

Christianity's role as a colonizing force in robinson crusoe



Christianity played a tremendous role in the 18th century European colonization of the New World, as exemplified by Robinson Crusoe. The story of Crusoe's isolation on the island, especially concerning his "missionary" attempts with a savage named Friday, shows the importance of Crusoe's religion in his life. Christianity allows Crusoe to see many things about Friday and his fellow savages, such as the similarities between Friday's people and the Europeans. But it also keeps him blind to other aspects of Friday's life, for instance, his not wanting to change to another way of life. The following will show the two sides of Christianity's affects on Crusoe's way of life and thought process during the time that he spends on the island. Christianity is a strong force in Crusoe's life, particularly during the years that he spent in isolation on the island. The thirty-five years spent away from European society gives him a chance to reflect on what God means in his life. He goes from a distant relationship with God when he is first shipwrecked on the island, to complete devotion and a want to spread this to others who do not "know" God. He receives this chance to spread the Word of God to a savage he names Friday. Through his "missionary" attempt, Crusoe discovers many characteristics in Friday that are similar to his own. For example, he finds that God "has bestowed upon [Friday's people] the same powers, the same reason, the same affections, the same sentiments of kindness and obligation, ...and all the capacities of doing good and receiving good, that He has given to us" (212), and this thought comforts Crusoe. He has no reason to fear Friday because of these similarities, they broke the barrier between Crusoe and Friday as well. Crusoe puts aside his apprehensions and attempts to learn from Friday. By gathering information, he can better understand Friday and further their relationship. Among the similarities that Crusoe discovers is <https://assignbuster.com/christianitys-role-as-a-colonizing-force-in-robinson-crusoe/>

that Friday has similar religious beliefs to his own. One similar characteristic is the belief in one Almighty being; the European version is God while Friday's is Benamuckee. There are also similar types of religious hierarchy, and Crusoe once observes during a conversation with Friday " that there is priestcraft even amongst the most blinded ignorant pagans in the world" (219). This hierarchical structure helps Crusoe's attempts to rule Friday because of Friday's faith in his " savage" religion. Through his talks with Friday, Crusoe expands his mind and begins to see that Christianity, or elements of that religion, can be found all over the world, and this helps the various peoples understand one another. These characteristics also help his mission to convert Friday. With a foundation already laid, Crusoe merely needs to " Christianize" what Friday already regards as truth. Friday believes that Crusoe's teachings are fact and therefore wants to model his life on Crusoe's. With these new discoveries, Crusoe sees that Friday wants to learn, for " he was the aptest schollar that ever was" (213). With great care, Crusoe shows Friday that the European way of thinking is the best and he must therefore follow Crusoe's lead. Friday takes a submissive role, allowing Crusoe to become his master. The determining of the savage's name symbolizes Crusoe's extreme power over Friday, for Crusoe " made him know his name should be Friday...[and Crusoe] likewise taught him to say Master" (209). The name " Friday," given to him because that was the day he was saved by Crusoe, is generic and shows what little worth he is to Crusoe; that is, he is only a reminder of the calendar that Crusoe keeps. Crusoe also teaches Friday to live properly, or according to European ways. This means that Friday is expected to give up his savage ways, especially his cannibalism, for Crusoe " found Friday had still a hankering stomach after

<https://assignbuster.com/christianitys-role-as-a-colonizing-force-in-robinson-crusoe/>

some flesh, and was still a cannibal in his nature...[and] by some means let him know that [he] would kill him if he offered [the flesh to him]" (210). All in all, Crusoe displays a great amount of patience with Friday, aside from the cannibalism that Friday has a tendency toward, but his other characteristics and habits. This is mainly because Friday is changing his life to suit Crusoe's and does not inconvenience Crusoe in the least. Along with this patience that Crusoe exhibits, there is also intolerance for Friday's way of thinking. Crusoe does not allow Friday to have a say in what he is being taught. Crusoe takes his position of Master to Friday seriously and "[makes] it [his] business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful" (213)-proper, that is, according to European rules. With Friday being servant to Crusoe, there is a great loss of freedom, freedom that he had known throughout his whole existence. Although he is not a slave by formal definition, Friday feels obligated to serve Crusoe because he saved Friday's life. This debt to his master makes Friday's conversion something that he has to do to please his master. This submission suits Crusoe's life perfectly. Being European, he naturally feels superior to Friday and welcomes this opportunity to be master of someone. Because this story is written through Crusoe's eyes, there is no way of knowing exactly how Friday actually feels, but Crusoe never wants to know in the first place. If he knew how Friday felt, his Christian conscience would stop him from his missionary attempts, and he would once again be alone on the island, with no one to control. Although Crusoe sees that there are similarities between his own religion and that of Friday's, Crusoe wants to re-teach Friday about religion. He wants Friday to learn Christianity and delete all knowledge of his own beliefs, but he finds that " it was not so easie to imprint right notions in his mind about the devil,

<https://assignbuster.com/christianitys-role-as-a-colonizing-force-in-robinson-crusoe/>

as it was about the being of a God" (219). Without an already present image of European notions, Crusoe has a difficult time showing Friday the European way of thinking—one being that there is a being with almost the same powers as God, a foreign thought to Friday. Friday's religious beliefs are "wrong," and Crusoe wants him to realize this and change his ways to those of a true Christian. Along these same lines Crusoe finds Friday ignorant, not just because of his savage ways, but also because Friday knows nothing about Christianity or how important it is to live a Christian life. Crusoe has found God in everything on the island, and he wants to see Him in Friday as well. This religious faith is a strong force that pushes Crusoe, and he does not want it to leave him either. Through this strong faith in God, Crusoe belittles Friday and shows once again how he is master of this savage. Even though Friday learns quickly what Crusoe is teaching him, he will never be as smart as Crusoe wishes him to be. Crusoe will always be looking for perfection in Friday, and he will never be satisfied with the results. Crusoe also compares himself with God, He being the ultimate Master. As a master, Crusoe wants his follower to be the best example of his authority. Through the eyes of Robinson Crusoe, readers are invited into the world of the colonizing European. This colonization was overshadowed by the strong faith of Crusoe in Christianity. With this faith, Crusoe was able to successfully convert the savage Friday. Through his "missionary" attempts, Crusoe was able to see the similarities between himself and Friday, but also turned a blind eye to other aspects of Friday's life. Through this novel, Daniel Defoe comments on eighteenth century Europe, a supreme power that showed its mastery over other countries much in the same way that Crusoe did with Friday. Literature gives its audience a view that could not otherwise be seen.

<https://assignbuster.com/christianitys-role-as-a-colonizing-force-in-robinson-crusoe/>