

## OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

### LECTURE 17 – VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY: PATRONAGE: THE ‘PROPAGANDA’ (The Christian faith goes round the world for the first time; three related aspects of this.)

Prayer by a seafarer, from the era we will be studying:

O Lord God, when you call your servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it is thoroughly finished, which yields the true glory; through him who, for the finishing of your work, laid down his life for us, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596) wrote in 1587 to a friend when his ship was lying off Cape Sagres, Portugal: ‘There must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory.’ His words were later turned into the prayer, which became popularly known as ‘Drake’s Prayer’.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

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In preparation, read Cairns, 268, 340-42; Lion, 420-1.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A new world vision

A new world vision came to Europe during the late C15, because its traditional overland trade-routes to China and India were closed, for two reasons as we'll see, and Europe was trying to find alternative ways. There were two problems:

First, during the C15, the Mongols (the rulers of China) lost control of China and southern Asia, and the new rulers, who were not sympathetic to European traders, closed the routes from Europe to the East. Secondly, a resurgence of Muslim power, following the collapse of the Crusader kingdoms, blocked overland trade with India. Enterprising Portuguese and Spanish sailors tried to reach India and China by sea.

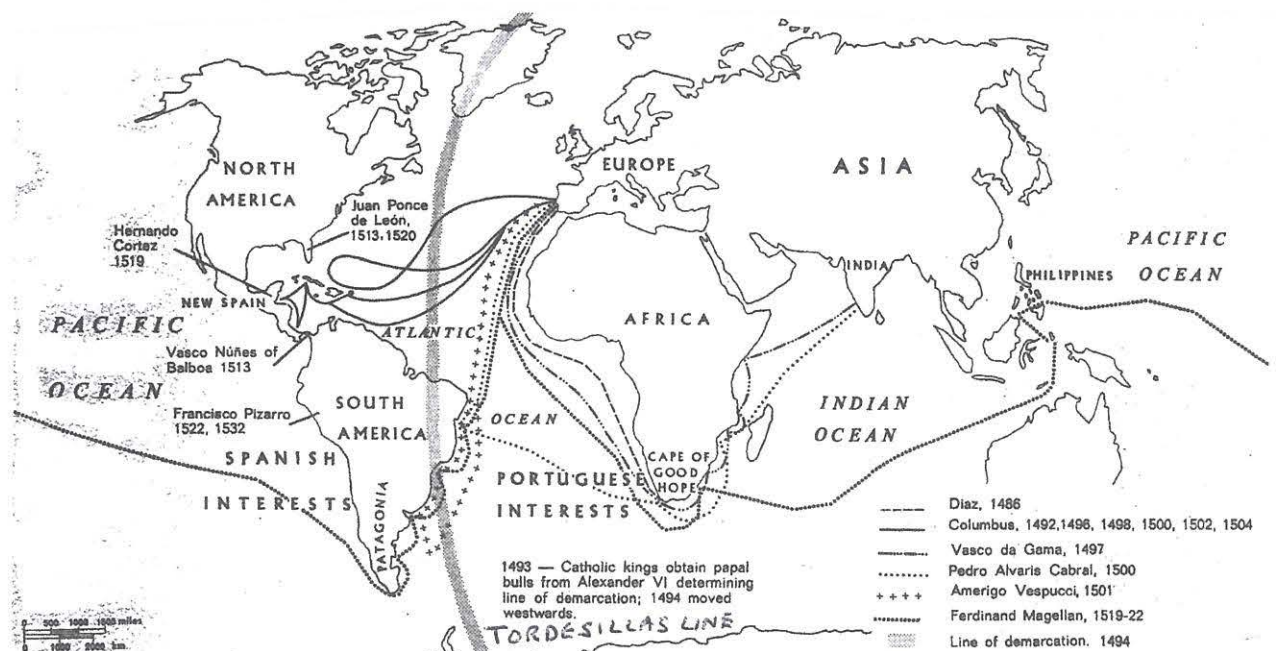
The Portuguese sailed (only) East and the Spanish went (only) West, because of:

### 1.2 The Tordesillas Line

Portugal and Spain were Catholic nations; both wanted new territory and Pope Alexander VI (who was Spanish) was concerned that they would fight each other for it. He therefore issued an order in 1493, (the year after Columbus discovered America) to mark out their respective spheres. He divided the entire non-Christian world between Spain and Portugal by drawing a line down the Atlantic - see it on the map below - running from pole to pole, west of the Azores Islands; all non-Christian lands to the east of this were allocated exclusively to Portugal, and all the lands west of it exclusively to Spain, and they were not to trespass on each other's territory.

Portugal and Spain got together in the following year, 1494, at a place called Tordesillas, to formalise the situation, but their maps were not accurate and the Treaty of Tordesillas inadvertently moved the Pope's line further west, and gave the eastern part of South America to Portugal - again, see the map - so Brazil now speaks Portuguese and the rest of South America speaks Spanish.

The line was later extended over the North Pole and through the Pacific Ocean, so the Spanish West included the Philippine Islands, and the Portuguese East included the Indonesian Molucca Islands.



Sea-trading routes, 1486-1522 and 'Tordesillas line', which allocated new lands to Spain or to Portugal



## 2 VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY EASTWARD

### 2.1 Reasons for these voyages

In Lecture 14, when we looked at ‘Evangelism to the East’, we noticed ‘the old silk route’ from China to Europe, by which traders brought Chinese silks, spices, gems, ivory and Indian cottons. The rise of Chinese nationalism from 1368 meant that the Chinese closed the trade routes between Europe and the East. Furthermore, as mentioned, the resurgence of Muslim power following the collapse of the Crusader kingdoms blocked overland trade with India. Enterprising Portuguese sailors embarked on exploratory voyages in the late C15, trying to reach India and China by sea, to bring back goods which fetched a high price in European markets. Portugal took the lead, because she was hemmed in by Spain and the only route for Portuguese expansion was by sea.

