

STATE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

A report on the current + future state

Lausanne MOVEMENT

STATE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Report prepared for Lausanne Global Congress Seoul-Incheon 2024

DIRECTOR | EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Matthew Niermann, Ph.D.

EDITOR **Simon Chan, Ph.D.** EDITOR **Finny Philip, Ph.D.**

EDITOR **E.D. Burns, Ph.D.**

COPY EDITORS: Sara White, Hannah Sevedge Ahn, Steven White, Chan Gyu Jang

TRANSLATORS: Virginia Grandjea, Andrew Wiles, Elisabete Fonseca, Misha Andronov, William Zhang, Paul Hyungkeun Choi

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Matthew Niermann, Ph.D.

CREATIVE PRODUCTION
California Baptist University

DESIGNER **Anne Sowers** DESIGNER **Joseph Suzuki**

DESIGNER **Elizabeth Robblee** DESIGNER **Marissa Clark**

DESIGNER **Carinna Hill** DATA ANALYST **Tyler Mazzagatte**

I STATE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION ..... *pg. 1*

CURRENT STATUS ..... *pg. 9*

Global Christianity ..... *pg. 10*

Christian Traditions ..... *pg. 11*

Protestants and Independents ..... *pg. 12*

Evangelicals and Pentecostals ..... *pg. 13*

Mission Workers ..... *pg. 14*

Evangelized ..... *pg. 15*

Unreached People ..... *pg. 16*

Disciple Making Movements ..... *pg. 18*

Digital Bible Engagement ..... *pg. 19*

Language ..... *pg. 20*

Bible Translation ..... *pg. 21*

Financial Giving ..... *pg. 23*

Great Commission Discipleship ..... *pg. 24*

II FROM TODAY TO 2050

WHAT IS POLYCENTRIC CHRISTIANITY? ..... *pg. 28*

Polycentric Global Missions / Polycentric Resource Mobilization / Rise of Asia / Rise of Africa / Majority World Mission Movements

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF HOPE? ..... *pg. 75*

Radical Politics / Islam / Secularism

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF TRUST? ..... *pg. 107*

Propaganda & Decentralization of Media / Visual affect as validation of Truth / Challenges to Objective Truth / Integrity & Anti-Corruption

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING DEMOGRAPHICS? ..... *pg. 144*

Global Aging Population / Regional Youth Populations / The New Middle Class

WHAT IS COMMUNITY? ..... *pg. 172*

People on the Move / Urban Communities / Ethnicism

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST? ..... *pg. 202*

Religious Persecution / Right to Freedom / Poverty & Access Gaps / Male and Female as Full Gospel Partners / Opportunities for People with Disabilities

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE? ..... *pg. 243*

Rising Debt Ratios / Creation Care / Global Health / Mental Health / Societal Influence of Christianity

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN? ..... *pg. 283*

Artificial Intelligence / Transhumanism / Sexuality & Gender

WHAT IS A DIGITAL LIFE? ..... *pg. 312*

Digital Communities / Virtual Work / Decentralization & Web3

WHAT IS MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL AGE? ..... *pg. 341*

Scripture Engagement / Ministry Data / Church Forms / Proclamation Evangelism / Discipleship

III REGIONAL REFLECTIONS

CARIBBEAN ..... pg. 388
Denise Margaret-Thompson, Anthony Oliver, Joy Wilson

EAST ASIA ..... pg. 395
Bolortuya Damdinjav, Hyung Keun Paul Choi, Chulho Han, Masanori Kurasawa, David Ro, Vanessa Hung Wong Wai Ling

EPSA (English, Portuguese and Spanish-speaking Africa) ..... pg. 405
Raymond L. Bukenya, Joseph Byamukama, Rudolf Kabutz, Hesbone Kang'e, Racheal Mutesi Kwetolaku, Rosemary Mbogo

EURASIA ..... pg. 416
Mirzabek Dosov, Alex Spichak, Ruslan Zagidulin

EUROPE ..... pg. 423
Julia Garschagen, Luke Greenwood, Rolf Kjøde, Jim Memory, Usha Reifsnider, Janet Sewell

FRANCOPHONE AFRICA ..... pg. 433
Cossi Augustin Ahoga, Fohle Lygunda, Rubin Pohor

LATIN AMERICA ..... pg. 441
Daniel Biachi, Analia Saracco

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA ..... pg. 449
Rafik Eagdy Barsoum, Salim J. Munayer, Jack Sara

NORTH AMERICA ..... pg. 458
Andy Cook, Dee Crye, D.A. Horton, Todd Korpi, Joshua Laxton, Michael Lee, Andrew MacDonald, Ed Stetzer, Andrea Summers, Daniel Yang

OCEANIA ..... pg. 469
Chris Edwards, Ainsley Freeman, Elliot Keane, Tammy White

SOUTH ASIA ..... pg. 479
Shivraj K. Mahendra, ed., Stephen King, Rubab Raza, Ruth Surenthiraraj, Richard Howell, Raju Gurung, Joel Christian, Bony Baroi, Adeel Samuel

SOUTHEAST ASIA ..... pg. 489
Philip Chang, I'Ching Chan-Thomas, Manik Corea, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Sakunee Kriangchaipon, Ishak Sukamto

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I *PART I* II *PART II* III *PART III*

II Sung Ho (Daniel) Ahn
East Asia

II Cossi Augustin Ahoga
Francophone Africa

II Seyram Amenyedzi
English, Port, Span Africa

II Uchenna Anyanwu
English, Port, Span Africa

II Seth Appiah-Kubi
English, Port, Span Africa

II Tehmina Arora
South Asia

III Bony Baroi
South Asia

III Rafik Wagdy Barsoum
Middle East North Africa

II Ana Lucia Bedicks
Latin America

II Dave Benson
Oceania

III Daniel Biachi
Latin America

II Darrell Bock
North America

II Karen Bomilcar
Latin America

II Dave Bookless
Europe

II David Brown
Europe

III Raymond L. Bukenya
English, Port, Span Africa

III Joseph Byamukama
English, Port, Span Africa

II David Fernández Caballero
Latin America

II Cristian Castro
Latin America

III I'Ching Chan-Thomas
South East Asia

III Philip Chang
South East Asia

II David Chao
North America

III Hyung Keun Paul Choi
East Asia

III Joel Christian
South Asia

II Latha Christie
South Asia

II Calida Chu
East Asia

II Seung-hyun Chung
East Asia

II Soojin Chung
East Asia

III Andy Cook
North America

II Yolande Cooke
Caribbean

III Manik Corea
South East Asia

III Rei Lemuel Crizaldo
South East Asia

III Dee Crye
North America

II Lars Dahle
Europe

III Bolortuya Damdinjav
East Asia

II Afia Darkwa
English, Port, Span Africa

II Décio De Carvalho
Latin America

II Dave Deuel
North America

II Bob Doll
North America

II David Doong
East Asia

III Mirzabek Dosov
Eurasia

II Olof Edsinger
Europe

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Continued

III Chris Edwards
Oceania

II Natasha Edwards
Oceania

II Rita El-Mounayer
Middle East North Africa

II Kavitha Emmanuel
South Asia

II Ted Esler
North America

II Andrew Feng
North America

II Yang Fenggang
East Asia

III Ainsley Freeman
Oceania

II Bulus Galadima
English, Port, Span Africa

III Julia Garschagen
Europe

II Nydia Garcia-Schmidt
Latin America

II Johnny Gathuku
English, Port, Span Africa

II Maggie Gathuku
English, Port, Span Africa

II Sam George
South Asia

II Wanjiru Gitau
English, Port, Span Africa

III Luke Greenwood
Europe

III Raju Gurung
South Asia

II Mimi Haddad
North America

III Chulho Han
East Asia

II Andrew Hang
South East Asia

II Robin Harris
North America

II Lara Heneveled
North America

II Desmond Henry
English, Port, Span Africa

III D.A. Horton
North America

III Richard Howell
South Asia

II Nora Hughes
North America

II Nathan John
South Asia

II Judith Johnston
Caribbean

II Guichun Jun
East Asia

II Rudolf Kabutz
English, Port, Span Africa

III Hesbone Kang'e
English, Port, Span Africa

III Elliot Keane
Oceania

II Angela Kim
Oceania

III Stephen King
South Asia

III Rolf Kjøde
Europe

II Manfred Kohl
North America

II Redina Kolaneci
Europe

II Ruth Elisabeth Kopf
Latin America

III Todd Korpi
North America

II Larry Kraft
Europe

II Stephanie Kraft
Europe

III Sakunee Kriangchaipon
South East Asia

III Masanori Kurasawa
East Asia

II Jonas Kurlberg
Europe

II Keim-Kiok Kwa
South East Asia

III Racheal Mutesi Kwetolaku
English, Port, Span Africa

II Jasmine Kwong
South East Asia

III Joshua Laxton
North America

II Marlies Leong-Hartkamp
Oceania

II Jason Lee
South East Asia

III Michael Lee
North America

I Tyler Lenocker
North America

II Stefan Lindholm
Europe

III Vanessa Hung Wong Wai Ling
East Asia

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Continued

II Timothy Liu
South East Asia

II Andrew Loke
East Asia

II Folhe Lygunda
Francophone Africa

III Andrew MacDonald
North America

II Melba Maggay
South East Asia

III Shivraj K. Mahendra
South Asia

II Esther Malm
English, Port, Span Africa

II Jason Mandryk
Europe

III Denise Margaret-Thompson
Caribbean

II Nicole Martin
North America

II Rosemary Mbogo
English, Port, Span Africa

II Stephen Mbogo
English, Port, Span Africa

II Tom McCormick
North America

III Jim Memory
Europe

II Kosta Milkov
Europe

III Salim J. Munayer
Middle East North Africa

II Kevin Murithi
English, Port, Span Africa

II Martha Mwendafilumba
English, Port, Span Africa

II Eva Nappier
North Ameica

II Héber Negrão
Latin America

II Jasmine Ng
South East Asia

II Edmund Ng
South East Asia

II Matthew Niermann
North America

II Roch Ntankeh
Francophone Africa

II Brian F. O'Connell
North America

II Kehinde Ojo
English, Port, Span Africa

III Anthony Oliver
Caribbean

II Matheus Ortega
Latin America

II Lisa Pak
North America

II Nick Parker
English, Port, Span Africa

II James Patole
South Asia

II Peter Philips
Europe

II Lazarus Phiri
English, Port, Span Africa

II Mac Pier
North America

II John Plake
North America

II Rubin Pohor
Francophone Africa

III Mick Pope
Oceania

III Rubab Raza
South Asia

II Usha Reifsnider
Europe

II Bong Rin Ro
East Asia

II David Ro
East Asia

II Adriana Saldiba
Latin America

III Analia Saracco
Latin America

III Adeel Samuel
South Asia

II Christie Samuel
South Asia

II Jack Sara
Middle East North Africa

II Sharoon Sarfraz
South Asia

II Leslie Segraves
North America

II Geleta Semeso
English, Port, Span Africa

III Janet Sewell
Europe

II Mary-Jo Sharp
North America

II Michael Soderling
North America

II Jocabed Solano
Latin America

III Alex Spichak
Eurasia

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Continued

II Garrett Starr
Europe

III Ed Stetzer
North America

III Ishak Sukamto
South East Asia

III Ruth Surenthiraraj
South Asia

III Andrea Summers
North America

II Karen Swallow-Prior
North America

II Efraim Tendero
South East Asia

II Jason Thacker
North America

II Rodrigo Tinoco
Latin America

II Mariam Varghese
North America

II Babu Karimkuttickal Verghese
South Asia

II Tharwat Wahba
Middle East North Africa

II Patricia Weerakoon
South East Asia

II Danny Weiss
North America

III Tammy White
Oceania

II Dan Whitenack
North America

II Roshini Wickremesinhe
South Asia

II Annelies Wilder-Smith
Europe

II Terran Williams
English, Port, Span Africa

III Joy Wilson
Caribbean

II Timothy Wong
South East Asia

II Menchit Wong
South East Asia

II Allice Yafeh-Deigh
English, Port, Span Africa

III Daniel Yang
North America

II Jenny Yang
North America

II Mark Yarhouse
North America

III Ruslan Zagidulin
Eurasia

II Anne Zaki
Middle East North Africa

INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission: A Theological Basis

Victor Nakah, Ivor Poobalan

Introduction

There is no gain saying that the Great Commission is one of the most-used phrases within global Christianity today. It has been the slogan that has powered some of the greatest evangelistic initiatives of modern times. Its closest association is with Matthew 28:18–20, and the expression is so familiar to the Christian ear, that it sounds like a phrase straight out of Scripture. It isn't. What's more, the popular use of 'the Great Commission' is no older than a hundred and fifty years. How then did it gain such currency?

It was Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), who first brought this to the frontlines of mission-speak. He had apparently borrowed it from the writings of a Dutch missionary, Justinian von Welz (1621–1688), who had used it as a title for Matthew 28:18–20. For 1600 years until von Welz, or thereabouts, this Matthean text had primarily served a broader purpose: 'as the trinitarian foundation of ecclesiology, not as fanfare for missiology'.[1] This historical note is significant because the contemporary application of the climax of Matthew may inadvertently undermine the Christological and ecclesiological emphases of his account that provide the necessary context for Christian mission.[2]

The effective employment of the parting words of Jesus in Matthew (and Mark) as a biblical basis for world evangelisation, however, preceded Hudson Taylor. These words had given impetus to William Carey's impassioned plea in 1792, which marked the turning point in modern missions.[3] He wrote:

> Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to *Go,* and *teach all nations;* or, as another evangelist expresses it, *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.* This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country in the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation.[4]

Consequently, with the renewed thrust towards missions in Asia and Africa during the heyday of the British Empire, the final words of Jesus to his apostles in the Gospels and Acts received fresh attention. Within these pericopes—which narrated Jesus's post-resurrection appearances—were found scattered references specifying what the apostles were expected to do following Jesus's departure. Most importantly they pointed to the international, global scope of their missionary undertaking, which resonated well with the existing world of European imperialism. As a result, these texts vied for attention as the ideal scriptural basis for motivating local churches to renew their commitment to cross-cultural mission and world evangelisation.

Furthermore, following World War II, the United States changed her foreign policy to engage more proactively with the nations of the world. This led US-based Christian mission agencies also to look outwards and to commit vast resources towards Great Commission work: the evangelisation of the unreached nations of the world.

