

# Vocabulary for the Study of Religion

*Volume 2*

F–O

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BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

2015

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Africa in contemporary times, as it is also among Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims in other parts of the globe.

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## Mission

Mission: *missio* (Latin), sending. Though widely employed for all kinds of sending, such as military or diplomatic missions, the original theological usage of "mission" is Trinitarian, indicating the "sending" of the Son and the Holy Spirit. From the sixteenth century onwards, "mission" has also been used to refer to the movement to convert non-Christians to Christianity. Related terms are evangelism (or evangelization), proclamation, witness, and proselytism. In religious studies, "mission" refers to the organized efforts of a faith to expand. However, it is debated whether the term

"mission," because of its Christian connotation, is suitable to describe the expansion of non-Christian religions.

Religions disseminate in a number of ways: by human dispersal (migration, trade), by political expansion (the spread of Islam to North Africa), by the cultural usurpation of groups (Sanskritization), and by organized missionary endeavors. Not every manner of spreading a tradition can be considered mission, nor are all faith traditions missionary. Mission is a considered characteristic of many of the so-called "world religions," such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Islam, as well as by movements of more recent origin, such as the Baha'i, Mormonism, and the Unification Church. Few religions have always been missionary. Mission has been less common in Daoism, Confucianism, and Shinto. Judaism has generally not been missionary, except for a brief period during the Roman Empire. Hinduism has both non-missionary and missionary traits (see below). In tribal religiosity, mission is non-existent: members are born into their religions.

Mission is generally carried out by those who feel called or commissioned to do so, whether as individuals or as groups. Missionaries spread a message which they consider to be of salvific and universal value. In earlier times mission was mainly done through personal encounter. Today modern media such as radio, television, and the Internet are also used.

Religions generally hold that change of religious affiliation ("conversion") is an act of free will, so that in principle, whether or not in practice, coercion is rejected. Research has shown that persons change religions for a variety of reasons. The motives may be spiritual but may also be psychological, social (e.g. *dalit* emancipation), economic (e.g. cargo-cults), practical (access to education or health care), or political (the decision of the Althing in Iceland). Missionary endeavors sometimes meet with firm resistance. The result may be the outright rejection of the message, and rejection may be followed by a revitalization of local religiosity (the Hindu Renaissance or *Awassane*

movement of Alinesitoué in Senegal) or by a hybrid form of tradition (Candomblé, Umbanda, Santería).

Mission is often, though not always, cross-cultural. The proclamation of a message across cultural borders usually brings about change, resulting in syncretism, or the adaptation of the tradition to a new context (the Sinization of Buddhism or the Latinization of Christianity). Mission has at times promoted cultural imperialism, abetting Arabization, Sanskritization, and Westernization. More recently, mission has transmitted ideas about gender relations, human rights, technology, and development.

When secularization theories predicted the decline of faith traditions in the mid twentieth century, mission was also expected to wane. However, the resurgence of faith traditions in their more conservative and fundamentalist forms have led to a new missionary élan, leading to a disproportionately large involvement of conservative and fundamentalist groups in contemporary missionary activities (Pentecostalism, Salafism, Hindutva movement).

## Hinduism

Hinduism is traditionally not considered a missionary religion. However, as “a loose confederation of numerous cults” (Srinivas 1967: 69), Hinduism takes many forms. The more soteriological strands of Hinduism embodied by the *guru* traditions (Van der Burg 2004: 101–102) are missionary. According to M.N. Srinivas, Sanskritization as a form of caste mobility can also be comprehended as the inclusion of groups into Hinduism (Srinivas 1967: 67–68).

The early dispersion of Hinduism was linked to military expansion and migration. The conquests of Alexander III of Macedonia brought the West into contact with Hinduism. Through labor migration generated by the abolition of slavery, Hinduism reached East and South Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Recent labor migration has brought Hinduism to the Gulf States

and North America, and with decolonization Hinduism has spread to Western Europe.