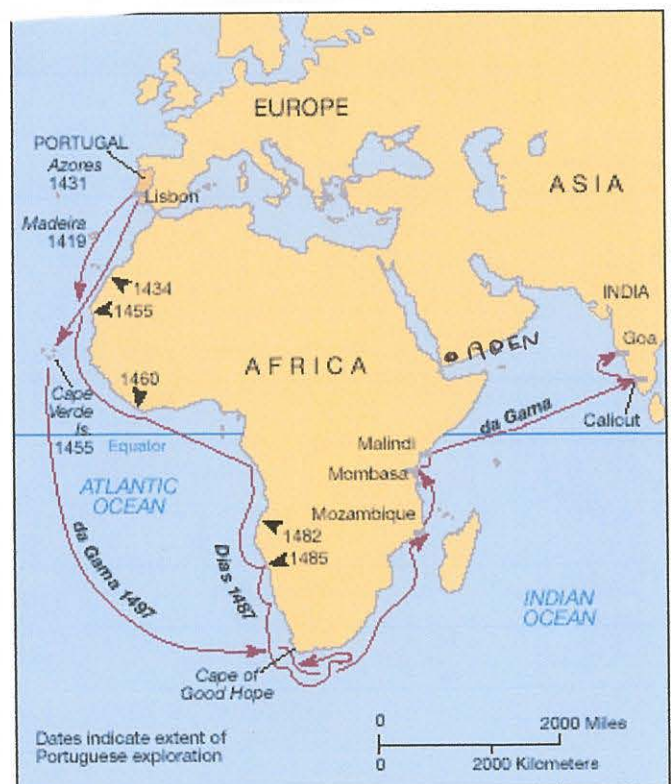
In the first half of the C15, the Prince of Portugal whom history calls Henry the Navigator spent twenty-five years studying maps, watching ships and putting money and personnel into exploring the west coast of Africa in two ways - one plan was to sail round Africa all the way to the Orient, which we’ll look at in 2.2; the other plan was to sail to the coast of Congo and then to cross Africa by following its rivers, picking up the trade route after circumventing the Moslems, which we’ll look at in 2.3.


### 2.2 Eastward by sea

The Portuguese had no idea how far the African continent extended, but they pushed on. In 1462 (thirty years before Columbus went westward) they reached what we now call Sierra Leone; in 1471 they crossed the equator and in 1482 founded the first European settlement on the Gold Coast (now Ghana), planting the flag of Portugal and celebrating the first Mass in West Africa. By 1484 they had reached Congo and in 1487 Bartholomew Diaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope. In 1497, Vasco da Gama (see the map) passed the Cape of Good Hope (the name he gave to the southern tip of the Continent), crossed the Arabian Sea and reached India. He returned in 1500 (three years later) with silk and spices, as proof that it was possible to trade with the East by circumventing the Moslems - the greatest feat in history of seamanship so far.

The reason for his route being so far away from the west coast of Africa was to take advantage of favourable currents.

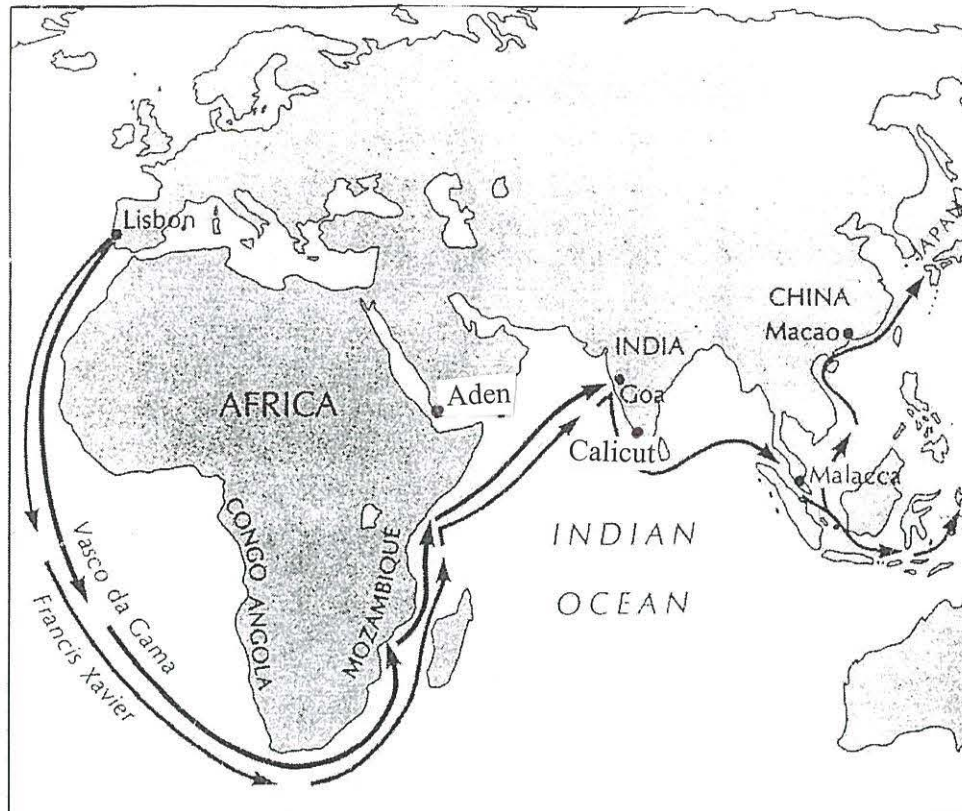
Sea routes need supply points, so the Portuguese set up permanent posts in Mozambique and Mombassa in 1506. The Portuguese captured Goa in 1510 (see the map), and used it not just as a staging post for going further east, but as their trading base in the Indian sub-continent. India allowed religious toleration, and Christian missionaries were allowed to preach, but they made little headway.