Roots of the Great Commission

Broadly speaking, the Great Commission refers to the mandate that the Lord Jesus entrusted to the church through his apostles, to be operational in the period between his ascension and return. From a scriptural perspective though, rather than being an inaugural call, Matthew 28:18–20 may be viewed as the climax to a summons issued by God in the Old Testament, which dates back to the call of Abraham (Gene-

sis 12:1–3). It is God calling a people to himself in order to make himself known to all humanity.[5] This theme then continues to unfold in Scripture. There is hardly a discernible reading of any book of the OT that doesn't point to the 'Great Commission' theme directly or indirectly.

The most striking feature of God's mission mandate for Israel in the Old Testament is the great love God extended to nations beyond the Jewish people. We may see this in the promise that 'all the families of the earth will be blessed' on account of Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3) or in Isaiah's prophetic vision of a day when the gentile nations will stream to Zion to be instructed in the ways of Yahweh (Isaiah 2:1–4). God's commissioning of Jonah to go to pagan Nineveh (Jonah 1:2) powerfully illustrates this overarching Old Testament ideal of the mission of God through Israel.

The New Testament Basis for the Great Commission

The most famous Great Commission texts have been taken from a collection of the direct farewell instructions from Jesus to his eleven apostles. In addition to the primary reference, Matthew 28:18–20, the following are usually included: Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46–49, and Acts 1:8.[6] Taken together these texts share a number of common threads.

First, they are spoken in the context of Jesus's highly-charged post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. In the early church, such narratives and their content would have acquired great significance as the final words of their victorious leader. Second, in every such instance, Jesus specifies the responsibilities that the apostles were to undertake: 'make disciples' by 'baptizing' and 'teaching' (Matthew), 'proclaim the gospel' (Mark), and 'be witnesses' (Luke and Acts).

In the unfolding story of the church—as can be ascertained from Acts and the epistles of the New Testament—we see how these very activities took centre-stage: evangelisation through witness, proclamation and demonstrations of power, incorporation into the church through baptism, and maturation in discipleship through teaching. Third, each of them pointed to an international, global audience: 'all nations' (Matthew, Luke), 'all creation' (Mark), and 'the ends of the earth' (Acts).

Due to these features, these chosen texts provided the ideal grist for the mill of cross-cultural mission-motivation and offered a revised paradigm for world mission from the late nineteenth century onwards. Christians were urgently called to travel to previously unevangelised regions of the world and to win people to faith through personal witness and public proclamation.

In retrospect, it is clear that the explicit requirements of the selected Great Commission texts had significantly nuanced the theology and praxis of the missionary enterprise. The emphasis on responding to social needs and working toward societal transformation—which had previously been considered an irreducible minimum in Christian mission—was increasingly marginalized and often dropped altogether. Such a separation of the societal dimension from the proclamation dimension of evangelisation would create enormous tensions within global Christianity and push the church inexorably towards some resolution of that tension. The later recognition and appropriation of the 'Great Commission' in John's Gospel (20:19-23), enabled the church to do just that.

Matthew 28:18–20: Authority, scope, and purpose of the Great Commission

The Matthean Great Commission brilliantly summarises the concerns of the entire Gospel of Matthew[7] and is widely regarded as the fountainhead for understanding what Jesus expects of his church in the period between his ascension and return.

The Great Commission was issued as a directive to follow, a command to obey, and a decree to execute. It was a mandate with unparalleled legitimacy. In Steve Harthorne's words, 'Never has there been such power in the hands of any person. He will never be surpassed. He will never surrender His kingship. He will never stop until He has finished the fulness of the Father's purpose.'[8]

In other words, the Great Commission is more than just a personal or political statement. It's a statement that announces the supremacy and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is because

of who Jesus is that we must call all people to faith in him and no other—to leave other allegiances, religions, false gods, and contradictory ideologies to follow him alone.

The Great Commission comes directly from the resurrected Lord, the head of all principalities and the possessor of all things. This communicates the weight of the commission and the debt we owe in its pursuit. We can't call him Lord and take his word for granted. The Matthean formulation is striking in its emphasis on comprehensiveness marked by the term 'all':

1. All authority: Jesus assures his disciples of his all-encompassing authority: 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me.' He has the right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. This authority is legitimate because it has been 'given' to him, not stolen or snatched (Philippians 2:9–11). Moreover, it is not an authority limited to this world, but one which applies equally in both the terrestrial and celestial realms. The commissioner is not struggling to be in charge, 'For the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son . . . And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man' (John 5:22, 27).

That the Great Commission is premised on this authority says a lot about the intent of God in getting the work done. With this authority, not only are we sure that we will be delivered from harm, but we are confident that when it matters most, we will not be let down, since the Father has put 'everything in subjection under his feet' (Hebrews 2:8).

2. All the nations: When Jesus said, 'go . . . make disciples of all nations', he established the unlimited scope of the Great Commission. But we must pay particular attention to the call not just to go and proclaim, but to 'make disciples of the nations' (bring people from all people groups to a true followership of the Messiah). It is not among a few carefully selected groups of people, but to all. This extensive scope of the commission suggests that in every generation, Christ's followers must seek to influence all to consider the valid claim of Jesus as Lord.

The call is to establish Christ-loving, sin-hating, God-honouring communities of worshippers from generation to generation and from nation to nation. It demands a measurable effort to harvest the obedience of those reached. The Great Commission's fulfilment is not measured by the distances travelled as much as by the quality of the followership of those who were brought in and nurtured to give allegiance to Christ in their daily living.

3. All the commands: Those Christ sends must teach all his commands. The Great Commission forbids a selective attitude to Christ's demands on all who follow him. We cannot pick and choose or add what we like. His instruction is to teach 'all that I have commanded you'.

4. All the way: The way Jesus wrapped up the commission implies the continuity of his presence no matter the circumstance or the clime in which the Great Commission is carried out. He promised to be with his followers always, even till the end of the age. That end may mean the end of time or the end of the inhabited world, notwithstanding the danger, perils, and trials.

This phrase 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age' is comforting, no matter what assails us as we go to the uttermost parts of the world. With this statement comes the certainty, the prestige, and the power of his all-time presence.

Making Disciples as the Definitive Purpose

'Make disciples' is the core of Jesus's command in Matthew 28:19. In the Greek, the imperative form of this rare verb—mathēteuō—is uniquely used.[9] 'Baptizing' and 'teaching' occur in participial form and are subordinate to the main command to make disciples.[10] The Great Commission's discipleship assignment is both global and instructively cross-cultural. In the Great Commission, we see the dimension of God's passion for all peoples, tongues, tribes, and languages of the world. Jesus here uses the phrase 'make disciples of all nations' (ethnos). This goes beyond the generalisation of geo-political states to what has been termed 'people groups',[11] of which there are an estimated 17,453 in the world today.[12]

With thousands of missionaries fanning out across the globe under the auspices of numerous mission societies, the evangelisation of the two-thirds world has reached unprecedented

levels of accomplishment. Christian communities that had been planted in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the nineteenth century were watered by mass evangelistic initiatives of Western evangelical organizations in the twentieth. Simultaneously, unprecedented numbers of indigenous mission-movements throughout the global south intensified efforts at witnessing to Christ in ways that were contextually effective.

The result has been exponential church growth leading to the surprising realization by the turn of the twenty-first century that the face of Christianity was no longer stereotypically white. The image of Christianity in the world was more likely to be black African, Latin American, or East Asian.[13] Philip Jenkins projected in 2002 that of 2.6 billion Christians estimated for 2025, '633 million would live in Africa, 640 million in Latin America, and 460 million in Asia. Europe, with 555 million, would have slipped to third place'.[14]

Timothy Tennent points to the unprecedented 5,000 percent growth of independent indigenous Christian movements in the global south 'from only eight million at the turn of the twentieth century to 423 million by the close of the century'.[15]

Never since the early centuries has Christianity grown so rapidly in previously un-evangelised societies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The most-recent stories of church growth in Asia for example—in places such as China, Iran, and Nepal—are nothing short of miraculous, because the gospel has thrived in predominantly communist, Islamic, and Hindu contexts where sustained antipathy and hostility have been most vocal and active.

Yet, unlike the apostolic and post-apostolic periods, the modern church's commitment to witness has not been accompanied by a concomitant commitment to disciple-making. As a result, we are forced to concede that today, global Christian spirituality is at risk of becoming 'a mile long and an inch deep'. In the evangelical church's enthusiasm to contend with liberal theology and assert the uniqueness of Christ and the necessity for evangelistic proclamation, did she fail to prepare adequately for the harvest of new believers that would emerge following the faithful witness of vibrant church communities?

John 20:19–23: A paradigm for the Great Commission

We noted above how the explicit emphasis on verbal witness and proclamation that characterized the selected Great Commission texts appeared to invalidate the longstanding Christian tradition of charity and social action as missional imperatives of the church. This tension has since led to the unfortunate dichotomization of 'evangelism' from 'social action' and has dogged missionary initiatives for much of the twentieth century.[16]

It was in such a context that another 'Great Commission' text gained prominence (John 20:19–23). Termed the Johannine Great Commission, the incorporation of this text within the cluster of the Great Commission passages has played a major role in shaping our theology of the Great Commission.

John Stott is rightfully recognised for skillfully demonstrating its validity and contribution to a biblical understanding of the Great Commission.[17] Although this too belonged to the records of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances and instructions, its evident vagueness in terms of specific responsibilities had precluded its inclusion as a Great Commission text ('As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' John 20:21).[18]

Unlike the instructions given in the Synoptics and Acts, the Great Commission in John is conspicuous in its silence about specific tasks that the believers are expected to perform, such as to 'proclaim', or to 'witness'. It also shows no interest in detailing the specific contexts in which the church should conduct her commission, such as 'all nations', 'all creation', or 'the ends of the earth'.

How then does John contribute to the church's understanding of her mandate from Jesus Christ? As we shall see, this unique formulation in John's gospel significantly broadens the scope of Christian engagement in the world. Rather than setting an agenda for the apostles following Jesus's ascension, the Johannine Great Commission (20:21) presents a paradigm that they are to operate out of.

So, instead of specifying the tasks and activities that would accompany Christian mission or the places in which it would be conducted, the uniqueness of the Great Commission in John is that there Jesus tells his disciples how to think about what they are to do and where they are to do it.

Incarnation as the Posture of the Agents of the Great Commission

What did Jesus mean when he said, 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you' (John 20:21)? We can never understand how we are sent if we have failed to appreciate how the Father sent the Son. How indeed then did the Father send his beloved Son?

In response to this question, we are immediately drawn back to John's prologue and to its defining declaration of the Son and his mission: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (1:14 ESV). Here we find that the fundamental posture of the divine Son was incarnational, expressed by two outstanding terms—'became flesh' and 'dwelt'.

With regard to the former, John deliberately uses the Greek term sarx (flesh), which bore the connotations of corporeality, physical limitations, mortality, and passions. Within the Greek worldview of the time, sarx was considered antithetical to that which is spiritual and noble. John could have used other words to describe the incarnation of the divine Son, such as anthrōpos (human) or sōma (body). But his radical use of sarx underscores his intention to establish that Jesus became utterly human when he was 'sent' to do the Father's mission. He would identify completely with his human creatures as 'flesh' himself.

The second term—'dwelt'—is a translation of the unique verb eskēnōsen, which John coined for the purpose of his incarnational Christology. Using the noun skēnos (tent), and alluding to the Old Testament Tabernacle in Israel, John creates the unique verb 'he tabernacled' to powerfully convey how the mission of Jesus demanded a settled presence in the world, by which the glory (1:14) and grace (1:17) of a holy God would be mediated to a rebellious humanity.

Such an understanding of Jesus's mission forces us to set the notion of the Great Commission within the broader frame of the whole of Jesus's person and work, as recorded in the gospels. No longer can the mission imperative to the church be limited to merely the selected texts from the Synoptics and Acts. While the latter may provide a sharp focus to the church's calling to be verbal witnesses to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Johannine text challenges and directs us to embrace the consonant paradigm and broader demands of that calling.

When we take a fuller understanding of Jesus's life and ministry into account for expressing the Great Commission, we note how the Lord seamlessly wove public proclamation, acts of compassion, demonstrations of power, and meaningful presence into his sustained witness to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.

In the same way, we would argue that evangelistic witness to the gospel of Jesus as Saviour and Lord is most effectively accomplished through the integration of the church's proclamation, praxis, and presence in the world. It is to such an integration of missional priorities that the church must aspire, as she renews her commitment to the Great Commission.

Conclusion

People with a kingdom mindset are known to take the Great Commission seriously in their everyday life. They carry the message of the kingdom—God's victory over sin and Satan—with daring convictions. They pursue the mission of the kingdom and world evangelisation of all peoples till Christ's name is known and honoured worldwide. This critical kingdom value drives them.

If we are the beneficiaries of God's good news in Jesus, we receive power to become disciples—students and followers—of Jesus our master. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be witnesses. And if we are truly learning from him, what we're learning is too good to keep to ourselves. We will be led to share it. That is the nature of the Christian faith and the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is always leading us to testify about Jesus and glorify him (John 15:26 and 16:14).

INTRODUCTION

There are hundreds of thousands of church congregations with hundreds of millions of followers of Jesus Christ. But to successfully execute the Great Commission, we need a fitting church with Great Commission hearts and minds. We must raise a community of believers united in purpose and pursuit, seeking to carry out Jesus's command to the letter. We need church leaders who understand the very heart of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. The future is the presence of all tribes, tongues, nations, and languages worshipping the King at the end of the age. In the words of John Piper: 'The end is not missions. Worship is. Mission is only a means to an end. Missions exists because worship does not.'[19] To put it another way, when the Great Commission is carried out with biblical faithfulness, it will lead to the worship of the King from all the nations of the world.

Endnotes

1 Robbie F Castleman. 'The Last Word: The Great Commission: Ecclesiology' Themelios 32, issue 3 (2007), 68.

2 'It is inadmissible to lift these words out of Matthew's gospel, as it were, allow them a life of their own, and understand them without any reference to the context in which they first appeared.' David Bosch. Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (New York: Orbis, 1991), 57.

