

Global Christianity

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1. Great shafting in the History of Christianity

In 1910, more than 82 percent of the Christians in the world lived in the Global North which combines Europe and North America. A century later, 62 percent Christians live in the Global South which comprises of Africa, Latin America and Asia yet the rest number of Christian live in Europe and North America accounting for slightly more than 38 percent of the Christians in the world. Notice that 92 percent of Christians lived in Europe by the Reformation era. From the Modern Christian movements, Christian populations in Africa, Latin America and some parts of Asia have significantly been growing making up the Global South Christianity. Christians in the Global South outnumbered the Global North Christians in 1981. Over all, there are about 2.2 billion Christians around the world, making it the most widely practiced religion. There are 1.2 billion Catholics and 600 million Protestants. Islam is the second most widely practiced religion, with an estimated 1.6 billion practitioners.

The center of gravity of the Christian faith has shifted from the West to the non-West, where the majority of the world's Christians now live. However, these geographic, racial, and quantitative changes do not necessarily mean that qualitative changes have occurred. The Global South remains largely unchristian and unreached. Churches in non-Western regions still largely follow Western forms of worship, theology, and missions practices. Still, Christianity in the Global South is challenging the notion that Christianity is Western. Churches in the Global South can emphasize different aspects of the gospel and focus on particular doctrines, resulting in multiple forms of Christianity.

2. The Decline of the Western Christianity

The rise of the Southern Hemisphere Christianity is actually due to the decline of Christianity in Europe and America. European Christianity as the axis of Christian civilization, culture, theological disciplines, and constituents is rapidly diminishing yet the rise of Islam as a world religion is crushing of ancient Christian centers in western Asia where it was born and several European cities.

According to the Atlas of Global Christianity, Europe was nearly 95% Christian and contained 66% of all Christians in 1910. A century later, only 80% of Europe's population was Christian and only 25.6% of the world's Christians lived there. The predictions for 2050 show the basic pattern of European decline continuing: Only 76.6% of Europeans are expected to be Christian 40 years from now and only 15.8% of all Christians will live in Europe.

The Western church's decline began gradually during the Enlightenment, when rationalism took center stage as the Western worldview. This began to influence

theology, calling into question long-held beliefs such as the occurrence of miracles, the virgin birth of Jesus, the inerrancy of the Bible, salvation uniquely through Christianity, and Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension. Unitarianism laid the foundation for liberal theology, which disavowed the traditional belief that salvation is available through Christianity alone. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution and urbanization caused many people to leave their rural, farm-centered lifestyles and the parochial system that had ministered to them. New city-ministry models struggled to meet the needs of the many migrants moving there. As the predominant worldview became highly individualistic, churches became a matter of individual choice. The separation of church and state also deprived the church of government support. Experiential faith began to be seen as irrational, especially to those influenced by Unitarianism, which put a damper on the presence and expressions of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Rise of Islam

Islam has undergone the most impressive growth of all world religions. In contrast to the slower growth of Buddhism and Hinduism, Islam has grown more than 500 percent during the twentieth century and is now the world's second largest religion. Islam is the majority religion in North Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Due to immigration, Islam is growing rapidly in Europe and North America, just as a decline of Christianity is underway. Furthermore, Westerners living in traditionally Christian regions are converting to Islam.

In Europe, the Muslim population in Europe reaches 5.6 percent. The real problem of European Christian population is not the number of practicing Christians. A lot European believe in a supreme being or identify themselves as Christians but seldom practice Christian worship and church attendance. Muslim immigrants are changing the face of European religious shape that Islamic practices could exceed Christian practices. The birth of Islam in AD 622 brought Christianity in North Africa and the Middle East to a standstill and then to destruction. The Crusades, mounted under the pretense of recovering the Holy Land, left a heritage of destruction and gave Christian the faith a bad name that has endured for generations among Muslims. Bearing this burden of historical injustice, the non-Western church now faces the challenge of missions to Muslims.

4. Growth of Christianity in the Global South

The fall of Western Christianity and the revival of the faith in the Global South began after the end of colonialism and World War II. If the 1960s marks the start of continuous European and American Christian decline, many non-Western regions experienced pivotal events that led to growth, including China's Cultural Revolution, Christian revival in Islamic Indonesia, and the arrival of liberation theology in South America, making Bible reading permitted. Sub-Saharan Africa experienced remarkable growth with native churches led by indigenous leaders. Church growth in the developing world made up for almost all the losses in the West. Main contributors to this growth are Pentecostal denominations born at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Charismatic movement of the 1960s. Significantly, most churches that experienced rapid growth

accepted such movements as coming from God. We can conclude that the main cause of church growth is due to this new movement of God: the Pentecostalism.

5. Growth of Christianity in Africa

Africa had 11.7 million Christians and 40 million Muslims in 1910. Who would have guessed that African Christianity would multiply 40 times in a century to almost 500 million and would include 48% of the African people in 2010. By 2050, the AGC predicts that Christians will form a majority (52%) in Africa.