 Portuguese explorers moved gradually down the coast of Africa and ultimately reached western India in their search for gold, spices, and slaves.



They also captured Aden (see map), the key port to the Red Sea), then Calicut and then established a base in Ceylon, thus controlling the shipping lanes on both sides of it. Further East, they took Malacca (see the map), then, in China itself, Macao (now Macau) and on to Japan (top right of the map) in 1549.

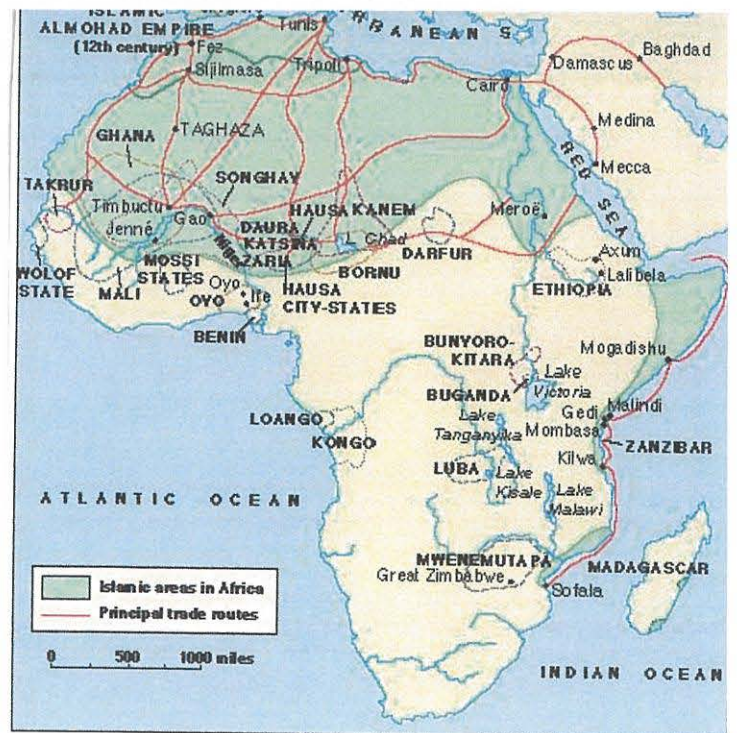


The Portuguese had no wish to conquer and hold large areas of Africa, India, Indonesia, China and Japan, so they made no attempt to conquer more than was needed for their trading posts, in contrast to the Spanish explorers, to whom we're

coming next, whose goal was to capture huge areas and to exploit their resources. All the Portuguese wanted to do was to trade with the Orient, so Portugal did no more than set up a network of military bases, which served as refitting stations for their ships and as guardians of the sea lanes.

### 2.3 Eastward overland

While this was going on, another Portuguese expedition sailed up the Congo River and entered the vast territory ruled by Manicongo (= king of Kongo), the present-day northern Angola, Congo and Zaire. Rumours abounded in Europe about the existence of a mysterious Christian prince who ruled a Christian country somewhere in the interior of Africa. He was said to be called Prester John (Priest or Presbyter John). The Portuguese in the C15 were determined to find him and establish an alliance to bypass the Moslems. They sailed up the Congo River and in 1487 reached the centre of Manicongo's Empire. They never found Prester John, who later turned out to be the Christian king of Ethiopia (see it on the map) – cut off because Islam controlled all the North African coast. They were, however, successful in persuading Manicongo to become a Christian – details in section 2.4.





## 2.4 Patronage

The Pope gave both Portugal and Spain a religious duty – in Portuguese *padroado*, in Spanish, *patronato*, both translated ‘patronage’. He appointed the explorers to be ‘patrons’ of the Church in their respective areas. They were to meet the cost of sending priests and missionaries and of building churches in their areas. In exchange, the Pope gave them full control of the churches they established, even the right to appoint bishops. The Spanish King Ferdinand accepted this patronage with enthusiasm and instructed the explorers:

Diligently seek to encourage and attract the natives of the Indies to all peace and quiet, that they may willingly serve us and be under our dominion and government, and above all that they may be converted to our holy catholic faith.

The Pope also encouraged the Portuguese to use the voyages of discovery to spread the Christian faith, writing in 1454:

The Prince (Henry) has rightly taken possession of the Moors' islands, lands, harbours, and seas ... King Alfonso (of Portugal) has the right to build churches and monasteries throughout the provinces, islands, and places acquired, and yet to be acquired, and to send clergy who are willing to go, and who have the licence of their superiors.  
(Pope Nicholas V, *Bull* 1454, abbreviated)

How far the explorers followed this exhortation, and how far they ignored it, we will see as we go along. The Portuguese sent priests to look after the spiritual needs of the expatriots in their trading posts, but the priests saw that as their main task - not to take the gospel to the local people. Portugal largely ignored its Patronage duty - trade was what mattered to them.

However, on the overland expedition (2.3), the Portuguese who reached the capital of Manicongo's empire invited four Africans to be their guests at the Court of Lisbon. When the Africans returned with stories of the wonders of European civilization, and of their good treatment in Lisbon, Manicongo asked Lisbon to send missionaries and technical assistance, in exchange for ivory and other goods. He himself was baptized in 1490 (all this took place before Columbus sailed westward). The King of Portugal encouraged missionaries and craftsmen and Pope Leo X consecrated his brother as bishop of Congo in 1520.

Dominican friars (? remember them - Lecture 12) went on the ships in order to undertake missionary work. Some who landed at Mozambique (2.2) went into the interior and reached (what we call) Zimbabwe, where its king was converted and baptized. Many Dominican missionaries gave their lives over the next fifty years, and in doing so gained the admiration of some Africans, but the majority of the Portuguese showed little concern for the Africans.

One other example is chosen simply because I came across it in 2002, while staying with a friend who was working with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in Macau. As we walked through the city, I noticed a colourful church building in the main street. It was a Dominican church, started in 1587 and rebuilt in a mixture of European and Chinese style; so there has been a church there for over 430 years – picture on the next page.