3 See Timothy Tennent, Invitation to World Missions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 258-264.

4 William Carey, An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1792), 7.

5 'The Church from all nations stands in continuity through the Messiah Jesus with God's people in the Old Testament. With them we have been called through Abraham and commissioned to be a blessing and a light to the nations.' An excerpt from The Cape Town Commitment in J Cameron ed. The Lausanne Legacy (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2016), 124.

6 If we follow the logic that has undergirded the identification of these 'Great-Commission' passages—direct, parting instructions by Jesus to his apostles in terms of their specified responsibilities—one other similar but neglected text demands our attention: Acts 26:15–18. It is the account of the great commissioning of Paul by the risen Christ. The fact that the Book of Acts alludes to Paul being in effect the twelfth apostle—although in his words, 'as one abnormally born' (1 Cor 15:8) —makes his unique commissioning and the scope of his calling as 'the Apostle to the Gentiles' (Gal 2:8) of great import in determining our Lord's intention for the church's mission. It would seem that the potential of these references must also be taken into account in developing the New Testament basis for contemporary world mission.

7 'Matthew has, as if in a burning glass, focused everything that was dear to him in these words and put them as the crowning culmination at the end of his gospel.' Gerhard Friedrich cited in Bosch, Transforming Mission, 57.

8 Ralph D Winter and Steve Hawthorne ed. Perspectives on the World Christian Movement–A Reader (Pasadena: William Carey, 2009), 99–101.

9 Of only four occurrences of mathēteuō, three are in Matthew (13:52, 27:57, 28:19; Acts 14:21).

10 'Encompassing all these efforts is discipling. Not only does it involve the other components of ministry – sending, going, preaching, witnessing, baptizing, teaching, and receiving the Spirit – but it directs every activity to the desired end, namely, to "make disciples" of Christ – men and women who not only believe the gospel but also continue to follow the way of Jesus.' Robert E Coleman. The Great Commission Lifestyle (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 19–20.

11 Coleman, Great Commission Lifestyle, 20: 'The words do not refer to geographic boundaries, but rather to all peoples of the earth.'

12 'Global Summary.' The Joshua Project. Accessed 29 September 2023. https://joshuaproject.net/.

13 Philip Jenkins. The Next Christendom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2: '[T]he stereotype holds that Christians are un-Black, un-poor, and un-young. If that is true, then the growing secularization of the West can only mean that Christianity is in its dying days. Globally, the faith of the future must be Islam. Over the past century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia and Latin America.'

14 Jenkins, Next Christendom, 3.

15 Timothy C Tennent. 'Lausanne and Global Evangelicalism: Theological Distinctives and Missiological Impact' in Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle, Knud Jorgensen eds. The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 58.

16 'The relationship between the evangelistic and the societal dimensions of the Christian mission constitutes one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission.' Bosch, Transforming Mission, 401.

17 'The "Great Commission" in John has not been generally perceived by either missiologists or evangelists. In recent times, we owe it to John R. W. Stott, "the architect of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization" (1974), the open recognition of a Johannine version of the last commission.' Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson. The Great Commission–Biblical Models for Evangelism (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 79.

18 '[John Stott] confessed that he had missed it because he had concentrated on the verbal proclamation of the "three other major versions of the Great Commission" (in the Synoptic Gospels)'. Arias and Johnson, The Great Commission, 79.

19 John Piper. Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17.

Authors

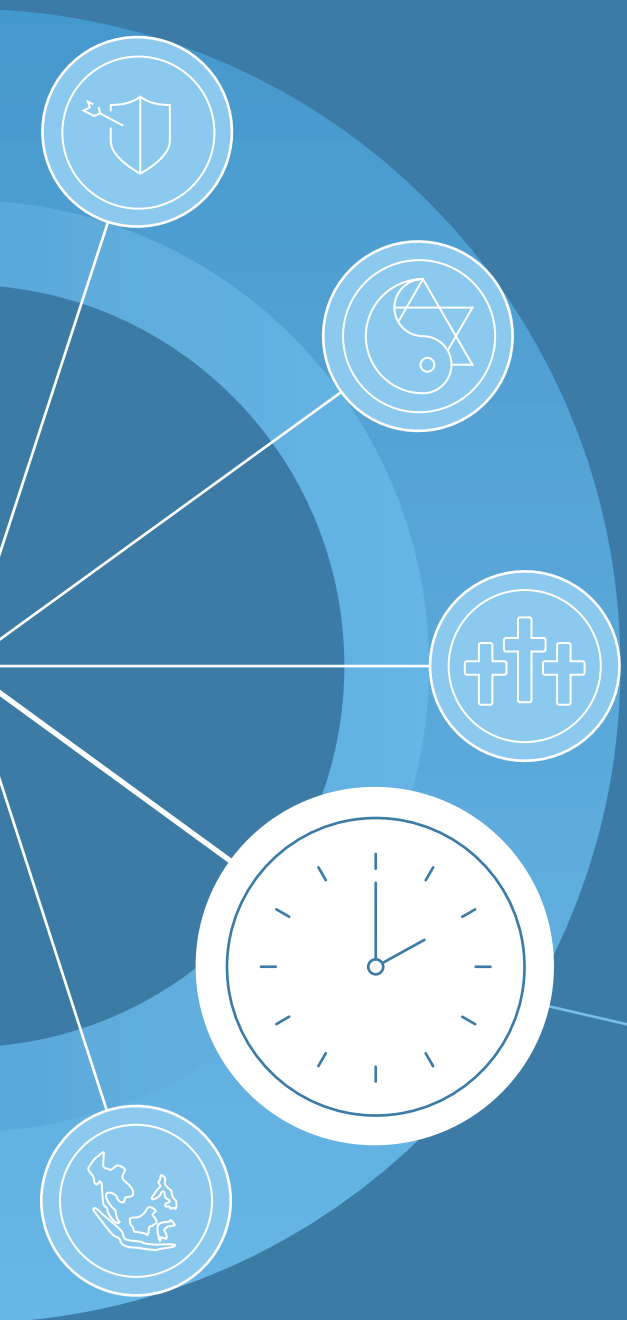
Dr Victor Nakah is an ordained Presbyterian minister and the international director for sub-Saharan Africa with Mission to the World (MTW), the mission sending agency of the Presbyterian Church of America. Victor served with Scripture Union and IFES in Zimbabwe before becoming the seminary president of the Theological College of Zimbabwe from 2000-2010. He was chair of the Lausanne Cape Town GlobalLink initiative and was on the drafting committee of The Cape Town Commitment. He has also held leadership roles with Overseas Council International and CURE International. In addition to his primary ministry responsibilities with MTW, Victor supervises students with the South Africa Theological Seminary (SATS), teaches at the Africa Reformation Theological Seminary (ARTS) in Uganda, and serves on a number of boards including the Child Theology Movement-Africa, Khulasizwe Trust (Zimbabwe), Emmanuel Christian University (South Sudan), Partners in Health Trust (Zimbabwe), and Forgotten Voices International (US). Victor has master's and PhD degrees from the University of South Africa and Stellenbosch University. He is married to Nosizo and they have two daughters.

Dr Ivor Poobalan has served as the principal at Colombo Theological Seminary (CTS) in Sri Lankasince 1998. CTS is an evangelical, interdenominational, trilingual seminary. Ivor's first job was asyouth pastor for churches in Colombo. He graduated with honours from the London School of Theology (UK) with a BA in theology and from Trinity International University (Illinois, US) with a ThM in Old Testament and semitic languages. In 2015 he was conferred a PhD by the University of Cape Town for his dissertation titled 'Who is "The God of This Age" in 2 Corinthians 4:4?' Ivor is married to Denisa and they are parents to daughters Anisha Eng and Serena.

STATE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION



CURRENT STATUS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION



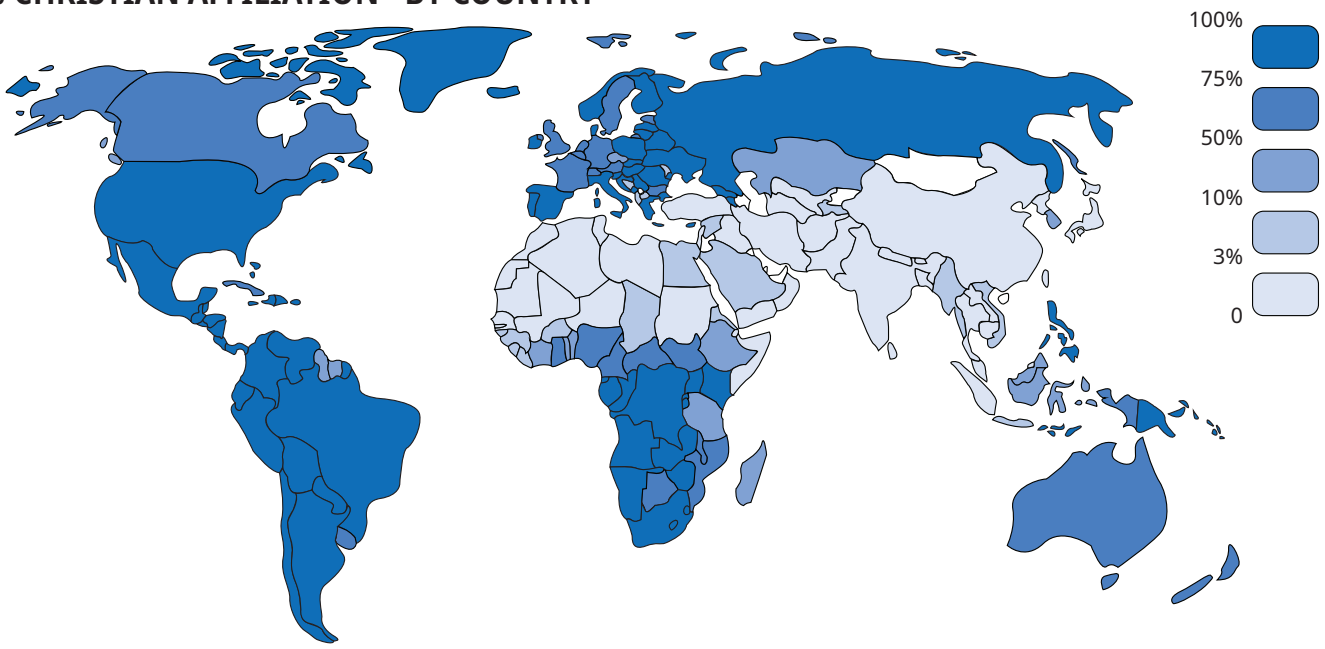
INTRODUCTION

Measuring the progress of the Great Commission is an infinitely complex task which aims to track the ineffable movement of God. Yet, we can measure a wide variety of human activity faithful to the Great Commission. The following reports on the current status of a wide variety of traditional missiological measures.

CURRENT STATUS

GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

% CHRISTIAN AFFILIATION* BY COUNTRY



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023; *Graph reports Christian affiliation, or membership, not belief, practice, or theological beliefs

YOUNG AFRICA, AGING WEST

Sub-Saharan Africa's youthful Christian population ensures the region's centrality to global Christian growth for decades to come. Christianity will increasingly be a religion of the aged in Europe and North America.

THE AMERICAS

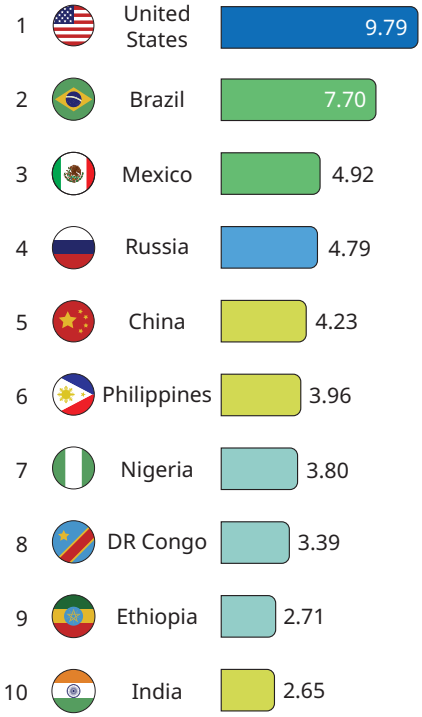
Countries in the Western Hemisphere maintain their centrality to the world Christian movement even as Western European nations fall out of the top ten for the first time in modern history.

GROWTH AND DECLINE

Over the past century, Christianity witnessed its most marked growth in Sub-Saharan Africa and its most marked decline in the Middle East, North Africa, and Western Europe.

