

## Chapter 64

# Psychotherapy and Christianity: Methods and Challenges

**Jeremy Lim**

*HELP University, Malaysia*

**Ke Hui Chuah**

*HELP University, Malaysia*

### ABSTRACT

*Christianity is counted as one of the biggest religious groups in the world, numbering at over 2 billion individuals who identify themselves with this religion. As of the 2010 census, the Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal reported that an estimated 9.2% of the population in Malaysia identified themselves as Christians. In numerical terms, this equates to approximately 3 million individuals spread out all over the Malaysian peninsular as well as Sabah and Sarawak who consider themselves part of the Christian church. This chapter intends to do four things: 1) provide a brief history of the church and Christianity, 2) acquaint the reader with basic Christian beliefs, 3) provide insight into the methods and challenges of working with the population in Malaysia drawing from both local as well as international literature, and 4) provide the implications of the methods and challenges of working with the Christian population.*

### INTRODUCTION

*He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” - Luke 10:27, NIV*

Worldwide, Christianity (including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and others) is counted as one of the biggest religious groups in the world, numbering at over 2,000,000,000 individuals who identify themselves with this religion (BBC, 2011). As of the 2010 census, the Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal (2010) reported that there is an estimated 9.2% of the population in Malaysia identified themselves as Christians. In numerical terms, this equates to approximately 3,000,000 individuals spread

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out all over the Malaysian peninsular as well as Sabah and Sarawak who consider themselves part of the Christian church. This essay intends to do 4 things: 1) provide a brief history of the church and Christianity, 2) acquaint the reader with basic Christian beliefs, 3) provide insight into the methods and challenges of working with the population in Malaysia drawing from both local as well as international literature, and 4) provide the implications of the methods and challenges of working with the Christian Protestant population.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

For many people, Christianity is synonymous from its founder from whom the name derives from – Jesus Christ. The following contains a short exposition on both the story of Jesus Christ and the history of the church as a means to provide the reader a basis for which to approach clients. This approach is presented from a Protestant point of view.

The Bible, Christianity's holy book, teaches that Jesus Christ (which means Yeshua the Messiah i.e. the Savior) was born in Bethlehem, Israel, to a virgin called Mary. Christians believe that Mary was pregnant not by human or physical means but by direct divine action through the Holy Spirit (BBC, 2009a). Jesus himself represented the fulfillment of prophecies of other parts of the Bible and was believed to have been born over 2000 years ago (approximately 4-7 BC) (BBC, 2009a; Robinson, 2008). The Bible covers Jesus' early life in brief and Jesus' public influence in detail in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, reputed eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life (BBC, 2009a). During this period in the public sphere, Jesus gathered many followers, foremost of whom were the 12 disciples who later went on to lead the early church (BBC, 2009a). The climax of Jesus' story is when the religious leaders, critical of Jesus and believing him to proclaim falsehoods, apprehended and crucified Jesus (crucifixion is an ancient Roman means of execution, where the condemned is nailed to a cross and left to hang until he/she suffocates) (BBC, 2009a). However, the Bible teaches that three days after Jesus' death by crucifixion, Jesus was raised to life again by the power of God whereupon he was taken up to heaven a few days later after having spent time with many eyewitnesses (BBC, 2009a).

Jesus' ascension to heaven marked the beginning of the church where Jesus' disciples and followers spread His message throughout the Roman Empire (BBC, 2011). This was also when the term Christians (literally, Christ-followers) began to be used to refer to Christ's followers (Acts 11:26, New International Version). This early movement faced many troubles such as condemnation, torture, and execution by Roman emperors such as Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian who believed the religion to be heretical (BBC, 2009a). However, Christianity became more accepted under the rule of Constantine whose efforts resulted in the codification of Christian doctrine (BBC, 2009a). Over the centuries, various divides such as the Great Schism in 1054 and the Protestant reformation resulted in different ways of understanding Christianity (e.g. the Roman-Catholics versus the Protestants versus the Orthodox church) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017).

The verse from the Bible at the opening of this chapter is Jesus' summary of the teachings of the Bible which have been handed down throughout the centuries. Differences in doctrine and interpretation of teachings have also resulted in the various denominations today (e.g. the Methodists, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Jehovah Witnesses, etc). However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover the differences between denominations in detail and interested readers would do well to consult other sources. Regardless, most Christian denominations today believing these commands are thus

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