

The Atlas of Global Christianity: Its Findings

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Why an Atlas?

When marking the centenary of the “Edinburgh 1910” World Missionary Conference, it would be remiss not to recall that one of its significant achievements was the production of the *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions*. This groundbreaking volume was produced at the behest of the flagship Commission I on “Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World”, chaired by John R. Mott.¹ A sub-committee of its members, chaired by James S. Dennis, prepared the atlas as an appendix to the Report of the Commission. It was soon recognised as an authoritative and definitive work in terms of mapping the progress of Christian missions in the “non-Christian world” as it was understood at that time.

As the centenary of the epoch-making conference approached, a plan to create a new atlas was adopted as an adjunct project of Edinburgh 2010. With a nerve centre at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston and a worldwide network of contributors spanning the confessional spectrum, the atlas project got fully into gear during 2006.² Edinburgh University Press agreed to publish the volume. The atlas was set in the framework of 1910–2010, seeking to map the presence of the Christian faith worldwide during this period. Rather than replicating the 1910 atlas, produced in the heyday of Western missions, the *Atlas of Global Christianity* sought to take account of the entire presence of Christian faith on a worldwide basis.³

Christianity’s Demographic Transformation 1910-2010

To understand the status of global Christianity and world evangelization for the 100th anniversary of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 one can consider trends both within global Christianity and outside of global Christianity.

TRENDS WITHIN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity has shifted dramatically to the South

For the entire 100-year period, Christians have made up approximately one third of the world’s population. Yet this masks dramatic changes in the geography of global Christianity—a process stretching back to the earliest days of the world Christian movement. While 66% of all Christians lived in Europe in 1910, by 2010 only 26% lived there. The Global North (Europe and Northern America) contained over 80% of all Christians in 1910, falling to under 40% by 2010. By contrast, less than 2% of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910, skyrocketing to almost 22% by 2010. In fact, the most dramatic difference over the 100 years is in Africa—less than 10% Christian in 1910 but nearly 50% Christian in 2010, with sub-Saharan Africa well over 70% Christian.

The 10 countries with the most Christians in 1910 and 2010 are presented below in Table 1, where the southern shift can be quickly perceived. Nine of the top 10 countries in 1910 were in the Global North, whereas seven of the top 10 in 2010 are in the Global South. Analysis of

growth rates of Christianity by country from 1910 to 2000 to 2010 shows that the fastest growth both over the past 100 years and over the past 10 years has all been in the Global South. As further evidence of the shift, an examination of mother tongues with the most Christians worldwide shows that Spanish is first and Portuguese third—reflecting the numerical strength of Christianity in Latin America. Asian languages such as Mandarin Chinese (5) and Tagalog (10) are in the top ten while African languages such as Amharic (11), Yoruba (15) and Igbo (16) are in the top twenty.

Table 1.

Largest population of Christians

	1910	Christians	2010	Christians
1	USA	84,800,000	USA	257,311,000
2	Russia	65,757,000	Brazil	180,932,000
3	Germany	45,755,000	Russia	115,120,000
4	France	40,894,000	China	115,009,000
5	Britain	39,298,000	Mexico	105,583,000
6	Italy	35,330,000	Philippines	83,151,000
7	Ukraine	29,904,000	Nigeria	72,302,000
8	Poland	22,102,000	DR Congo	65,803,000
9	Brazil	21,576,000	India	58,367,000
10	Spain	20,357,000	Germany	58,123,000

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2. Christianity is fragmented

Christians are now found in some 41,000 denominations. These range in size from millions of members to fewer than 100 members and are listed for each of the world's 232 countries in the *World Christian Database* (Brill Online, 2010). Moonjang Lee observes, "Christianity has become too fragmented. Existing in a fragmented world, churches fail to show a united front. There are so many divisions within Christianity that it is an intriguing task to clarify a Christian identity. At the beginning of Christian history, the designation of a person as a "Christian" was sufficient to tell about his or her social, religious and cultural identity. Today, however, we have to supply subcategories to tell about who we are as Christians, for there are many different and conflicting forms of church life."⁴ Note that the vast majority of denominations are found in the Independent and Protestant traditions. By 2025, there will likely be 55,000 denominations.

3. Christians are experiencing unprecedented renewal

Global Christianity encompasses many forms of renewal, including Evangelical movements, liturgical renewal, Bible-study fellowships and house-church movements. One of the most significant is the Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal that coincides with the 100-year period on which we have been reflecting. Over one fourth of all Christians are involved in this Renewal.