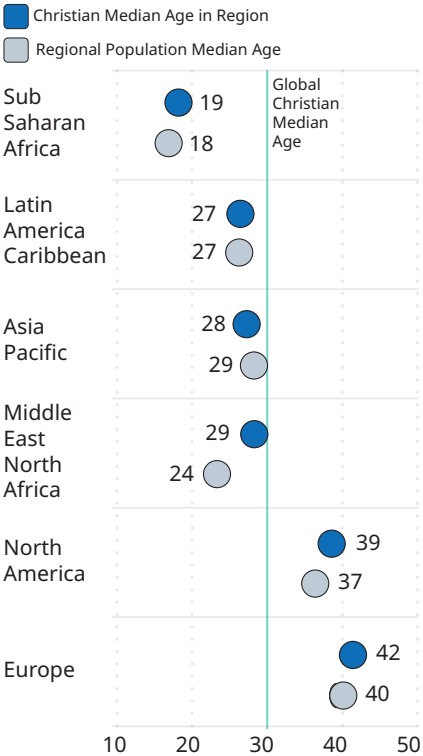
% OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

Ranking of Countries



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023

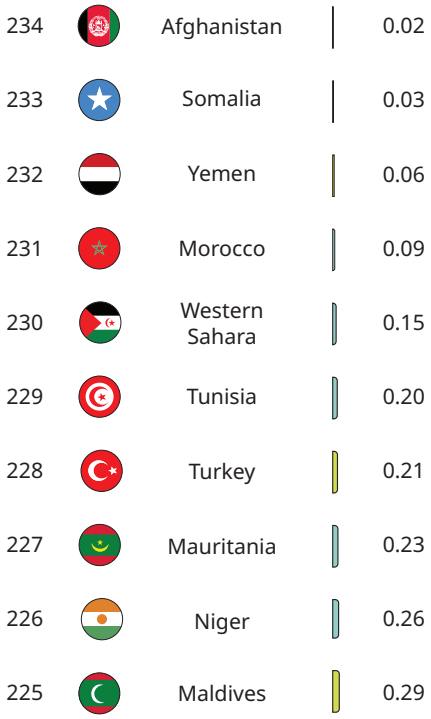
MEDIAN AGE



Source: Pew Center, The Future of World Religions, 2015

LOWEST % CHRISTIAN

Countries with Lowest % Christian

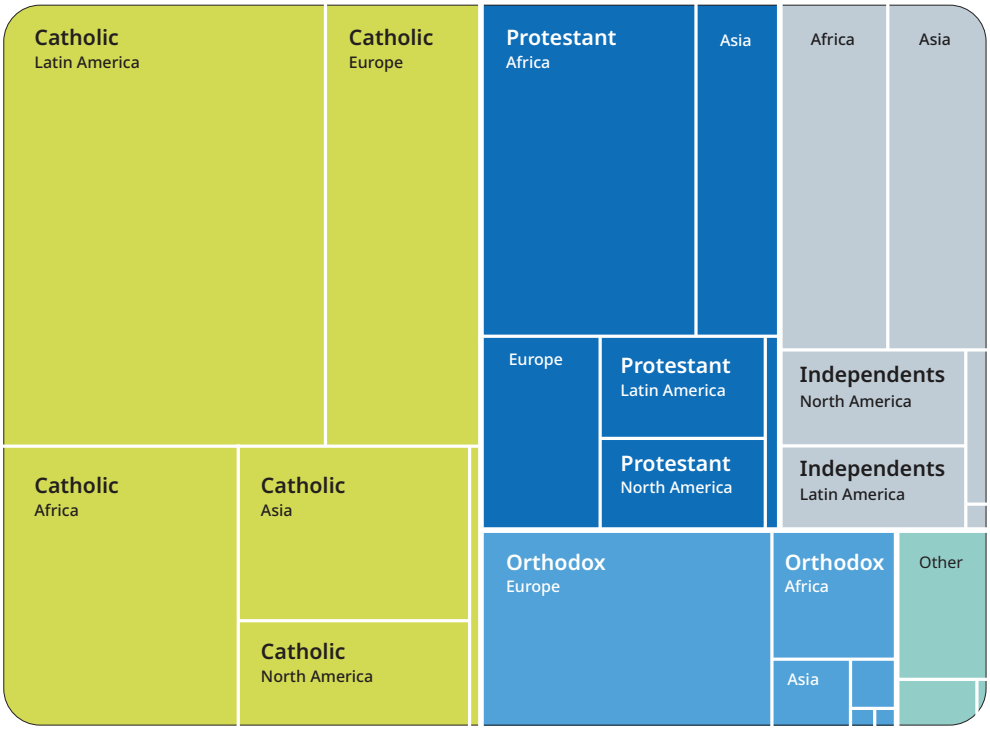


Source: World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023

CURRENT STATUS

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

CHRISTIAN POPULATION BY MAJOR TRADITIONS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16; 2020, Evangelical and Pentecostal movements are found within other Christian traditions as listed above. See pg. 13 for more details

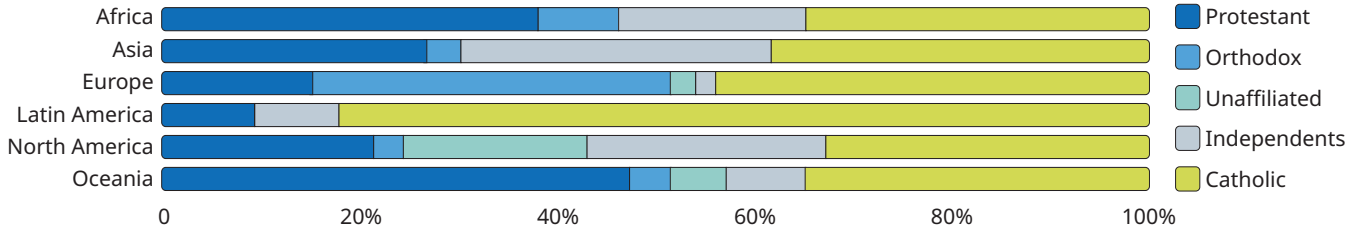
GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION

Catholicism remains the dominant Christian tradition throughout the world, with only Oceania possessing a near majority of Protestants. Orthodox traditions have experienced the sharpest decline in the past century, primarily through persistent persecution in Communist and then Islamic contexts.

Independents, those who do not identify with Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestants, have witnessed the most marked growth.

Growth of independents has fueled the rise of Christianity in Africa, and independents will likely dominate Christian growth in the Global South for decades to come.

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS BY GLOBAL REGION



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16; 2020, See World Christian Encyclopedia for Christian tradition definitions

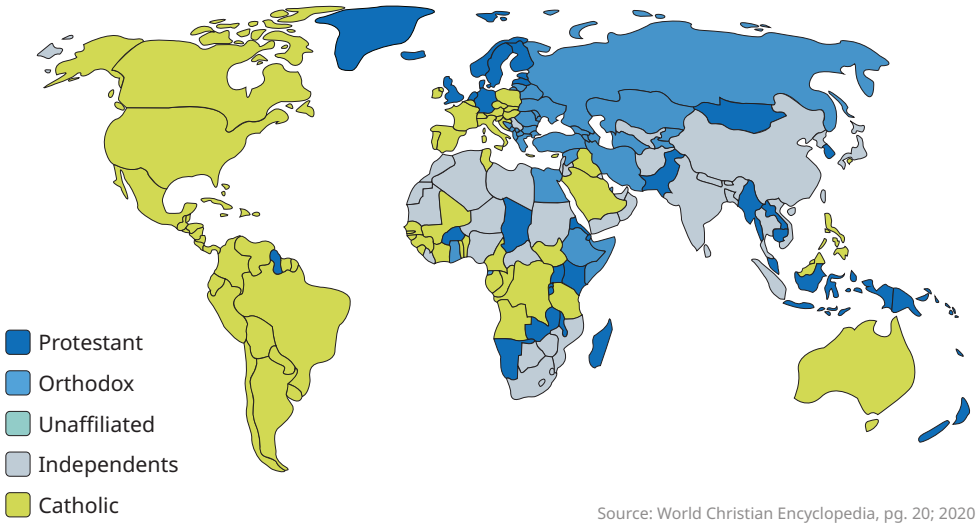
GROWING DIVERSITY

While European-origin traditions, most specifically Catholicism, dominated a century ago, today's global church is marked by increasing denominational parity.

The increase in number of denominations and movements can be both cause for celebration of Christianity's diversity but also can promote fragmentation and division.

Urban contexts marked by high levels of migration are centers of the promises and perils of Christian diversity.

MAJORITY CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION BY COUNTRY



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 20; 2020

CURRENT STATUS

PROTESTANTS AND INDEPENDENTS

SHIFT SOUTHWARD

Protestants are those belonging to denominations descended from the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

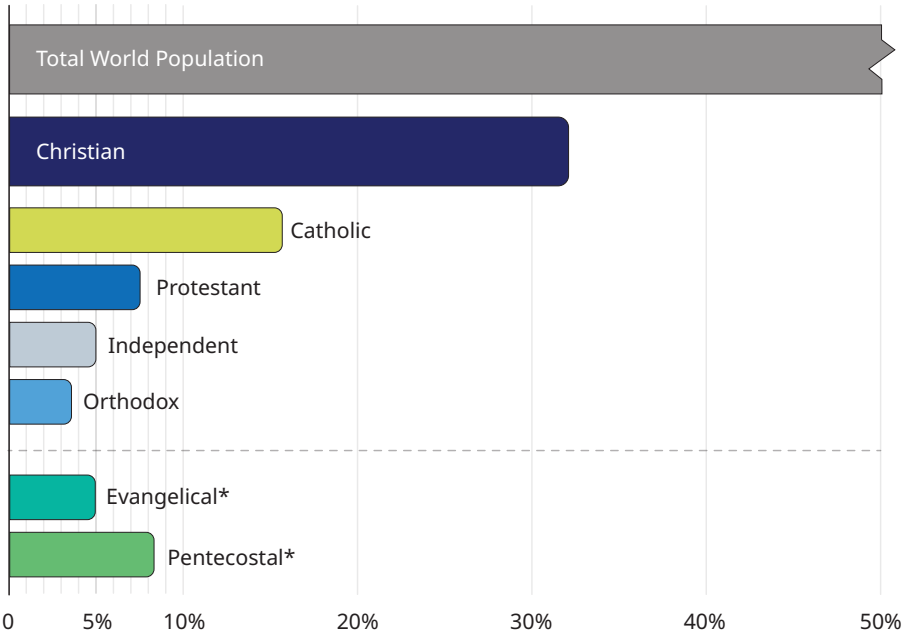
They include Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, some Pentecostals, and many others.

More Protestants are now found in the Global South than Global North, with more Anglicans worshipping on a Sunday morning in Nigeria than in England.

Independents do not identify as Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant.

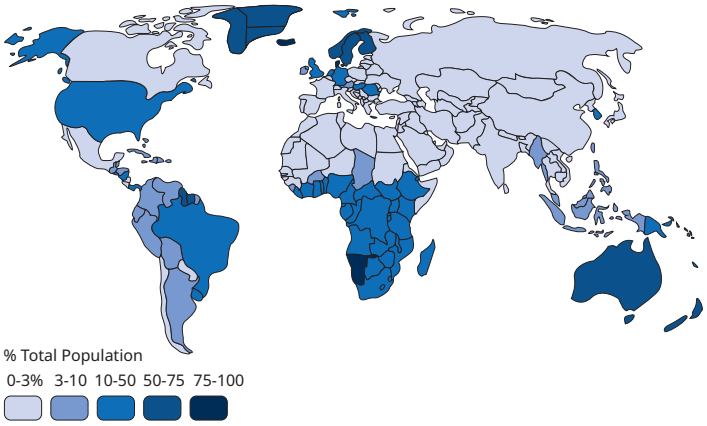
Independents are spread throughout the globe and are most conspicuous in contexts like China, Brazil, the United States, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

% OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY 2020



*These movements are found within the other Christian traditions Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 25-26, 2020

GLOBAL PROTESTANTS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 25, 2020

PROTESTANT FACT SHEET



Nigeria
Largest Country



Faroe Islands
Highest Percentage



Albania
Fastest Growth



United States
Largest Decline

23.2%

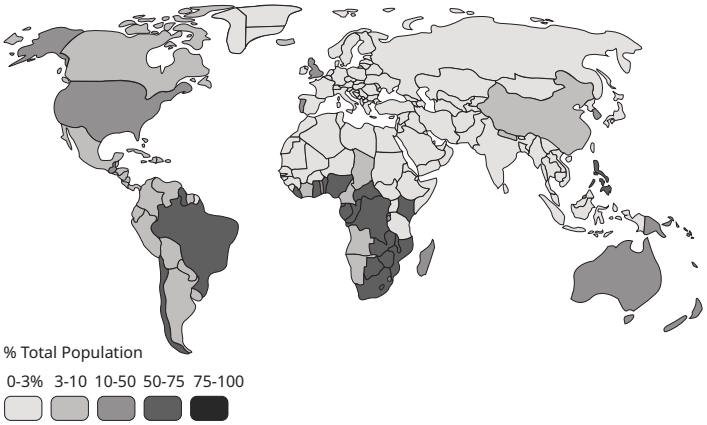
Percentage of Christians

7.5%

Percentage of World

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 25, 2020

GLOBAL INDEPENDENTS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 26, 2020

INDEPENDENTS FACT SHEET



United States
Largest Country



Tonga
Highest Percentage



Mozambique
Fastest Growth



Germany
Largest Decline

15.5%

Percentage of Christians

5%

Percentage of World

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 26, 2020

CURRENT STATUS

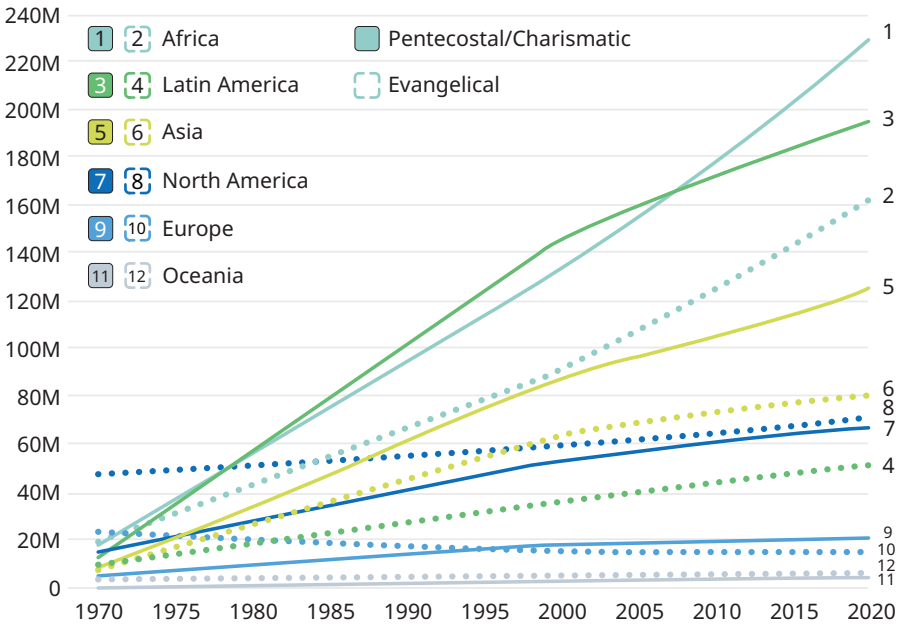
EVANGELICALS AND PENTECOSTALS

GROWING PIETISM

These two movements focused on experience, conversion, and personal piety often overlap. Yet while evangelicals are Protestant, charismatic Catholics also form part of the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostal and charismatic expressions of Christianity are the face of the rapid growth, renewal, and diversification of Christianity in the Global South. Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa are now the demographic centers of global Pentecostalism. Fast Pentecostal growth in the Gulf States is caused primarily by labor migrations from African and Asian nations.