The TOPIC - FRANCIS XAVIER - was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

(The Notes continue on page 7 - page 6 consists of two illustrations.)

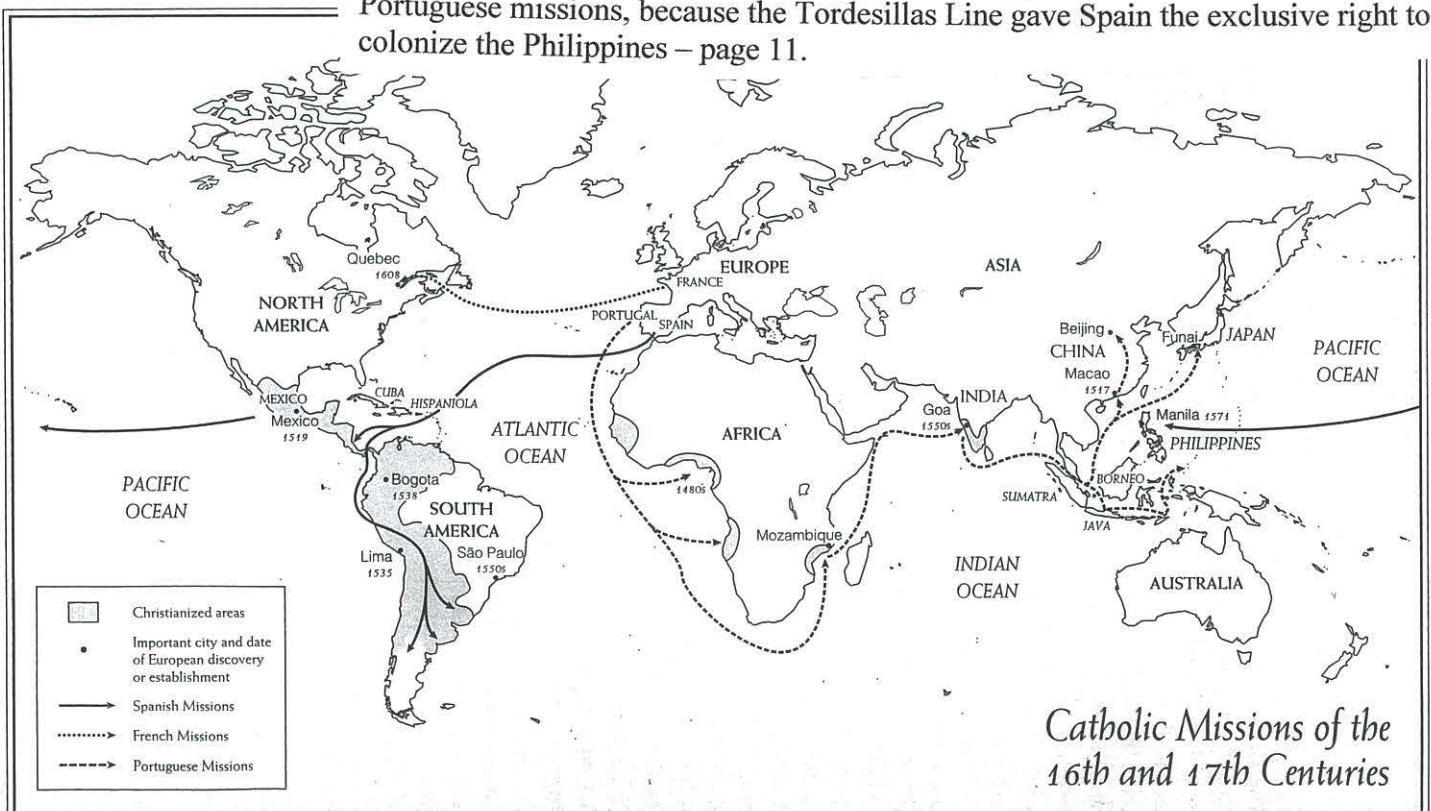




MACAU – ST. Dominic Church

玫瑰聖母堂 - 澳門

The line on the right of the map is solid black, as opposed to the dotted line of the Portuguese missions, because the Tordesillas Line gave Spain the exclusive right to colonize the Philippines – page 11.



When the Spanish explorers discovered the northern coast of (what we call) South America, a cartographer with the ships in 1507 named it after the expedition leader, Amerigo, giving the name 'America' which is now used to describe both the modern southern and northern continents. See his name on the map on page 2.



## 2.5 Cultural differences

Catholic outreach to the East lost momentum in the C17, partly because of rivalries between the various Orders of friars. It came to a head on how to treat local customs. One particularly fervent group of Catholic missionaries, known as Jesuits (we'll come to them in Lecture 26) were prepared to accept much in the local way of life, such as reverence of ancestors, as social rather than religious, and so not to be discouraged. They sought ways in which the Gospel could 'accommodate' ancient eastern cultures. To quote one Jesuit:

Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear on the peoples, to change their manners, customs, and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals. ... Do not draw invidious contrasts between the customs of the peoples and those of Europe; do your utmost to adapt yourselves to them.

The Franciscan and Dominican missionaries saw it differently, condemning this as a dangerous compromise with paganism. They may have been prompted by jealousy of Jesuit success, but one night a Franciscan and a Dominican went in disguise to a Jesuit celebration of the Mass for Chinese who had converted to Christianity. They were shocked to find that the Mass was being recited in Chinese, not Latin, and that the word used to translate 'Mass' into Chinese was the character which local people used for the ceremony of ancestor-worship. They reported their experience to Rome, which ruled against the Jesuits. By this time, the Jesuits had, with the permission of the Chinese Emperor, had great success in China. When they were ordered by Rome to stop respecting local customs, the Emperor, enraged at what he regarded as an insult to Chinese customs, revoked all concessions and brought Christian missionary work in China to a halt.