In modern times explicit Hindu missionary movements have arisen. The beginnings of these movements are linked to Swāmī Vivekānanda (1863–1902), who wrote: “I am anxiously waiting for the day when mighty minds will arise, gigantic spiritual minds who will be ready to go forth from India to the ends of the earth to teach spirituality and renunciation.... Up India, and conquer the world with your spirituality” (Klostermaier 1989: 394). In 1897 Vivekānanda founded the Ramakrishna Mission. Other well-known missionary movements are the Divine Life Society of Swami Śivānanda Saraswati (1887–1963), the International Transcendental Meditation Society of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917–2008), and the Sathya Sai Organization found by Sathya Sai Baba (1926–2011). The activities of the *Hindutva* movement can also be interpreted as a form of mission.

## Buddhism

Buddhism is generally considered a missionary tradition. However, J.S. Walters considers the word “mission” for early Buddhist dispersion a nineteenth-century Western distortion, one that serves to support theories of religion that distinguish so-called “missionary” or “world” religions from “national” or “indigenous” religions (Walters 2005: 6077).

The characterization “mission” is ascribed to Buddhism because of narratives about the Buddha “commissioning” fifty *bhikkus* (disciples) to spread the message: “Walk monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manifold, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of the *devas* and men. Let not two (of you) go by one (way). Monks, teach *dhamma* which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending.” (Horner 1963: 28). This commission was given to a select group of persons (the *bhikkus*), and compassion (*karunā*) is singled out as the motivation for missionary activities.

Stories about King Asoka (third century B.C.E.) also take Buddhism to be a missionary tradition. Asoka, after a bloody victory over the Kalinga region, supposedly became a lay Buddhist and appointed officers (*dharma-mahāmātras*) to disseminate Buddhism. The spread of Buddhism on the Indian subcontinent and to Sri Lanka occurred in this period.

Buddhism has had no large-scale missionary movements. Buddhist teachings were mainly spread by itinerant monks, who disseminated the tradition at the grassroots level. Erik Zürcher sees the monks' free interaction with persons from all backgrounds and castes, their openness and respect for other faith traditions as preparation for the truth, and their translation of Buddhist texts into the vernacular as the reasons that Buddhism spread rapidly (Zürcher 1987: 570). For various reasons Buddhism gradually declined in India. The recent recurrence of Buddhism in India is partly attributable to the social and political effects of emancipation for the *dalits* (as propagated by B.R. Ambedkar, 1891–1956) and partly to missionary endeavors by Sri Lankan Buddhists.

Today there are Buddhist communities around the world. In Europe interest in Buddhism started with nineteenth-century philosophers and esoteric movements like Theosophy, and has since proliferated. European communities have oriented themselves to Theravada Buddhism, to Zen Buddhism, and to Tibetan Buddhism. Migration has also brought Vietnamese Buddhism to Europe. The community of Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926) in Southern France has been quite influential. Buddhism in North America is the result partly of Japanese and Chinese migration and partly of Southeast Asian Buddhist mission.

### Christianity

Christianity can also be classified as a missionary tradition. In Missiology “mission” is the generic word for the expansion of Christianity. Expressions of Christian witness include proclamation, silent witness, and humanitarian aid. The term “evange-

lism” is reserved for efforts to convert individuals or groups or to generate spiritual renewal within existing Christian communities. Contemporary missionary theology considers mission first of all to be God's mission (*missio Dei*) in which churches are called to participate (*missiones ecclesiae*). Missiologists such as David Bosch, Andrew Walls, and Darrell Guder see mission less as an activity and more as the core identity of the church (missional church).

Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches emphasize a centripetal interpretation of mission: They attract persons through the conduct of the community and the splendor of the liturgy. Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions emphasize a centrifugal interpretation of mission: They send out missionaries. Matthew 28:19–20 is generally considered the main biblical injunction to conduct mission: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (NIV). But David Bosch has convincingly argued that the reading of this passage as the “Great Commission” is a recent development, one which has gained prominence only since William Carey's 1792 tract *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (Bosch 1991: 340). In earlier times other biblical passages (Jn 3:16, Acts 1:9, Lk 14:23) prevailed. The aims of Christian mission include the conversion of individuals, the planting of churches, and the transformation of society.