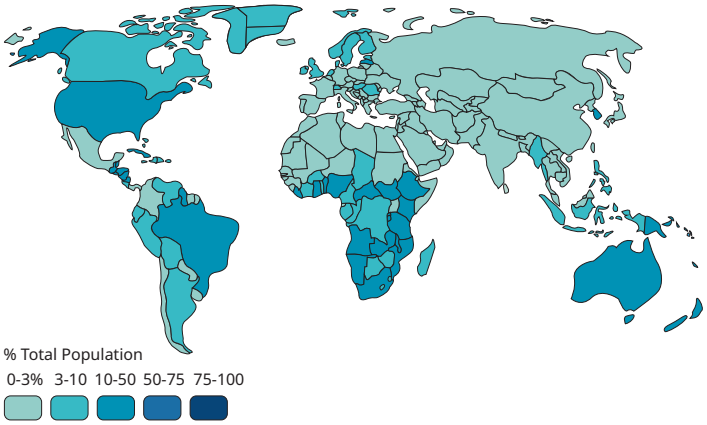
While the majority of evangelicals are now found outside the West, the United States remains a fiscal and institutional center for the movement. America's evangelical population, however, is declining.

RISE OF EVANGELICALS AND PENTECOSTALS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 25-26, 2020; M = Millions

GLOBAL EVANGELICALS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 25, 2020

EVANGELICAL FACT SHEET

United States
Largest Country

Marshall Islands
Highest Percentage

Belgium
Fastest Growth

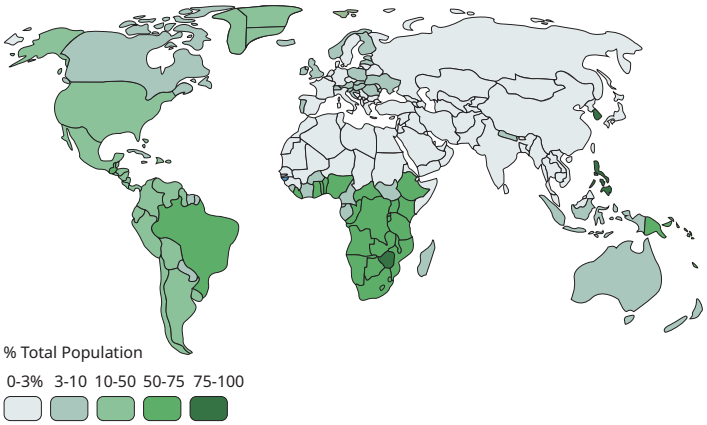
Australia
Largest Decline

15.4%
Percentage of Christians

5%
Percentage of World

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 25, 2020

GLOBAL PENTECOSTALS/CHARISMATICS



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 25, 2020

PENTECOSTAL FACT SHEET

Brazil
Largest Country

Marshall Islands
Highest Percentage

Kuwait
Fastest Growth

France
Largest Decline

25.6%
Percentage of Christians

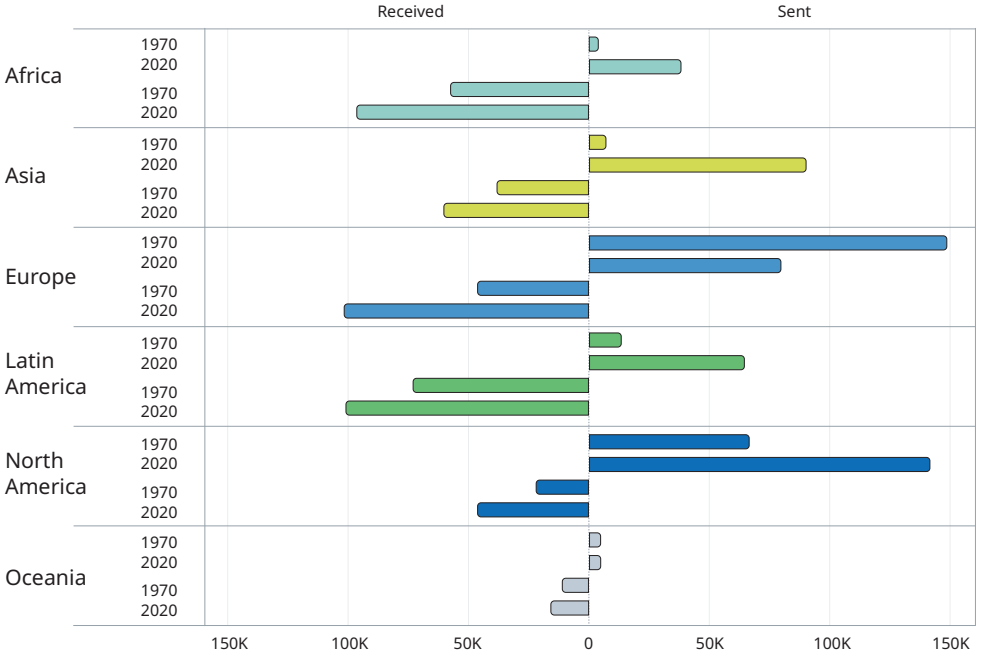
8.3%
Percentage of World

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pg. 26, 2020

CURRENT STATUS

MISSION WORKERS

MISSIONARIES SENT AND RECEIVED*



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023; *Estimated numbers of missionaries

POLYCENTRIC MISSION

Mission is now from every continent to every continent. With the exception of Europe, every region in the world both sends and receives more missionaries than fifty years ago.

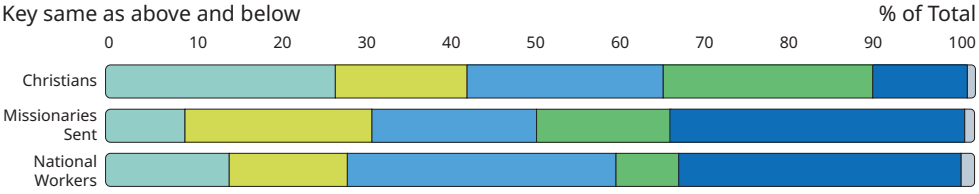
Mission is increasingly decoupled from its Western colonial legacy, with more missionaries coming from countries that lack Christian majorities.

Left out of these statistics is the explosion of short-term missionaries, especially from North America, whose impact and experience differs markedly from missionaries who embed themselves in a cross-cultural setting for several years or more.

INDIGENOUS EQUIPPING

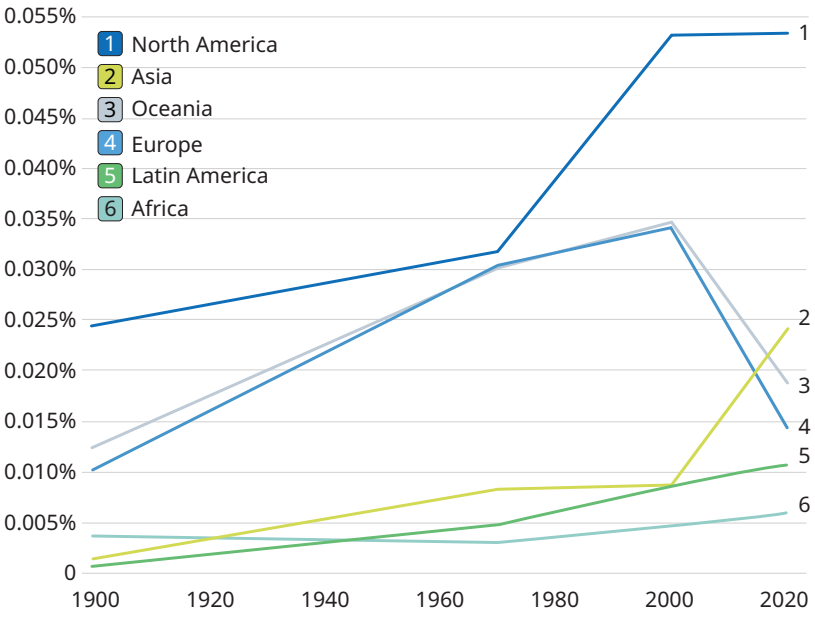
National workers are those who minister cross-culturally in their own country. This emphasis on equipping and sending indigenous ministers is an important trend in global missions.

DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL WORKERS



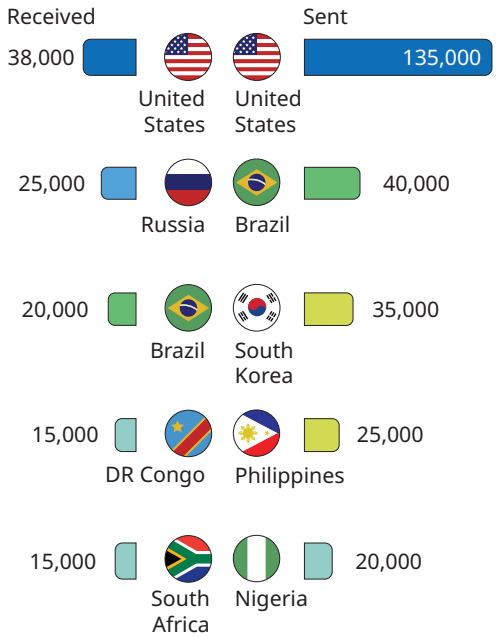
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

MISSIONARIES SENT PER CHRISTIAN CAPITA



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

TOP MISSIONARY ACTIVITY



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

CURRENT STATUS

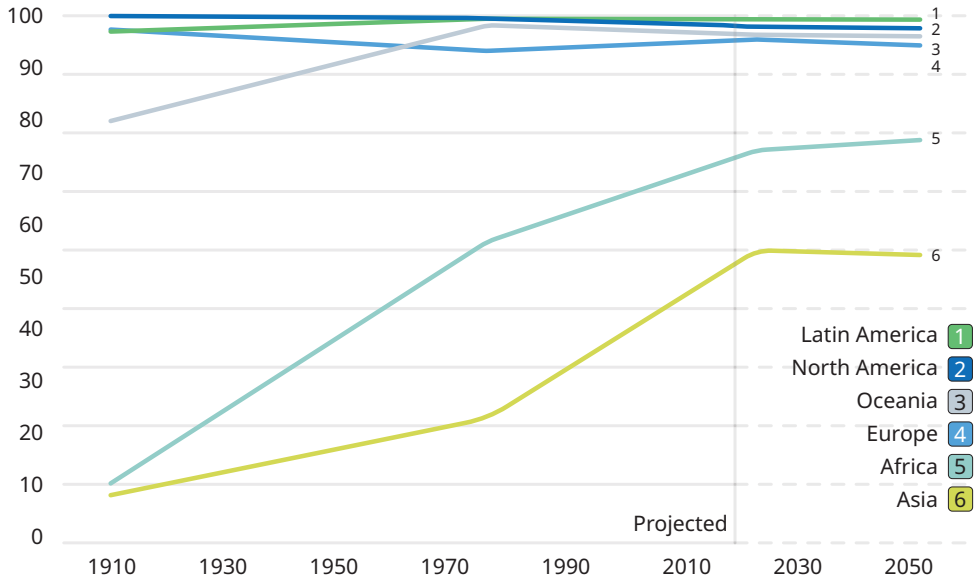
EVANGELIZED

DECLINE IN ACCESS

With the exception of Africa, all regions will witness an increase in the proportion of the population that is unevangelized in the coming decades. This is a stark reversal of a century of growing gospel access around the world.

An evangelized person is someone who has heard the gospel and responded personally to its message. Asia, and more specifically South Asia (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), is poised to remain the least evangelized region for many decades to come.

% EVANGELIZED



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed April 2023

MISSION MISALIGNED

Only three percent of international missionaries go to the unreached (who compose 40 percent of the global population). Thus, 97 percent of missionaries are sent to people who already have gospel access.

More missionaries are sent to Europe than Asia. This is despite the fact that Asia has 60 percent of the global population (versus Europe with 10 percent), Asia contains the majority of the world's unreached, and the cost of sending a missionary to Europe can exceed ten times that of sending a missionary (or equipping an indigenous missionary) in an unreached context in Asia or Africa.

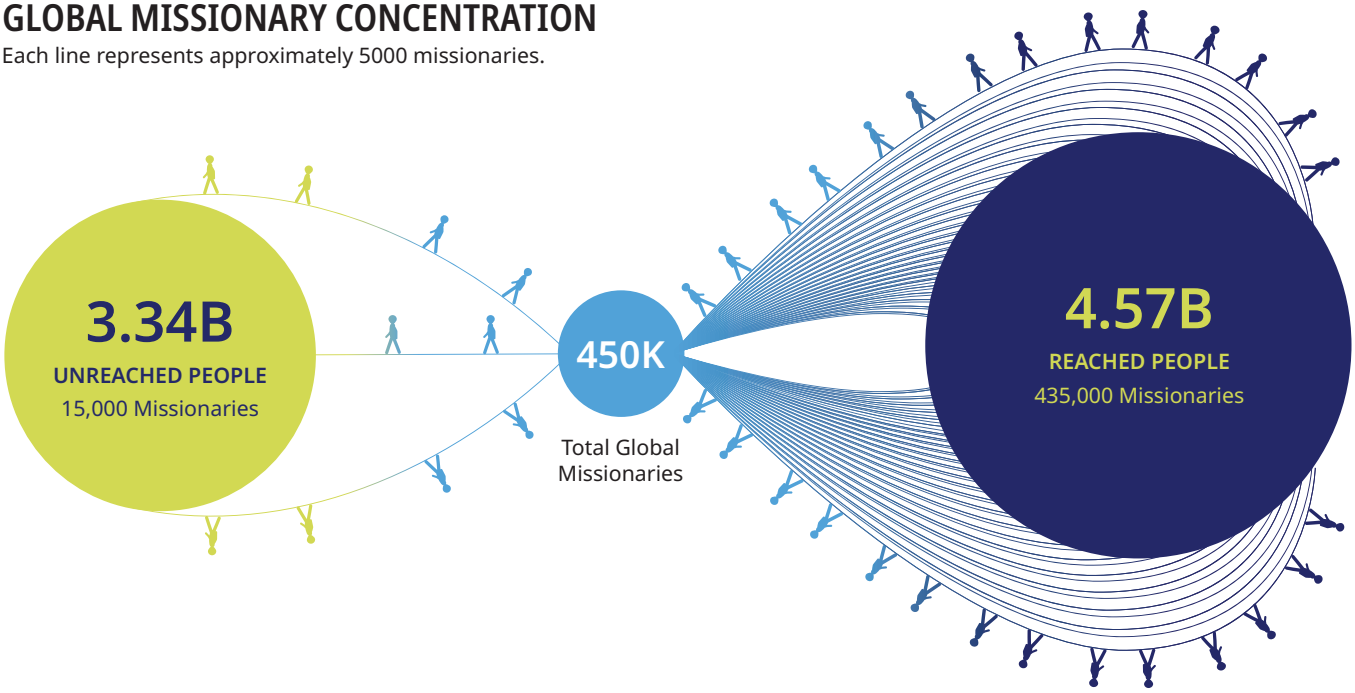
NO PRESENCE, NO RELATIONSHIP

Most missionaries go to predominantly Christian or Post-Christian contexts, leading to a lack of connection to and understanding of adherents to other religions.