## 2.6 Protestant mission

We'll come in Lecture 19 to the Protestant Reformation, starting in 1520, and we'll see why by the mid-C16, three seafaring nations, Britain, Holland and Scandinavia, had become Protestant countries. However, although they had strong navies at home, none of them could trade or evangelise in the East at that time, because Portugal was master of the Indian Ocean. Gradually, the Dutch navy became sufficiently powerful to face down Portugal in the Indian Ocean. They formed the Dutch East India Company in 1602 and by 1638 Holland controlled Ceylon. Holland planted Dutch Reformed Churches all the way from the Cape of Good Hope, at the southern tip of Africa to Taiwan (Formosa), which the Dutch took over in 1624.

For the next two centuries, the Dutch were the only Protestant Western Christians to evangelise eastward from Europe. They translated the New Testament into Malay in 1668, the first Bible translation into any language of South-east Asia. By end of the C17, there were 100,000 Protestant Christians in Java, but early Protestant mission to the East was poorly supported by the Churches at home – we'll come to the reasons for that in a Lecture 31. By the end of the C17, there were only twenty-two Protestant ministers in the whole of Indonesia, and of these only five could speak the local language. Of the thousands baptized, less than one in ten was ever admitted to Communion, so it was a patchy and unsatisfactory situation.

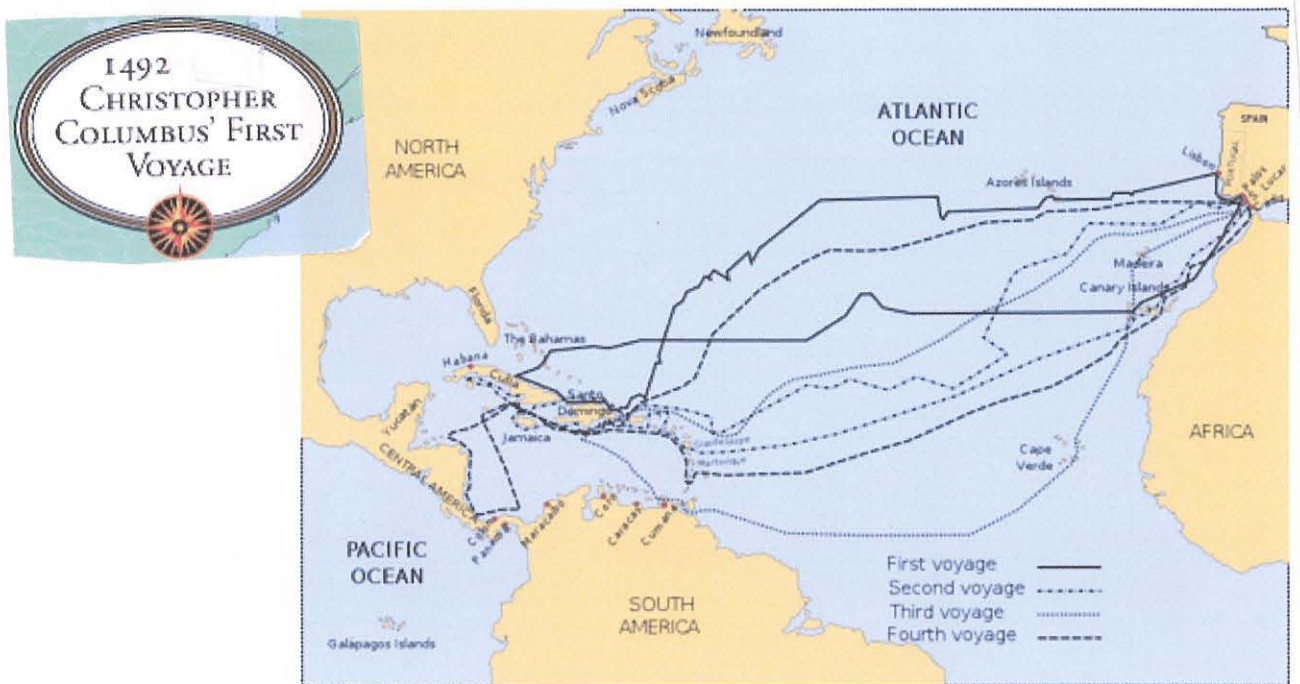
Missionary activity for the years covered by this Lecture was almost entirely Roman Catholic. We'll see in Lecture 31 how and why evangelical Protestant missionary work started.



### 3 VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY WESTWARD

#### 3.1 Columbus and the New World (1492)

Portuguese success with their voyages of discovery made Spain jealous and in 1492 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain sponsored Christopher Columbus to search for a route to the Orient by sailing west – see the map.



Columbus reported to King Ferdinand:

Thirty-three days after leaving Cadiz, I reached the Indian Sea (*note - he thought he had reached India*), where I discovered many islands. To the first I gave the name San Salvador (Spanish, Holy Saviour)

Columbus thought to end of his life that he had set foot on India - in fact it was the Bahamas. In talking of the 'West Indies' and 'American Indians' we have perpetuated his mistake. ('American Indians' are known now as 'Amerindians'.) His report continued:

I myself gave them much plate, glass and metal, which were new to them, and took nothing in return. I did this to pacify them, and that they might be led to become Christians. Let Christ rejoice in the salvation of the souls of so many nations hitherto lost. Let us all rejoice, both for the exultation of our Faith, and for the increase of our wealth

So Columbus was an evangelist as well as an explorer; on his second voyage, he took seven priests with him, whose task was to convert the Amerindians, but look at the end of that quote - Columbus' coupling of 'exaltation of our Faith' with 'increase of our wealth'. These two did not go together, because the Spanish *conquistadores* (conquerors) were more interested in 'increasing their wealth' than in 'exalting their faith'. When, on his second voyage, Columbus found gold, lots of it, in Haiti, he started the most violent gold rush in history. From then on, Spanish interest in the New World was dominated by extracting as much wealth as possible from the conquered territories, regardless of the cost in the human misery of the native population.