Daniel Jeyaraj observes, "Pentecostal Christianity... promotes the ideals of Spirit-filled holy life, apostolicity and catholicity. It incorporates practical ways of leadership, training and

mission that draw much inspiration not only from Western business models, but also from local socio-religious customs, hierarchies and practices. Its emphasis on tithing of financial resources and time, using personal talents in mission, and accountability to the Holy Spirit make it mostly self-sufficient and self-propagating (although its view on material wealth and good health as symbols of God's blessings is critiqued).”⁵

The locus of the Renewal is clearly in the Global South, where the majority of its practitioners live and where it is growing the fastest.

4. Christian resources are not evenly distributed

Christians of the Global South represent 60% of all Christians but receive only about 17% of all Christian income. This puts them at a disadvantage in many areas, including health, education, communications and overall quality of life. This imbalance is one of the great tragedies of global Christianity that could not have been easily predicted at Edinburgh in 1910.

Comment: There needs to be a better way to word this – it is easy to interpret this as “Churches in the South receive 17% of all Christian giving”, which is not the point here.

TRENDS OUTSIDE OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

1. There is enough evangelism to reach everyone in the world

One might have the impression today that what is needed to reach the world for Christ is more evangelism. But, in sheer quantity, there is already enough evangelism in the world today for every person to hear a one-hour presentation of the gospel every other day all year long. This amounts to over 1,136 billion hours of evangelism generated by Christians every year, ranging from personal witnessing to television and radio broadcasting. Asia and Northern Africa have the least evangelism but the largest non-Christian populations.

Comment: These don't really seem like trends “outside of” Christianity, as evangelism is an essential part of Christianity.

2. Most Christian outreach never reaches non-Christians

Eighty-five per cent (85%) of all Christian evangelism is aimed at other Christians and does not reach non-Christians. Part of the explanation is the unanticipated success of Christian missions in the 20th century. Much Western missionary deployment is trying to sustain the growth of the churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Surprisingly, however, missionaries from the Global South have also been drawn into mission primarily to other Christians. Deployment studies in Nigeria and India have shown this to be the case, although there has been a perceptible shift in the past decade toward work among non-Christians.

3. Christians are out of contact with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists

Recent research reveals that as many as 86% of all Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists do not personally know a Christian.⁶ This must be viewed negatively in light of the strong biblical theme of incarnation that is at the heart of Christian witness. Christians should know and love their neighbours! In the 21st century it is important to realize that the responsibility for reaching Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists is too large for the vocational missionary enterprise. While missionaries will always be at the forefront of innovative strategies, the whole church needs to participate in inviting people of other faiths to consider Jesus Christ. It is significant that Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists are increasingly found living in traditionally “Christian” lands.

Recurrent Themes in the Analytical Essays

Complementing the demographic material in the Atlas are 52 analytical essays that critically examine the geographical regions, ecclesial traditions and key themes featured in the maps. The

essays were written independently by authors who are authorities in their respective fields. Therefore, points that recur in the essay collection represent significant indications of salient trends and issues in global Christianity today. Among them are the following:

The Many and the One: Diversity and Unity

Time and again, authors highlight the diversity that characterises the Christian faith today. Concluding his essay on African Christianity, Jesse Mugambi writes, “Perhaps the greatest mistake we could make in assessing African Christianity today would be to generalise too much, for diversity is the order of the day. Among the churches wide differences can be discerned in cultural identity, doctrinal standpoint, social concern, pastoral approach, mission strategy and ecumenical commitment. Christians are among the wealthiest and the poorest, among the most politically conservative and among the most politically transformative, among the most ethically exemplary and among the most scandalous, among the most Westernising in cultural values and among the greatest champions of African tradition.”⁷ Diversity is the order of the day not only for church but also equally for mission. As Cathy Ross concludes her essay on Great Commission Christians, “Christianity is now a faith of many centres, and mission is multi-directional – from anywhere to anywhere. Christians in various parts of the world engage in mission differently and in new ways. We are experiencing Christianity as a kind of multi-coloured and multi-layered quilt with many shapes, sizes, fabrics and textures.”⁸

The atlas tells a story, however, not only of diversity but also of unity. Apparent in a bewildering variety of circumstances and in a dazzling diversity of cultural forms, Christian faith nonetheless is marked by an irreducible unity and coherence which demands that consideration be given to global or world Christianity. This commonality is affirmed by the atlas but also recognised as a pressing contemporary challenge, particularly in the essay on the future of global Christianity by Moonjang Lee: “The question for global Christianity over the next century is how to restore the theological and ecclesial unity within the Christian faith and the spirit of love and tolerance in Christ.”⁹

Migration and mission

One factor making for diversity in the Christian faith is the large-scale migration that is a feature of today’s world. As Jonathan Bonk comments in his essay: “Much contemporary evangelisation is part of a vast migration surpassing in scale and potential import the one that saw Europeans sweep the globe. ... A great majority of [the migrants] are deceptively inconsequential, profoundly Christian and explicitly evangelistic.”¹⁰ The effects of this are evident in many different parts of the world.

