural context and particular circumstances. In regard to liturgical usage, he is tolerant of diversity within a general unity and does not require conformity with Roman practice. Augustine, on the other hand, takes a hard line with the British bishops and fails to gain their recognition as archbishop of a single English church. Initially, Gregory expected the Saxon king Ethelbert to assist in a policy of coercion in converting the Saxons and destroying pagan shrines. Slow progress and more information about the mission later moved Gregory to take a more gradualist approach. In 601, he directed Augustine not to demolish shrines, but only the idols in them, and to transform the buildings for Christian use with rituals adapted to sites already familiar to the people.

Appreciation for the complexity of pastoral practice and respect for cultural context are two important lessons to be taken from Martin and Gregory. Gradualism, diversity in unity, and tolerance for dissent follow from them. Two additional themes in these memories and models of mission are relevant to

contemporary rethinking of mission: the need for both collegiality and critique within the episcopacy in order to maintain integrity of witness and the tendency of coercive attitudes and practices in the *missio ad gentes* to play themselves out in the *missio ad nos*.

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MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

Topic: From the Abbey to the World
 Convener: Michael Gorman, The Catholic University of America
 Moderator: Mark Johnson, Marquette University
 Presenters: Marie Anne Mayeski, Loyola Marymount University
 Dennis D. Martin, Loyola University (Chicago)

Once again, the medieval group's program was set on the basis of an open paper call with blind refereeing. Marie Anne Mayeski examined the theology behind the Mediterranean church's efforts to convert the Germanic and Slavic tribes that occupied the European continent. There being no single theology informing an effort that took over 400 years, was directed to *gentes* of varied cultures, and was stamped by many different personalities and policies, Mayeski focused on one particular missionary endeavor, the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic peoples who lived on the eastern edge of the Carolingian empire. From the wealth of evidence that survives it is possible to describe its theology of mission and in particular its ecclesiology, especially as this is articulated in the *vita* of St. Leoba, a nun whom Boniface personally invited to participate in his mission project. Focusing on the "Life of St. Leoba," authored by Rudolf of Fulda, Mayeski considered three main points. First, concerning authority in the Church, she noted that the Anglo-Saxon mission, like the English church itself, had both a strong commitment to the authority of Rome and frequent encounters with the imperial authority of the Carolingian dynasty; negotiating this potential conflict required a clear but nuanced notion of church authority. Second, she considered the way in which Boniface structured his missionary project and the kind of persons he invited into his mission team (considering ethnicity, gender and talents); these helped to shape the permanent church that succeeded his missionary effort. Third, she explored how St. Leoba's *vita* presents the work of evangelization, and the life of the church itself, as a balanced dynamic of word and sacrament. Mayeski ended by drawing some conclusions that could shape further study and by briefly reflecting on the significance of a woman's *vita* as the locus of ecclesiology.

Dennis Martin discussed the influence of Carthusian monks on lay spirituality during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Considering the relative