### 3.2 Caribbean, Central and South America

Within fifty years of their first sighting of San Salvador, Spaniards had conquered and plundered the New World from California to the tip of South America. They seized the capital of the Aztecs, Montezuma, in 1521, destroyed the Aztec Empire in Mexico and then crushed the Inca Empire of Peru in 1533-35. With the settlement of Buenos Aires in 1580, Spanish occupation of South America was complete. When the native population declined through disease, overwork, and the brutality of the wealth-seekers, the Spanish imported slaves from Africa, tens of thousands of them by the mid 16th century.



Spanish overseas policy was the opposite of Portuguese overseas policy. Portugal, as we saw, established trading posts along their sea routes, with little attempt to control surrounding territory. The Spanish, greedy for gold, set out to conquer, dominate and exploit the whole of the Caribbean, Central and South America, making the natives work for them as slave-labour. The priests who accompanied the explorers looked after the spiritual welfare of the *conquistadores*, but they had no regard for the spiritual welfare of the local people.



A word about the Portuguese, who colonized the area now known as Brazil. They too exploited the local people, but for a different reason. They found that sugar cane could easily be grown in their area and sugar got high prices in Europe; to grow and process sugar cane, they used the natives as cheap labour – essentially slavery - again not carrying out their Patronage duty to evangelise.

A word also about France's voyages of discovery. They went only, as you see on the map on page 6, to North America, where there was no gold to plunder and no sugar or tobacco requiring slave labour. So the land attracted a different kind of settler, not *conquistadors* seeking a quick fortune, nor plantation owners with slaves, but farmers and merchants, self-employed middle-class people, who wanted to replicate the churches of their homelands; if the natives could be persuaded to convert to Christianity, so much the better, so Quebec reflected, as it still does, French culture and religion.

### 3.3 Priests and friars

How, then, did Central and South America become nominally Roman Catholic countries? Remember the distinction we saw in Lecture 12, between priests, who worked within the framework of the Church under bishops, who were often part of the establishment, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, friars, who lived in poverty in local communities and who were directly responsible to Rome, not to the local bishop. The friars - Franciscans and Dominicans and, also now, a new order, the Society of Jesus, Jesuits, whom we'll look at in Lecture 26, saw the need for genuine missionary work in these new countries. They went to live among the people, as was their traditional way of working, learned their language and identified with their problems.

The friars were not only evangelists, but tried to mitigate the 'human rights' disaster of the Spanish exploitation of the Amerindians. So, there were two types of cleric in 16th century Central and South America - (a) priests, appointed by Spain under their Patronage rights, who looked (only) after the interests of the Spanish ex-pats, wilfully ignoring their religious responsibility under the Pope's Patronage to do missionary work, and (b) friars, who were responsible directly to Rome and who worked tirelessly not only for the conversion of the native people but also for their welfare. The task of the friars was not easy, because the Christianity they preached was seen by the Amerindians as the religion of the conquerors, who forced them, with indescribable cruelty, to work in mines and fields. The difficulty for the Pope was that, as mentioned at 2.4, he had given the explorers full control of religion in the areas where they traded; we'll see in section 4 how the Pope got round the problem that Patronage was causing him in evangelism.

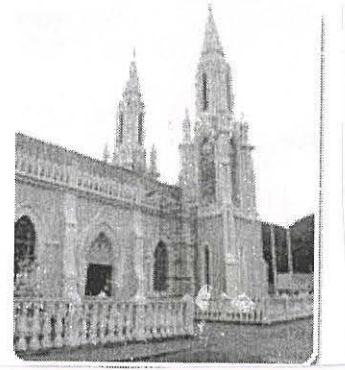
Little by little, friars gained the respect of the Amerindian people and many professed Christianity. The friars baptised everyone who (a) acknowledged one God, (b) accepted Christ as Redeemer and (c) could recite the Lord's Prayer. This was immensely successful but it was a long time before the converts had any real understanding of the Christian faith. It was all a bit messy - the Amerindians resented and hated the Spanish for what they were doing to them, but it seemed to them that the Christian God had defeated their own local gods, and so they requested baptism in order to get on the side of the more powerful Christian God. For example, by 1540 - quite soon after the first explorers landed - 8 million Mexicans called themselves 'Christian'.

The Jesuits created about sixty villages in Paraguay to provide havens for native converts to Christianity, accommodating about 100,000 people. However, they refused to train and appoint clergy from the local converts and indigenous Christians were slow to take on responsibility, so when Jesuits could no longer provide leadership, Spanish colonial interests destroyed these villages.

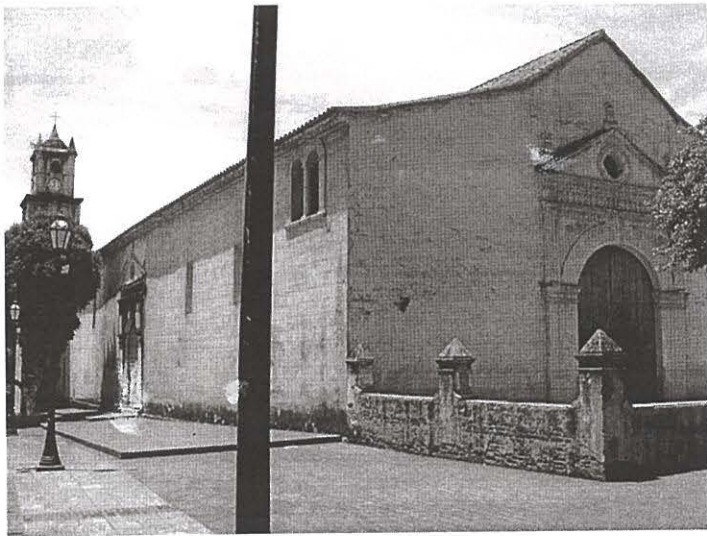


### 3.4 ‘The Church of our Lord Ascension’

As with the picture of the Dominican church in Macau on page 6, which was founded in 1587 by friars who accompanied Portuguese traders, these two pictures of *La iglesia de nuestra Señora de la Asuncion* in Venezuela are here to illustrate how quickly Jesuit friars established a witness in South America. I came across this church (equally by chance) in 2005, when a bus, in which I was travelling, stopped for a ‘refreshment break’ in the