Commenting in his essay on the missionary impact of African Christianity, Jehu Hanciles observes, “By the end of the [20th] century, African migrants were widely dispersed among the wealthy industrialised countries of the North, and everywhere they went they established new Christian congregations. In effect, African migrations have provided a vital stimulus for missionary expansion, for the simple reason that every Christian migrant is a potential missionary. In both Europe and Northern America, African immigrant congregations have grown in unprecedented fashion and represent ... the cutting edge of Christian growth.”¹¹

Roswith Gerloff and Abraham Akrong, in their essay on Independent Churches, refer to “religions on the move” amidst “processes of transmigration and transculturation, which unleash dynamic, reciprocal, transitory and multidimensional creations in shaping a ‘poly-contextual world’.”¹² They conclude that “the overall scene on all continents, including the migration of African, Asian or Caribbean Christians to Northern white-dominated societies, displays a reticulate structure – the vast variety and pluriformity of Christian families including traditional elements which overlap denominationally, culturally and linguistically. ... Current trends suggest that this mobilisation of the masses in the South will be the driving force in Christian mission, with all promises and risks.”¹³

Rise of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has proved to be a form of Christianity particularly well adapted to a world of large-scale migration. As Julie Ma and Allan Anderson comment, “Pentecostalism has polynucleated origins, a global orientation and network and inherent migrating tendencies that, coupled with its strong individualism, made it fundamentally a multidimensional missionary movement.”¹⁴ All these factors play a role in what is perhaps the greatest single change in the composition of world Christianity: the rise of Pentecostalism. In his essay on Eastern Asia, Edmond Tang states, “It is estimated that over 80% of new conversions in Asia are Pentecostal or Charismatic, while the traditional denominations are declining or have reached their ceiling.”¹⁵ Commenting on the rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in India, Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj remarks that “The resonance they found with local religious and social reality, particularly because of the immediacy of their spirituality and its close attention to existential questions and dilemmas, set them up as an attractive force and facilitated significant growth.”¹⁶

Examining the Latin American context, Ana Maria Bidegain recognises the growth of Pentecostalism and comments that “one important characteristic of this new form of Christianity is the capacity to create new and adaptive forms of religion, which often have melded effectively with Latin American cultures.”¹⁷ She also highlights the strict moral code of Pentecostal churches and suggests that “Also significant is the prominent role women have played in the spread of this new Christian movement, particularly in starting new congregations. ... [T]he most important aspect from a female perspective is that Pentecostalism establishes a familial context in which women receive emotional and physical advantages. When husbands convert, they cease practising patterns of masculine behaviour associated with a *machista* lifestyle (such as alcohol/drug consumption, gambling and solicitation of prostitutes) and transform into more consistent, positive presences.”¹⁸ This may help to account for Pentecostalism’s extraordinary reach. As Cecilia Mariz and Eloisa Martin observe, “In Brazilian *favelas*, slums that police, governments, and even census researchers are unable to reach because they are dominated by drug traffickers, there are Assembleias de Deus [Assemblies of God] churches.”¹⁹

Missionaries – not so foreign

“A century ago,” observes Dana Robert in her essay on missionaries worldwide, “India and China had the largest foreign missionary presence, with ‘foreign’ defined as mostly European. Today their governments keep out foreign missionaries through visa restrictions. But within their

borders tens of thousands of 'home' missionaries evangelise other ethnic groups."²⁰ The complicity of Christian mission with Western power in the 20th century sealed its foreign character and made it unappealing as a faith option for most Asians. By contrast, Lalsangkima Pachuau reports the assessment of a Korean missionary in Thailand: "We are easily accepted as one of their own, and we, on our part, understand better their situation and ways of thinking."²¹ To put this in historical perspective, Pachuau remarks, "If the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh represents the high point of the modern missionary movement from the West to Asia, Edinburgh 2010 marks another high point, namely Christian missions from Asia, by Asians, in Asia and around the world."²²

Violet James gives the flavour of the missionary movement in South-eastern Asia: "Many missionaries are entering countries as 'tent-makers' or through 'short-term missions'. ... Indonesians, Filipinos, Malaysians and Singaporeans are part of a large missionary force in Asia today as educators, doctors, nurses, businesspeople and consultants in information technology. Some businesspeople have started various micro-enterprise projects to empower the poor."²³ A similar pattern is observable in regard to Latin America: "The first decades of missionary work on the continent relied heavily on the hundreds of devoted Northern American and European missionaries who dedicated their lives sacrificially for the sake of the gospel. Today foreign personnel are still active but not indispensable to the missionary task. What makes mission occur today are the thousands of local and national partners working every day as missionaries not only within their own continent but also all over the world."²⁴