Early Christianity spread in various ways. It spread through the scattering of people (military personnel, traders, refugees) but was also actively propagated by Jewish communities outside Palestine. Mission outside the Jewish community (to Gentiles) came from Greek-speaking Jews, of whom Paul of Tarsis was the most famous. Theorists such as Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls see the decision of this first generation of missionaries to preach and conceptualize the Christian message in Greek-Roman terminology as paradigmatic in its focus on the receiving culture

and on adaptation and inculturation. There are many examples of adaptation and inculturation (e.g. Western European Christmas and Easter rituals). Intentional mission strategy is tied to the work of the Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) in India.

Christianity's spread first followed the contours the Mediterranean. Growth intensified after the promulgation of the Edict of Milan (313) and the pronouncement of Christianity as state religion of the Roman Empire (380). Nestorians took Christianity eastwards, to India and China, and Coptic Christians evangelized present-day Sudan and Ethiopia. Celtic and British monks worked among the Germanic tribes while missionaries of the Byzantine Church evangelized the Slavs. Pope Gregory the Great (540–604) is credited with what was possibly one of the first centrally coordinated church missions: the evangelization of people north of the Alps. Monastic orders have played a key role in the Christianization of Europe, offering the gospel alongside education, farming, and crop cultivation. The emergence of Islam in the seventh century brought the Christian expansion to a halt and led to the gradual decline of Christianity in many of its initial heartlands, thus shifting the centre of Christianity and Christian missions to Latin world.

The Portuguese and Spanish explorations in the fifteenth century inaugurated a new phase in Christian mission. Endorsed by Papal decrees (*padroado*), these explorers conquered large parts of Latin America and Asia and subjugated its inhabitants to the Iberian throne as well as to Christianity. In 1622 the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was established to regain papal control over mission work and the newly established churches in the New World.

The late eighteenth century marked the beginnings of the modern missionary era. Missionary societies (Basel Mission, CMS) developed, followed by the emergence of the so-called faith missions, or those missionaries who were not financially supported by denominations but were to “to live by faith” (read: donations). From the mid-nineteenth

century on, Protestant missionary societies organized ecumenical mission conferences, the most famous of which was the 1910 Edinburgh World Mission Conference. From the mid-twentieth century on, the goals of mission of the mainline churches shifted from conversion to the transformation of society and to interreligious dialogue. In response, Evangelicals and Pentecostals founded the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (1974), a group that advocates evangelization over other forms of mission and seeks to reach “unreached” people with the gospel.

The modern missionary movement has been harshly criticized for its close links with colonialism, though relations were much more complex and the missionary movement much more diverse than is often suggested. Postcolonial thinkers above all have scorned the Western missionary endeavor as an agent of imperialism. The emergence of indigenous churches as well as the call for a moratorium on mission (Gatu 1971) can be seen as the rejection of Western imperial and ecclesial dominance and a call for the decolonization (institutional as well as financial) of churches in the south.

Contrary to common perception, Christian mission has never been an exclusively Western endeavor. There have always been missionaries from the Global South (Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific) working either in their own context or cross-culturally (Tongans in Fiji, Jamaicans in West Africa, Indians in East Africa). Moreover, mission has always depended on the dedication of countless numbers of local agents, who have by far outnumbered the expatriate missionaries. Today, with the majority of Christians living in the South, the (problematic) term “reverse mission” has been coined to describe mission work by missionaries from the Global South working in Europe.

### Islam

In Islam the word *da'wa* is sometimes used as the equivalent of Christian mission. *Da'wa* means call, or invitation (from the root *da'a*: to call, invite).

In common use *da'wa* means an invitation to a meal or a gathering. The term can also mean the invitation to embrace Islam, an appeal to God in prayer (*du'a*), or the call to the dead to rise from their graves on Judgment Day (Qur'an 3:24) and the invocation of the name of God to cast a spell. In the early centuries of Islam *da'wa* also signified the summons to support a claimant to Islamic rule. The Shi'a Isma'ili movement in particular developed *da'wa* as a political concept to refer to the call to submit to the rightly guided *Imam*.