city of *La Asuncion* (The Ascension) on Isla Margarita, the Island of Pearls. I noticed a very old church spire in the centre of the city, the one in the top photo; I was told that it was the oldest church building in Venezuela. Spanish traders had settled in the area in 1565, and five years later Jesuit priests built this church - so it had been there for 435 years. Significantly, there was, and still is, a Catholic school next door - securing the allegiance of the next generation by offering the best education available in the area. I took a photograph of the school, with the Church in the background but I couldn't get one without that telegraph pole in the way.



### 3.5 The Philippines

The extension of the Tordesillas Line over the North Pole and through the Pacific Ocean - page 2, and see the solid line on the map on page 6 - resulted in the Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan landing and claiming the islands for Spain in 1521, naming them after its king, Philip. Missionary activity led to the transformation of the Philippines into the first predominantly Catholic nation in East Asia, and by the end of the 18th century, 93% of the population claimed to belong to the Christian faith. Today the Philippines is the only country in the world whose Constitution explicitly states its Christian belief:

We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society and establish a Government that shall embody our ideals and aspirations ...

## 4 THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ‘PROPAGANDA’

### 4.1 Rise and decline of Roman Catholic mission

Because Spain and Portugal did not use the priests in their colonies to Christianise the natives, in 1622 Pope Gregory XV took over and co-ordinated Catholic missions under a central authority called ‘The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith’, usually referred from its Latin title as ‘The Propaganda’. It was immensely successful under direct Vatican control. No longer did trade or political interest conflict with evangelism. The Propaganda found and trained recruits and provided money and resources for mission. Financial help was generous and the Pope made sure that his missionaries had no difficulty in securing passages in Spanish and Portuguese ships.



A key element was the appointment of Vicars Apostolic, who performed episcopal functions in missionary areas as representatives of the Pope, and who were directly responsible to the Propaganda. As we saw earlier (page 5), the Patronage system gave the explorers the right to appoint bishops in their areas, but the Vicars Apostolic were not technically ‘bishops’ so the Pope could appoint ‘his’ men to oversee his policies in the Portuguese and Spanish colonies to which he sent ‘his’ missionaries.

Why the ‘rise’ and ‘decline’ of Catholic mission?

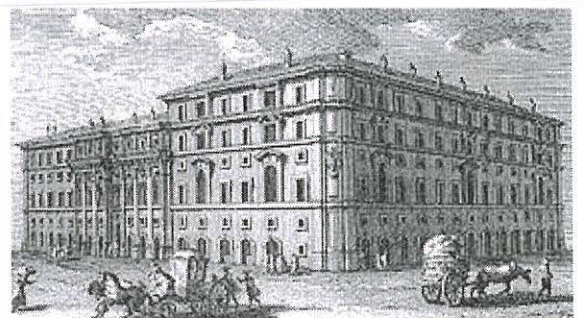
By 1700, most of the inhabitants of Central and South America who had been in contact with the Spanish called themselves Christian. Roman Catholicism was also established in Vietnam, Korea and parts of India as well as in the many other areas described throughout this Lecture. For example, there were now half-a-million Christians in Angola and the Congo in West Africa. However, four factors were working to emaciate Catholic mission.

1. The friars were reluctant to encourage the vocation of priesthood, or even lay leadership, among the peoples where they worked, and the *conquistadors* were certainly not going to appoint indigenous clergy. For example, the 600,000 converts in the Philippines by 1700 were cared for by 400 Spanish friars and not one indigenous leader.
2. Rome insisted that the liturgy had to be in Latin, not the local language, and suppressed this whenever it was attempted - for example in the villages in Paraguay mentioned on page 10 and in several places in China. The Mass was therefore incomprehensible to almost everyone in the Roman Catholic mission fields and a major obstacle to the growth of an indigenous Church.
3. Many converts gave a Catholic veneer to their pre-Christian beliefs and practices, and many non-Christian practices continued without any theological grounding.
4. The suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 - for reasons to be explored in Lecture 26 - deprived the Church of its most effective Catholic religious orders, with 22,600 members robbed. (They were reinstated in 1814.)

However, despite these setbacks,, the Catholic Church gained more converts in the Orient and the New World than it was losing to Protestantism in Europe, because the Reformation was in full swing in Europe at this time, as we’ll see in Lectures 19 to 25.

‘The Propaganda’ was renamed in 1982 as ‘The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples’ and its mission continues to this day.

Missionary activity in South America between 1500 and 1800 was almost exclusively Roman Catholic. Then their missionary work diminished, partly through the four points just mentioned; at the same time, a new Protestant spiritual energy was released as a result of the Evangelical Revivals, which we’ll come to a Lecture 31. Pentecostal churches took off there in the 20th century, as we’ll see in Lecture 33.