Christianity is an integral part of Africa today. Hastings affirms, “Black Africa today is totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity, a presence which a couple of generations ago could still be not unreasonably dismissed as fundamentally marginal and a mere subsidiary aspect of colonialism.”¹ Christianity is growing extensively in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. However, at the beginning of twentieth century, the Christian influence in Africa was minimal. In the north, the Muslim majority prevailed. In 1910, there were 11.7 million Christians in Africa while Muslims numbered 40 million. In 2010 Christianity increased 40-fold to more than 490 million while the number of Muslims grew tenfold to 418 million.²

6. Growth of Christianity in Latin America

In 1910, evangelicals represented 1.1 percent of the population in Latin America and numbered 895,000. In 2010, evangelicals made up 8.1 percent of the population with 48,118,000 adherents. The growth of Renewalists has been dramatic. Currently, Pentecostals and Charismatics account for 26.3 percent of the populace, three times more than evangelicals. In 1910, there were only 15,300 Renewalists, but this grew to 156 million by 2010.

Several denominations have huge churches in Brazil, Columbia, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and more. For instance, the Brazilian Universal Church of the Reign of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) has more than three million followers. The Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International in Bogota, Colombia, has more than 500 congregations in several Latin American countries, the United States, Europe, and Japan.³ One-fifth of the world’s Pentecostals live in Brazil, making them proportionally the largest membership anywhere in the world. Stoll has made some impressive projections for the growth of Pentecostalism based upon the Protestant growth index between 1969 and 1985 in several Latin American countries and also accounting for “the typical fragmenting nature of Pentecostal churches.”⁴ Brazil alone has a Pentecostal community of at least 13,323,000.

¹ Hastings, “Turning Points in Religious Studies,” 208.

² Johnson and Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, 112.

³ D. Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 175.

⁴ Wagner states, “Pentecostals are either the largest church or the largest natural groupings of churches in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.” Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming*, 26.

7. Growth of Christianity in Asia

Christianity is growing all over Asia - Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia, Cambodia, etc. But the explosion of Christianity in China and South Korea has seen the Christian population in east Asia grow from 2.3 million to 140 million (9%) since 1910. Christianity grew 4 times faster than the population and there is no end in sight. In 40 years, Christians will likely comprise almost 16% of the east Asian population and Christians in Asia will outnumber Buddhists.

In Asia, Christians are not in the majority, but their numbers have grown greatly. Still, this growth does not make Christianity a powerful political or religious force except in a few nations, including the Philippines, South Korea, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as some regions in India, China, Myanmar, and Indonesia. Noticeable Christian growth has occurred in Nepal and Cambodia since 1990. In the twentieth century, the number of Christians in Asia doubled, growing to make up 8.5 percent of Asians in 2010. Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Asia have experienced phenomenal growth, which is attributed to the revivals and awakenings of the early twentieth century. Areas where significant growth has taken place—South Korea, Philippines, India, China, Indonesia, and Myanmar—all experienced revival in the early twentieth century. Among the revivals in Asia are the 1905 Mukti Mission of Pandita Sarasvati Ramabai in South India, the Khasi Hills in North India, and the 1907 Pyongyang Revival, which I call the Pentecost of Korea. These revivals all included repentance, conversion, Spirit baptisms, and life-changing experiences of rebirth, leading ultimately to the large Christian populations that we see today.

8. The Emergence of Independent Churches

According to “the Atlas of Global Christianity,” “independents” are “believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic) They are independent of historic, organized, institutionalized, and denominational Christianity.” One of phenomenal Christian growth is, indeed, indebted from independent churches. Christians from Independent churches in 2010 account 369 million by making up 16.1% of the Global Christians.

The largest independent group of Christians are Chinese charismatics (77 million). Africa has the largest number of independent congregations today and is one of the major centers of Independent Christianity along with China and the US. What is surprising is that the 100 year Independent growth rate in Europe was 10 times faster than population growth. One reason is the number of large African Independent congregations in major European cities but there are also an increasing number of white-led Independent groups across the continent. Northern Europe has the highest percentage of Independent Christians in Europe.

9. The Growth of Renewal movements such as Pentecostal and Charismatic movements

Evangelicalism was propagated through revivals and awakenings until the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, while evangelicalism remains strong, it has been characterized increasingly by fragmentation. Rather than a few large denominations, there are alliances and clusters. Pentecostal and charismatic groups are counted among the worldwide community of evangelicals.

In 2010, the largest Christian group was the Roman Catholics with 50.4 percent of global Christian population. Protestants, the second largest group, had 6.1 percent, followed by the Independent church group with 5.3 percent and 369 million followers—not that much smaller than the Protestant group, which accounted for 419 million. Evangelicals had 3.8 percent, and Pentecostals claimed 8.9 percent, with 614 million adherents. Independent churches can either be classified as a major tradition or as a Pentecostal movement.

10. Problems of the Global South Christianity

In case of the Global South, Christian growth in Africa and Latin America seems quite astonishing yet encounters with many social weakness such as poverty, AIDS, famine, civil unrest, religious persecution, and so much more.

Conclusion

Looking at global Christianity we have seen a great number of believers in Jesus are living in the Global South yet the diversity of the Global South Christianity is tremendous. Analyzing all of the Christian branches in the Global South challenge scholars and researchers to study why they are flourishing. This questions brings us to consider the origins and connectedness of the Global South Christianity into the where Christianity and existed in the global north. The author will explore the connections the Global North and South. We will first look at Christianity in Europe to start the investigation.