Integrity in Discipleship

One important area where the essays complement the demographics is by offering analysis of the quality of the faith that is professed. Philomena Mwaura, writing on Eastern Africa, concludes trenchantly, "The numerical growth is yet to be matched by deep, faithful commitment to the gospel. The faithful need to be aware that peace, justice and reconciliation are integral to evangelisation."²⁵ Likewise with regard to the Pacific, Featuna'i Liua'ana notes the "huge gap between religious principles and action" and observes, "Churches that failed to address important theological, political, economic and social issues became compromised when they participated in corrupt politics and supported military coups which promoted ethnic separation."²⁶

Fohle Lygunda observes that "In a context like the eastern [Democratic Republic of] Congo, where many people have been displaced through ethnically-based conflicts and civil wars, the credibility of the churches' witness will depend on how far they are able to provide a basis on which just and peaceful communities can be built. ... Amidst sometimes catastrophic social breakdown, they face the question of whether they can uphold basic Christian values, faithfully announce the gospel of justice and peace, and offer healing and hope amongst a sorely afflicted people."²⁷

Ambition and Achievement

The atlas offers a visual tour of the remarkable changes in global Christianity over the past 100 years. The story of the Southern shift has been told in many other books and encyclopaedias over the past 30 years or so. But it has never before been depicted through a comprehensive set of maps and charts, presented in living colour.

The academic study of World Christianity has focused much of its attention, rightly, on particular forms of Christianity, especially in the non-Western world. This is a much-needed counter-balance to the false impression that Christianity is a Western religion. But Christianity is more than the sum of vastly different denominational, national and linguistic manifestations. This atlas puts every Christian—Western and non-Western, black and white, man and woman, German and Papuan—in the same book under the unifying moniker “global Christianity”. With the corrosive fragmentation the world experiences every day in conflicts and struggles, it is important for Christians to return frequently to the reality of the prayer of Jesus that “they be one.” While giving full recognition to the diversity evident in many contexts, the atlas also demonstrates the common belonging of Christians worldwide. It fulfils its ambition to take account of adherence to the Christian faith on a comprehensive, worldwide basis and hence to offer an assessment of global Christianity.

¹ *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions: Containing a Directory of Missionary Societies, a Classified Summary of Statistics, an Index of Mission Stations, and a Series of Specially Prepared Maps of Mission Fields. Compiled by Sub-committees of Commission I, 'On Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World,' As an Integral Part of Its Report to the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, June 14–23, 1910*, Edinburgh: World Missionary Conference, 1910.

² See further Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, “The Making of the *Atlas of Global Christianity*”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 34 No. 1 (January 2010), pp. 12-16.

³ Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910–2010*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

⁴ Moonjang Lee, “Future of Global Christianity”, *Atlas*, p. 104.

⁵ Daniel Jeyaraj, “The Re-Emergence of Global Christianity, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 54.

⁶ Todd M. Johnson and Charles L. Tieszen, “Personal Contact: The *sine qua non* of Twenty-First Century Mission” in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 2007, pages 494-502.

⁷ J.N.K. Mugambi, “Christianity in Africa, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 111.

⁸ Cathy Ross, “Great Commission Christians”, *Atlas*, p. 291.

⁹ Lee, “Future of Global Christianity”, p. 104.

¹⁰ Jonathan J. Bonk, “Finance”, *Atlas*, p. 295.

¹¹ Jehu J. Hanciles, “Missionaries Sent and Received, Africa, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 265.

¹² Roswith Gerloff and Abraham Akrong, “Independents”, *Atlas*, p. 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁴ Julie Ma and Allan Anderson, “Pentecostals (Renewalists)”, *Atlas*, p. 100.

¹⁵ Edmond Tang, “Christianity in Eastern Asia, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 139.

¹⁶ Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj, “Christianity in South-central Asia”, *Atlas*, p. 142.

¹⁷ Ana Maria Bidegain, “Christianity in Latin America, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 174.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁹ Cecilia Mariz and Eloisa Martin, “Christianity in South America, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 187.

²⁰ Dana Robert, “Missionaries Sent and Received, Worldwide, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 259.

²¹ Lalsangkima Pachuau, “Missionaries Sent and Received, Asia, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 268.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Violet James, “Christianity in South-eastern Asia”, *Atlas*, p. 147.

²⁴ Marcelo Vargas and Antonia Leonora van der Meer with Levi DeCarvalho, “Missionaries Sent and Received, Latin America, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 276.

²⁵ Philomena Mwaura, “Christianity in Eastern Africa, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 115.

²⁶ Featuna'i Ben Liua'ana, “Christianity in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 201.

²⁷ Fohle Lygunda, “Christianity in Middle Africa, 1910–2010”, *Atlas*, p. 119