The headquarters of the ‘Propaganda’ in Rome



# OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

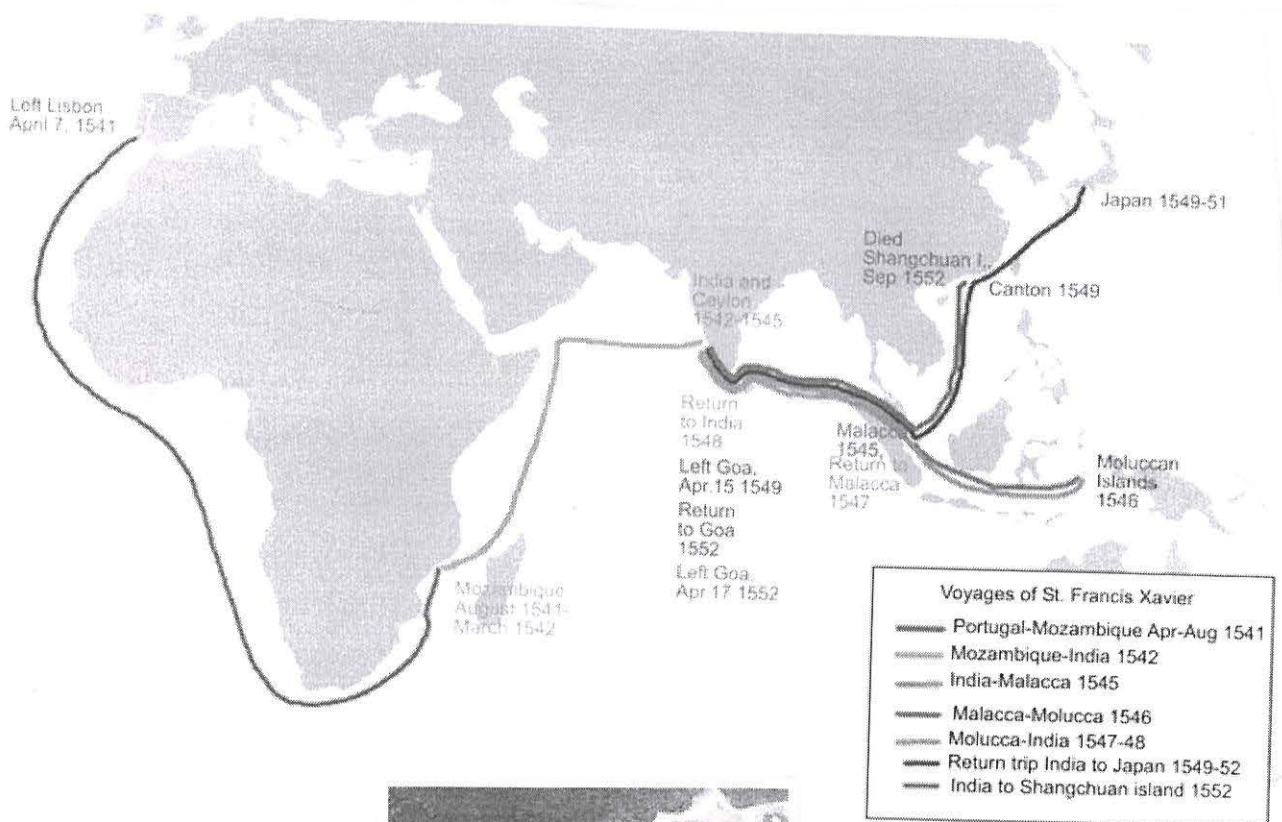
## TOPIC FOR LECTURE 17 – FRANCIS XAVIER (1506-52)

Francis Xavier was a member of a religious order known as ‘Jesuits’, whom we will not study until Lecture 26. However, he was a key person in the Voyages of Discovery (Eastward) that we are looking at in this Lecture, so:

Please tell us about the life of this remarkably successful pioneer missionary, particularly his evangelistic methods in Goa, the problems he encountered in the Far East, his time in Japan and his attempt to enter China – and anything else about him that you consider worth while.

There is a brief mention of Francis Xavier in Cairns at pages 342 and 344 and in Lion at pages 431-2, but there is nothing about him in Vos or Olson. There is, however, abundant material about him on the Internet.

Overleaf are notes which the student who took the Topic provided for the class.





## Francis Xavier

In 1540, the King of Portugal requested that six Jesuits (an Order of friars) be sent to his colonies in the Orient. They could spare only two. One of these was Francis Xavier, who arrived at Goa, the centre of Portuguese operations in East, in 1542. He was scandalized by the lifestyle of the Portuguese, but soon hit on method to reach people - he walked along the streets with bell, inviting children to come with him to church, where he taught them the catechism and Christian morals. Then he sent them home to share with their parents what they had learned. Little by little, Xavier gained the respect of adults, who eventually flocked to hear him preach.

He taught them the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Rosary. When he was satisfied that they had learned these, he baptized them, by the hundred.

But it was not to reach the Portuguese, who were nominally Christian, that Xavier had come to India. He went to the pearl fishermen along the south-eastern coast, taking with him two young clergymen who knew the language of the area, and with them as interpreters he preached and taught for some time; people responded, and Xavier trained some of his converts, who then travelled about preaching and baptizing.

In 1546, leaving others in charge of the work in India, Xavier sailed east – see some details on the map overleaf. In 1549 three Japanese, whom he had met in his travels, invited him to visit their land. He was well received; Buddhism was out of favour and no national religion challenged the Christian message. Jesuit missionaries enjoyed remarkable success for the next fifty years and in 1579 established a new town, especially for converts to Christianity, which they called Nagasaki (where the atomic bomb was dropped in 1945). By 1600 there were 300,000 converts, hundreds of churches and Christian colleges. The Jesuits were convinced that they had built the foundations for a flourishing church.

Sadly, early in the 17th century, the new rulers of Japan were concerned that the missionaries were agents of European imperialism and that to welcome them might lead to the invasion of their country by foreigners; they launched a policy of persecution of Christians. Many were monitored and the newly founded church almost disappeared - but not completely. Three centuries later, Protestant missionaries found about a hundred thousand Christians in Nagasaki and neighbouring areas - descendants of the converts of Xavier.

Xavier's dream was to preach the Gospel in China, but the government refused to allow any foreign influence. He died on the fringe of the Chinese empire, where he had settled to prepare for the day when that vast land opened to him - but it never did.