Nearly nine out of ten Muslims and Hindus in the world do not personally know a Christian. The lack of contact reinforces the notion that Christianity is a Western religion.

GLOBAL MISSIONARY CONCENTRATION

Each line represents approximately 5000 missionaries.

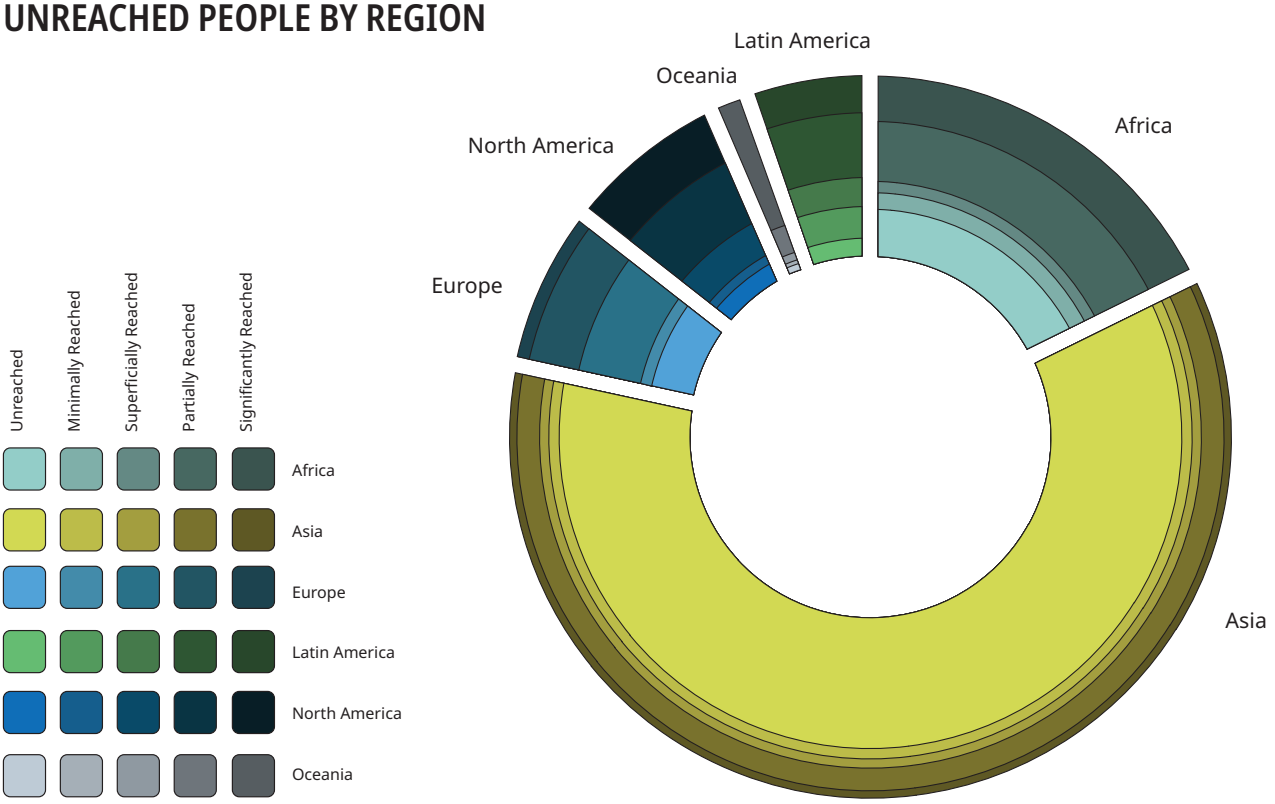


Source: Joshua Project, Aug 2022; B = Billion; K = Thousand

CURRENT STATUS

UNREACHED PEOPLE

UNREACHED PEOPLE BY REGION



Source: The Joshua Project, 2023

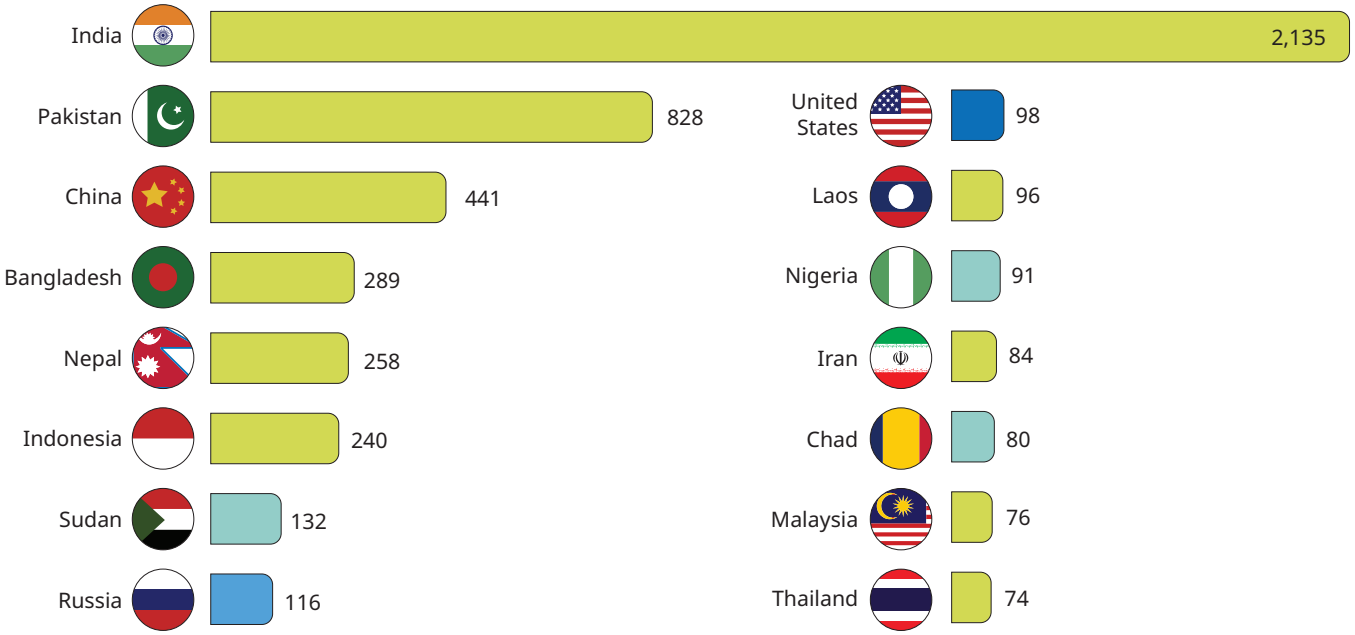
DEFINITION

Unreached people groups are those who lack an indigenous church capable of evangelizing their own people. People groups are distinct social groups where shared language and cultural practices create communal belonging.

MISSIONARY CHALLENGE

The countries that have received the greatest amount of Western missionary attention over two centuries contain the greatest number of unreached and unreached people groups: China and India (which once included Pakistan and Bangladesh).

COUNTRIES WITH MOST UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS

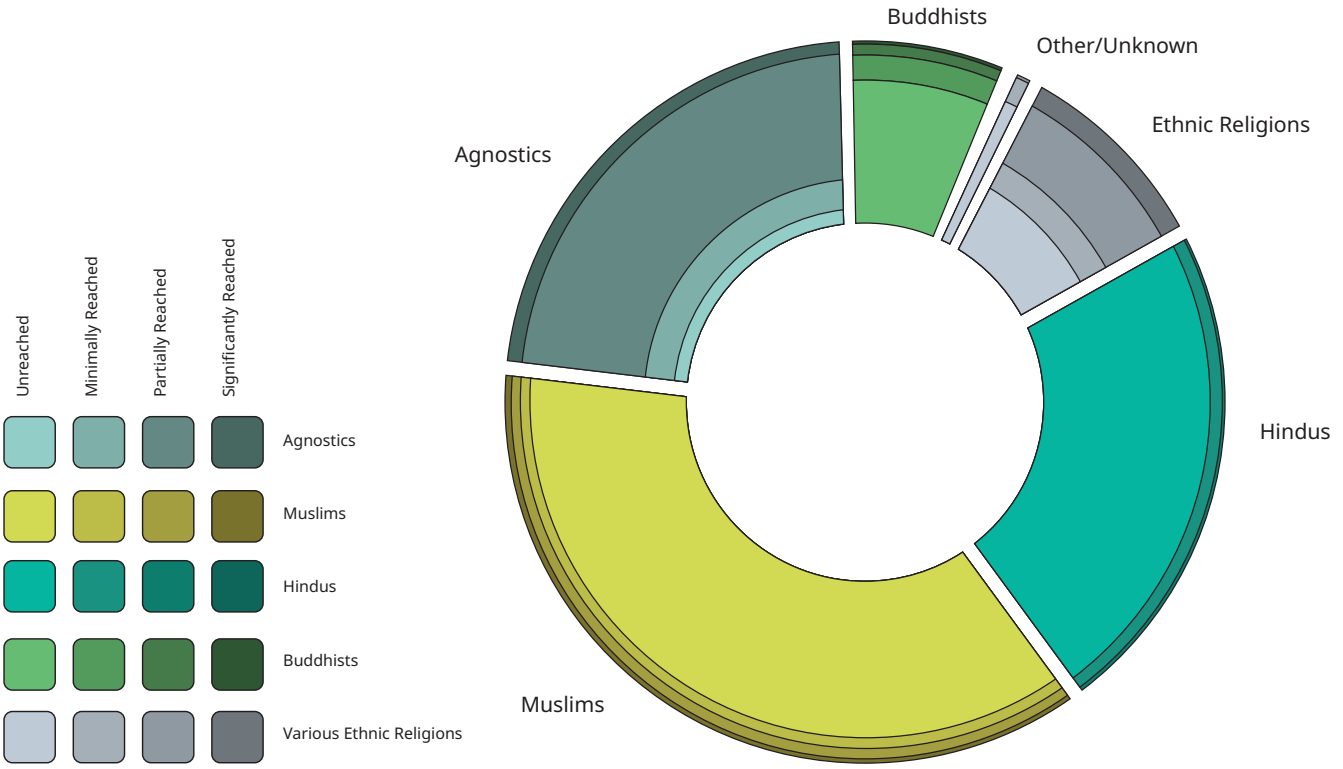


Source: The Joshua Project, 2023

CURRENT STATUS

UNREACHED PEOPLE

UNREACHED PEOPLE BY RELIGION



Source: The Joshua Project, 2023

RESISTANT ISLAM AND HINDUISM

The number of unreached among ethnic religions has rapidly declined over the last half-century while the number has grown among Muslims and Hindus. The large population of agnostics is due primarily to China. This population in China is declining, however, as multiple religions, including Christianity, are growing in the country.

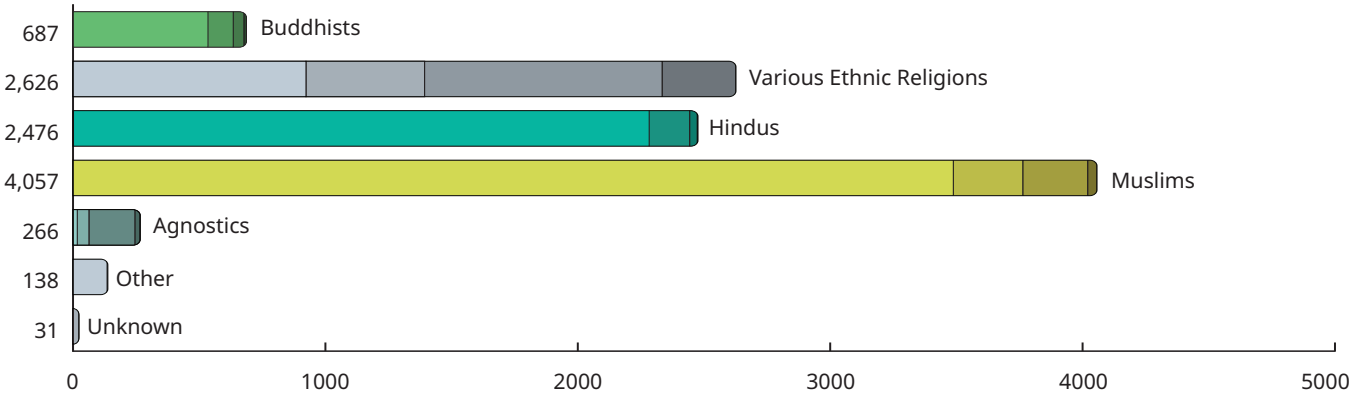
While adherents to global religions like Islam and Buddhism remain most resistant to Christianity, nominal believers in either religion are most likely to convert. Conversions by committed Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are less common.

CHANGING PARADIGMS

Even as the number of Unreached People Groups declines, the number of unreached peoples continues to grow. Unreached people are increasingly found among new forms of human community that differ from the 'ethnolinguistic groups' that dominated the unreached of prior generations. Urbanization, migration, digital technologies, and the individualism encouraged by a rising global middle class are reshaping cultural belonging. These forces are leading to a greater prevalence of ethnic and linguistic mixing that produce hybrid identities and novel communities. UPG paradigms will need to be complemented by other models for understanding and reaching an unbelieving world.

UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS BY RELIGION

Same key as above



Source: The Joshua Project, 2023

CURRENT STATUS

DISCIPLE MAKING MOVEMENTS

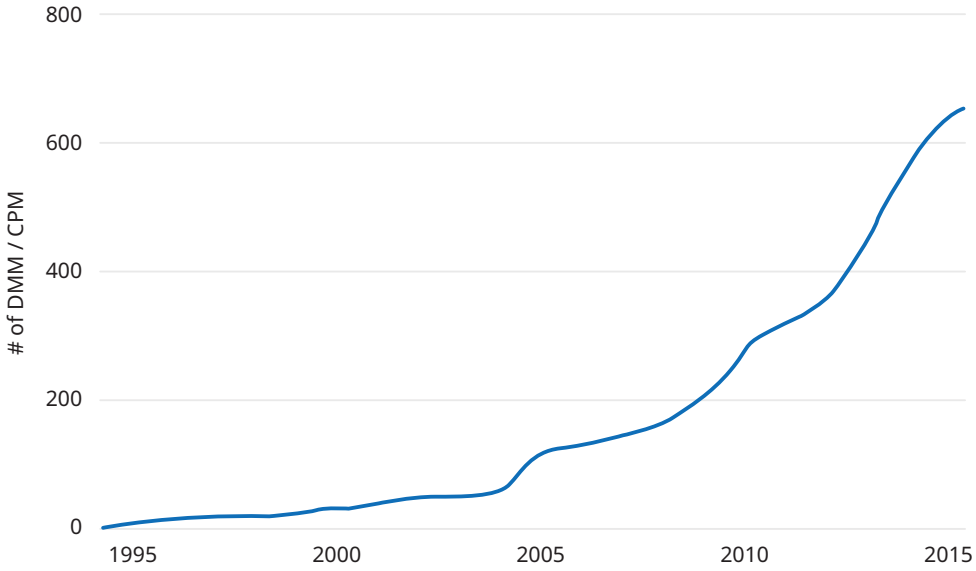
GENERATING DISCIPLES

A disciple making movement (DMM) or church planting movement (CPM) is defined by three characteristics.

First, there are sequential generations of growth. When an original disciple or church makes a new disciple or church, that is one generation. DMM/CPM are identified when there are at least four successful direct generations. Second, the movement is dynamic and growing. Third, the DMM is greater than approximately 1,000 believers or CPM are greater than approximately 100 churches.

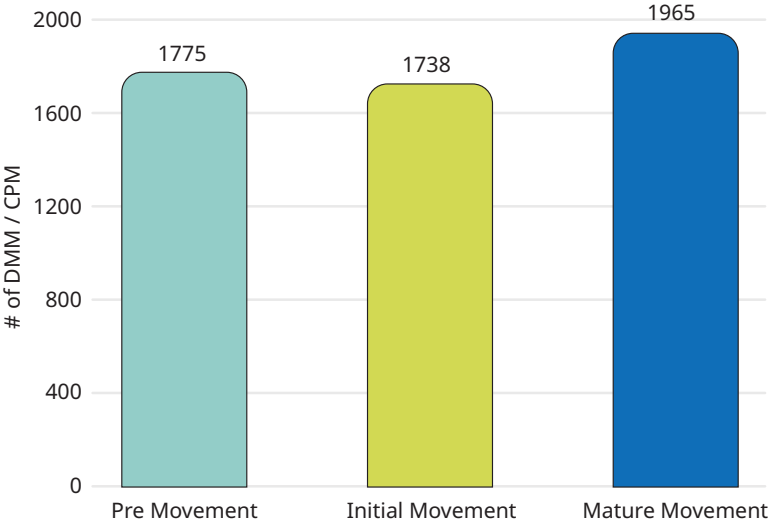
GROWTH OF DISCIPLE MAKING MOVEMENTS

Based on sub-set of movements for which we have "Begin" dates.



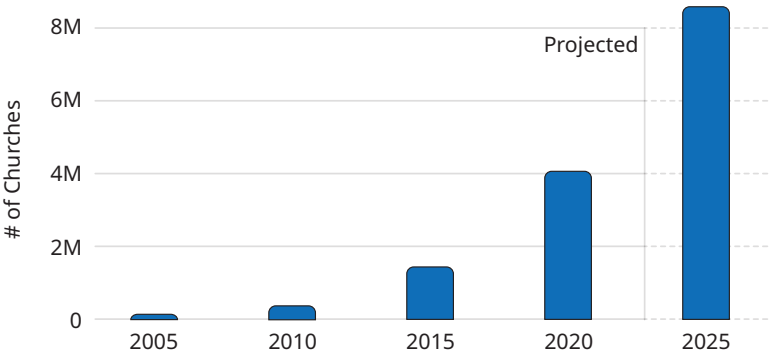
Source: Justin Long, December 2022; Data includes Church Planting Movements and Disciple Making Movements

OF MOVEMENTS IN STAGES



Source: Justin Long, December 2022

INCREASE IN CHURCHES OVER TIME



Source: Justin Long, December 2022; M = Million; Churches started by CPM/DMM movements

GLOBAL FRUIT RIPENING

A harvest is being celebrated due to research results of quantifiable disciple making movements. Sources informing the missional information community include members of networks and networks of movements. Some are quite large, in the millions, while others are quite small, numbering a few thousand.

DMM/CPM continue to grow with the number of known mature movements over 1,950 and over 1,750 pre-movements and 1,750 initial movements in 2022. And these are only what are known so far. In other words, these figures are a conservative 'floor', not an estimate of the 'ceiling.'

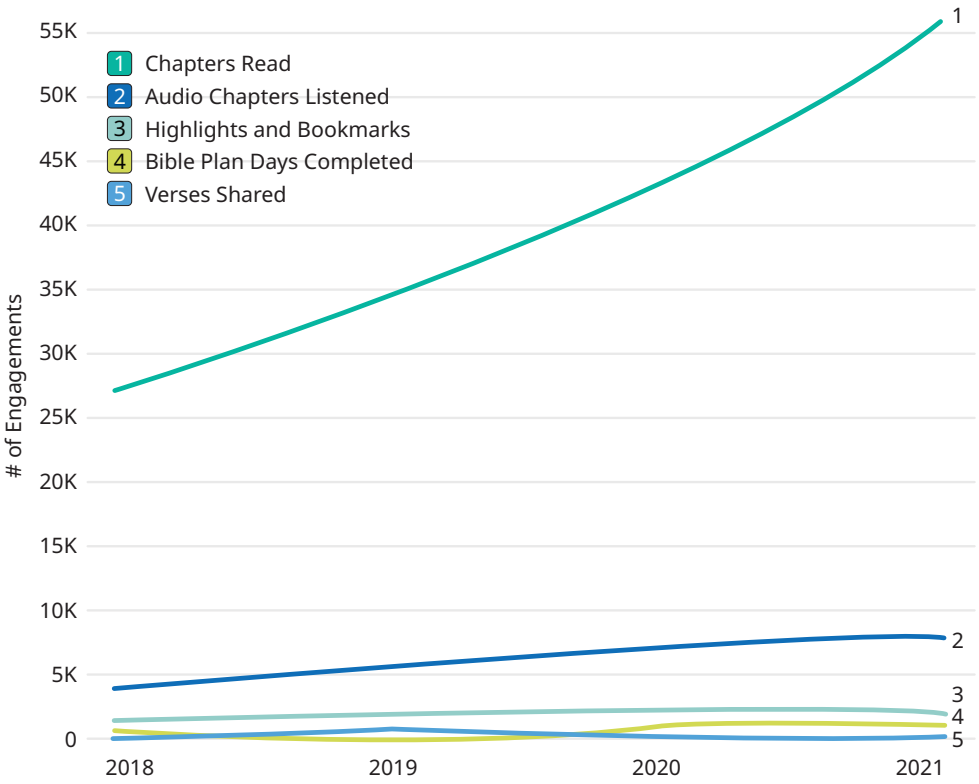
DMM researchers estimate that there are 100+ million professing disciples due to DMM.

DMM researchers estimate that there are 100+ million professing disciples (not all baptized) due to DMM, making around 1 percent of the world part of a DMM. Additionally, researchers estimate that there are over 9 million churches emerging from or part of a CPM. Understanding that most of these churches are 'house churches' with an average of 14 disciples per church, there are more house churches in CPM than churches in traditional denominations.

CURRENT STATUS

DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

YOUVERSION DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT



Source: YouVersion Annual Statistics; K = Thousand

A NEW MEDIUM

The rise of digital media is potentially as transformative to Scripture engagement as the advent of the printing press in Early Modern Europe. Technological developments always impact how Christians interact with the Bible.

YouVersion's research shows constant growth in online Bible reading. Less evident, however, is growth in engagement in the interactive possibilities of digital media like note taking and verse sharing, or other ways of capitalizing on digital media's social and creative capabilities.

The rise of smart phone usage around the world opens access to the Bible in new ways, especially in sensitive contexts. Unequal internet access, however, remains a barrier.

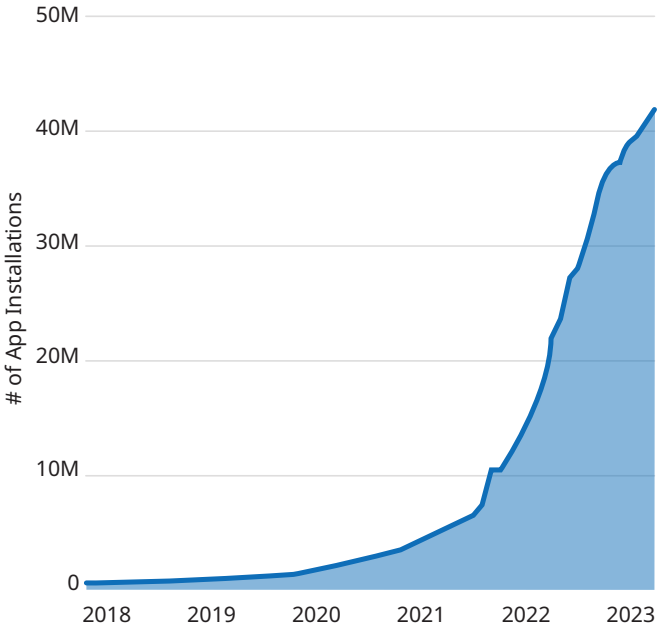
A NEW ORALITY

Digital technologies give rise to what many call the 'new orality.' Bible applications allow people around the world to hear, as opposed to read, the Bible in their heart language.

NEW TACTICS

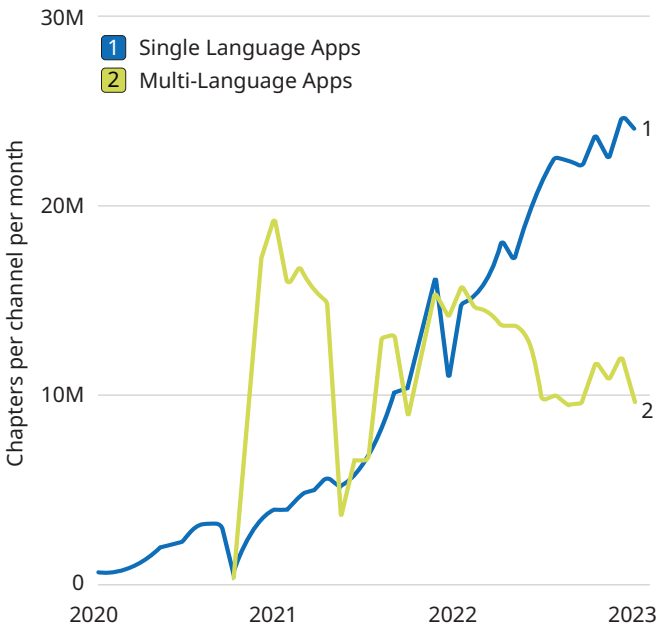
Experimentation in strategic delivery of digital Scriptures has recently produced an interesting observation. Distribution of targeted single language Bible apps increases the engagement levels over multi-language apps.

SINGLE LANGUAGE BIBLE APP INSTALLS



Source: Richard Margette, SIL, Single Language Bible App Installs via Faith Comes by Hearing; M = Million