Contrary to the centrifugal term mission (sending), the Muslim term *da'wa* represents a centripetal movement (invitation). *Da'wa* is said to have originally been undertaken by God (Qur'an 10:25) and his prophets (16:125; 57:8) but is also considered to be the collective responsibility of the Muslim community: "Let there arise out of you a band of people [*umma*] inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right [*amr bi'l-mar'uf*] and forbidding what is wrong [*nahy 'an al-munkar*]" (Qur'an 3:104; Yusuf Ali translation). The invitation can be made verbally as well as by exemplary living. Conversion must be voluntary: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256).

Classical commentaries understand *da'wa* primarily as the exhortation to the Islamic community to observe an Islamic way of life. The term *jihād* (striving for God) refers to the territorial expansion of the Caliphate to non-Muslim areas. Only Abu Ja'far at-Tabari (d. 923 C.E.) applied *da'wa* to people outside the Muslim community. Modern commentators such as Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935) reinterpret *da'wa* to include religious revival and apologetics against Christian missions and Western imperialism and secularism.

The expansion of Islam can only partly be conceived as organized "mission." Islam spread mainly through conquest, migration, trade, and intermarriage. *Da'wa* was undertaken by representatives of the *tariqas* (Sufi orders), who played an important role in spreading Islam in South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In present times, in reaction to Christian missionizing, *da'wa* organizations

have been formed to encourage non-Muslims to embrace Islam. Examples are the *Tablighi Jama'at* of Muhammad Ilyas (1885–1944), the *Jama'at -i Islami* of Abu'l A'la Mawdudi (1903–1979), and NGOs such as Muslim World League and the World Islamic Call Society. The Ahmadiyya movement, which originated in late nineteenth-century Pakistan, has actively pursued worldwide *da'wa*, often copying Christian missionary methods such as medical and educational services to advance its message.

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## Modernization / Modernity

This study of the relationship between religion and modernization/modernity will consider (1) religion and modernization, (2) religion and modernity, and (3) the modernization of religion.

### Religion and Modernization

Sociologically, the term "modernization" refers to the process by which traditional, agrarian societies were transformed into functionally differentiated, industrial, and urban societies by the creation of new kinds of institutions: a market-based economy, a democratic polity, and autonomous knowledge-producing institutions—notably, science (Wagner 2001). According to the conventional view of modernization, traditional societies relied on religion as a unitary source of meaning from which political and spiritual leadership, social rank, artistic production, and human relations all derived their legitimacy. In modern societies, on the contrary, religion no longer plays this overarching role and is simply one functional system among others (Luhmann 1977) (→ Secularization). It was assumed that under the impact of modernization religion would become privatized and would ultimately decline (Martin 1978; Wilson 1966). It was also assumed that the modern scientific worldview would replace religion as the

source of meaning and that the modernization of economic processes would create a surplus of wealth and existential security that would render superfluous the consolation offered by religion.

The two most important sociological works on religion and modernization were Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Durkheim showed that distinctively modern, seemingly secular forms of religion have arisen—for example, in the cult of the nation. Weber focused on the way that traditional religion has shaped culture. Most famously, he argued that the Protestant Reformation inaugurated a change in economic mentality that brought about the demise of traditional economy and the rise of capitalism (→ Protestant Ethic). Both sociologists considered the relationship between religion and modernization as paradoxical—as a condition of simultaneous permanence and demise.

In recent decades the assumption that modernization leads to the privatization and ultimate disappearance of religion has been challenged. José Casanova, for example, has noted the continued public presence of religion in modern society (Casanova 1994). Secularization in Western Europe has come to be seen as the exception. Religion is growing elsewhere (Eder 2002; Chakrabarty 2000), and there has even been a trend toward "de-secularization" (→ Secularization and De-Secularization; Berger 1999). As a result of these findings, present-day debates refrain from sweeping claims about the destiny of religion in modern society and look instead at concrete historical processes (Gorski 2003).

Casanova (2008) has pointed out that the alleged starting point of the secularized modern state—the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the inter-religious Thirty Years' War—in reality brought about the creation not of a secular state but of a homogeneously confessional state. Tensions between politics and religion remained. Marcel Gauchet has pointed out that the modern secular social and political order marks not a departure from religion but rather a transfor-