MULTI-LANGUAGE APPS

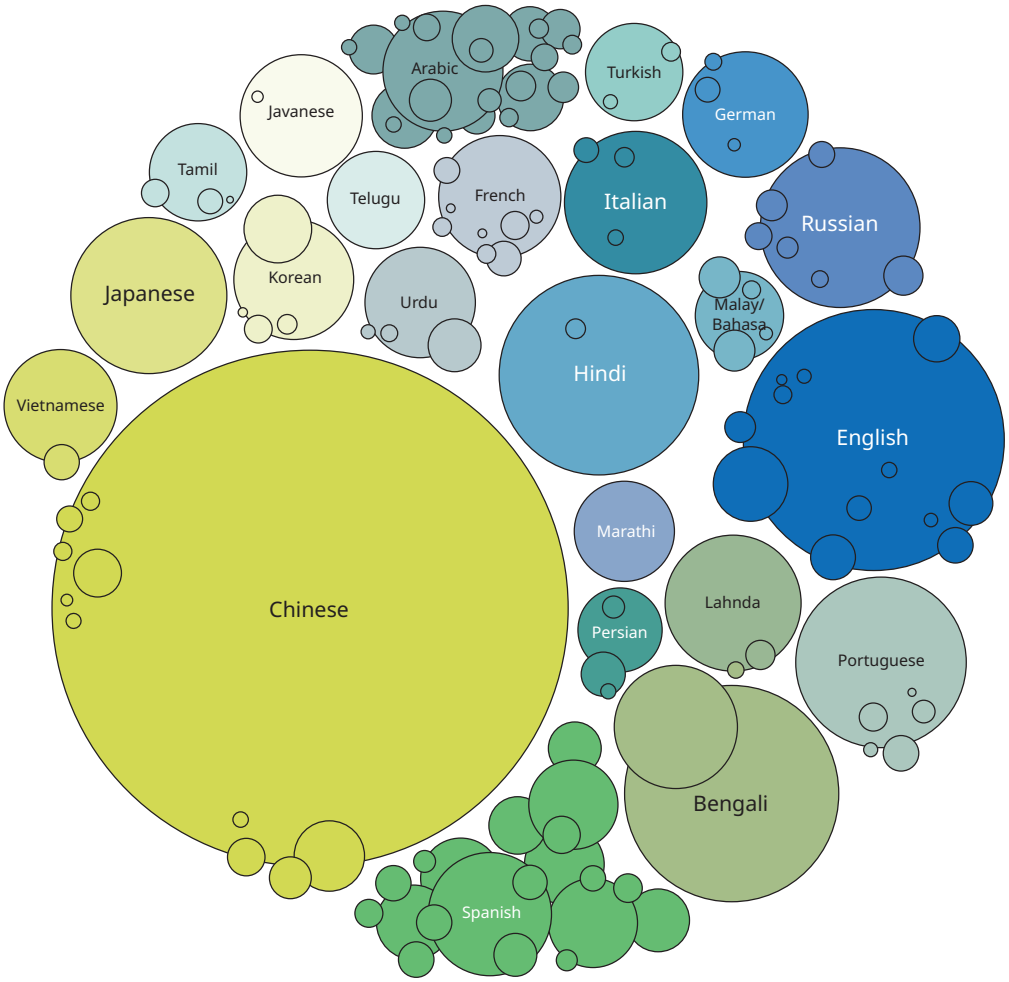


Source: Faith Comes by Hearing, Annual Statistics; M = Million

CURRENT STATUS

LANGUAGE

GLOBAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION BY LANGUAGE



Source: Ethologue, "Languages of the World," 2023

STRATEGIC GATEWAYS

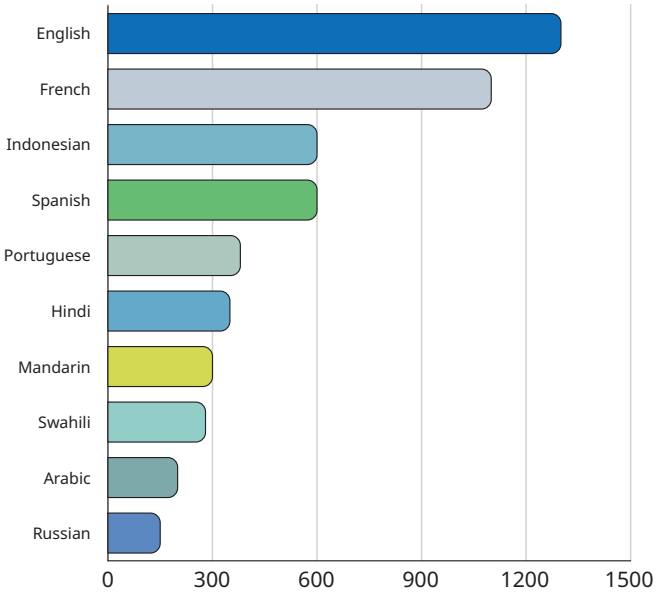
Instead of relying on primarily English-speaking translators and Western organizations to supervise individual translation projects, advocates of new methods suggest that translation resources and initiatives should be decentralized and housed within 'Strategic Languages' that provide interconnections with the majority of the world's languages.

The method recognizes scales of multilingualism, the interconnectivity of languages, and that all languages perpetually evolve.

English, Hindi, Arabic, Mandarin, French, Indonesian, Swahili, Russian, Portuguese, and Spanish are recognized as the ten most strategic "Gateway" languages, central hubs in linguistic networks.

GATEWAY INFLUENCE BY SUB-LANGUAGES

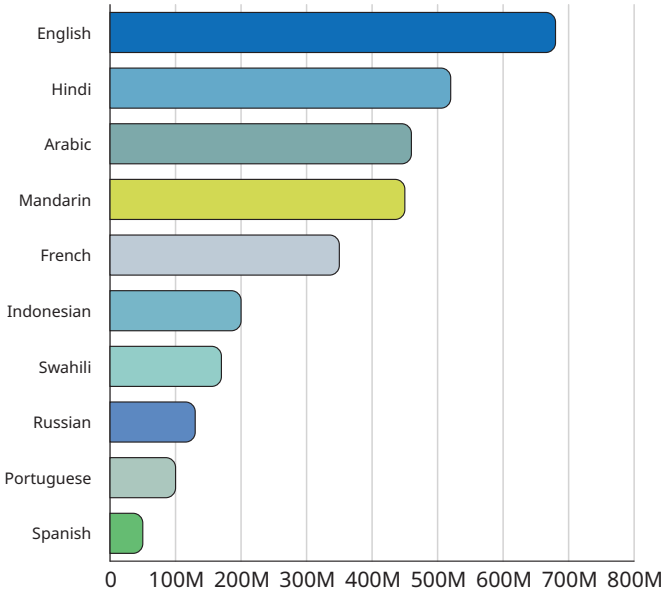
Number of languages reached by gateway language resources



Source: Weiss, Unfolding Word, June 2023

GATEWAY INFLUENCE BY POPULATION

Number of people reached by gateway language resources

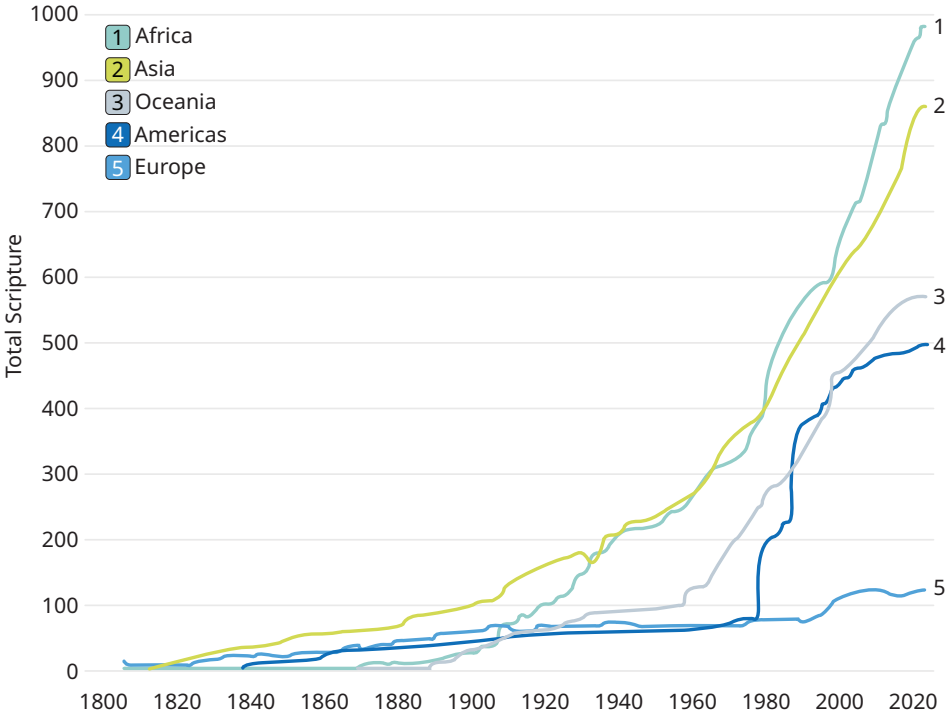


Source: Weiss, Unfolding Word, June 2023; M = Million

CURRENT STATUS

BIBLE TRANSLATION

BIBLE TRANSLATION OVER TIME BY REGION



Source: Progress Bible, 2023

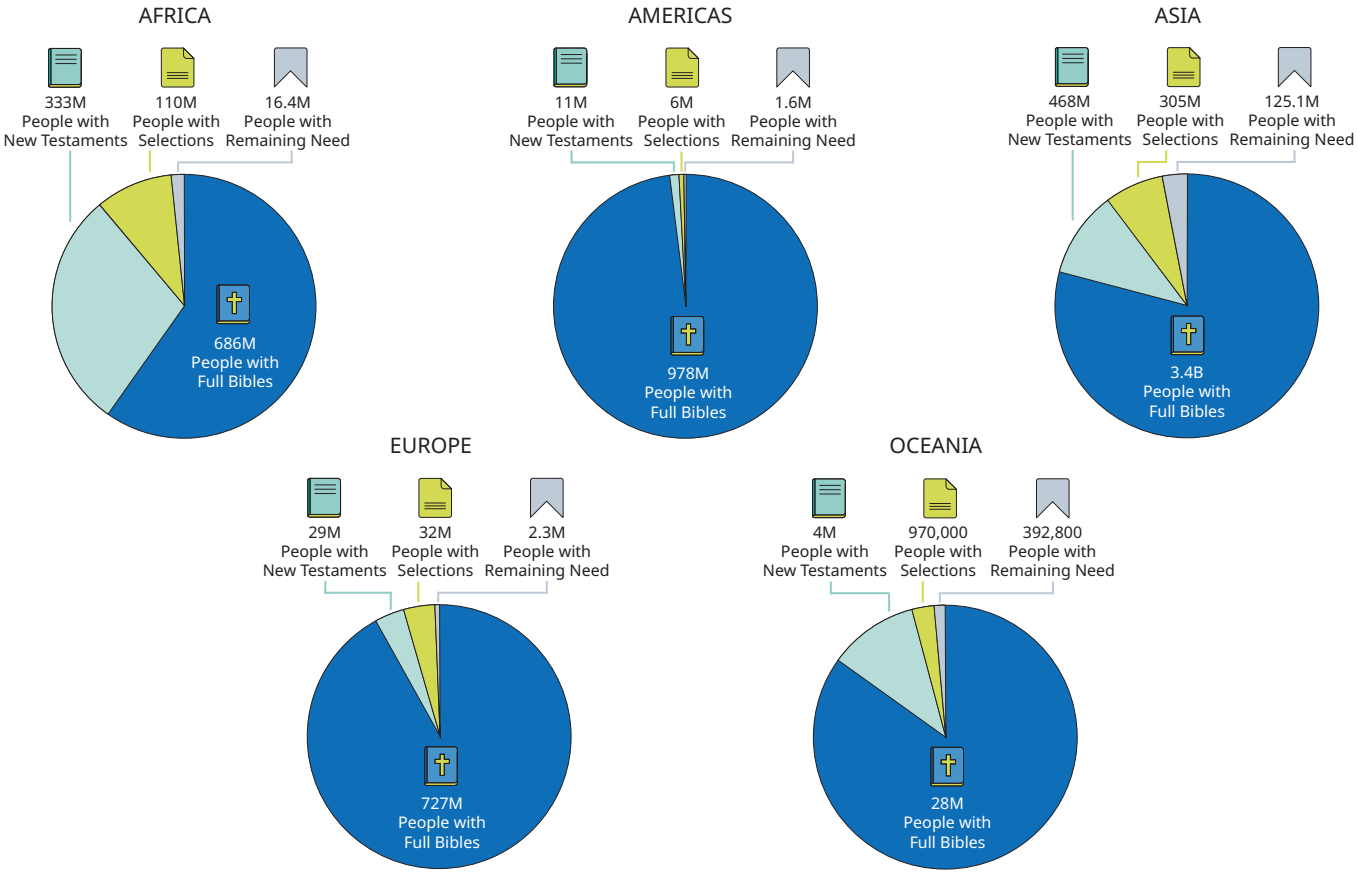
GROWING ACCESS

While work remains, the rapid increase in languages having Bible translations over the last 50 years is one of the great missionary successes of our time. Never before have so many people had access to God's word in their heart language.

Never before have so many people had access to God's word.

Three quarters of the global population possess access to the full Bible while nearly 10 percent lack even partial access. The Americas remain the region with the greatest access to Scripture while Asia contains the largest amount of people with either partial or no translation in their language.

BIBLE TRANSLATION STATUS

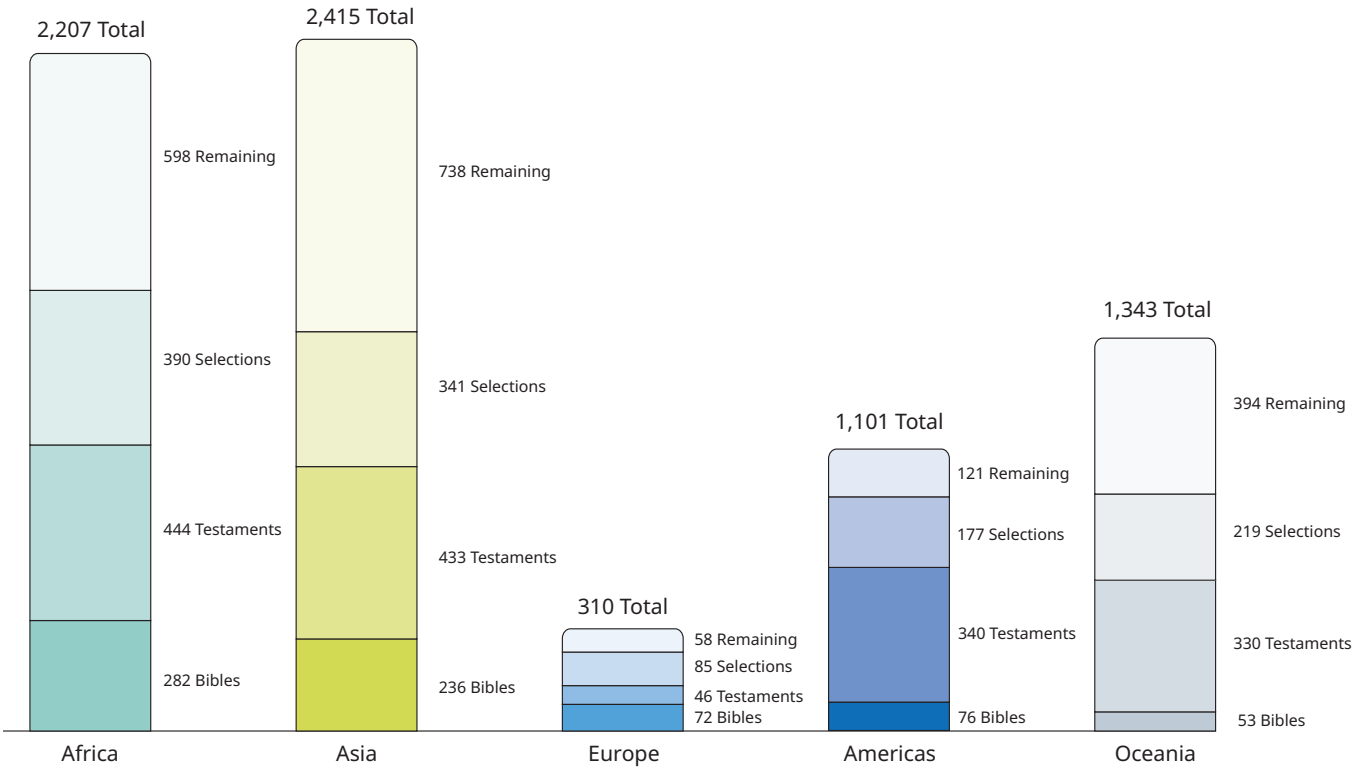


Source: Missio Nexus, 2022; B = Billion; M = Million

CURRENT STATUS

BIBLE TRANSLATION

LANGUAGES WITH SCRIPTURE AVAILABLE



Source: Missio Nexus, 2022

TRANSLATION AND ACCESS

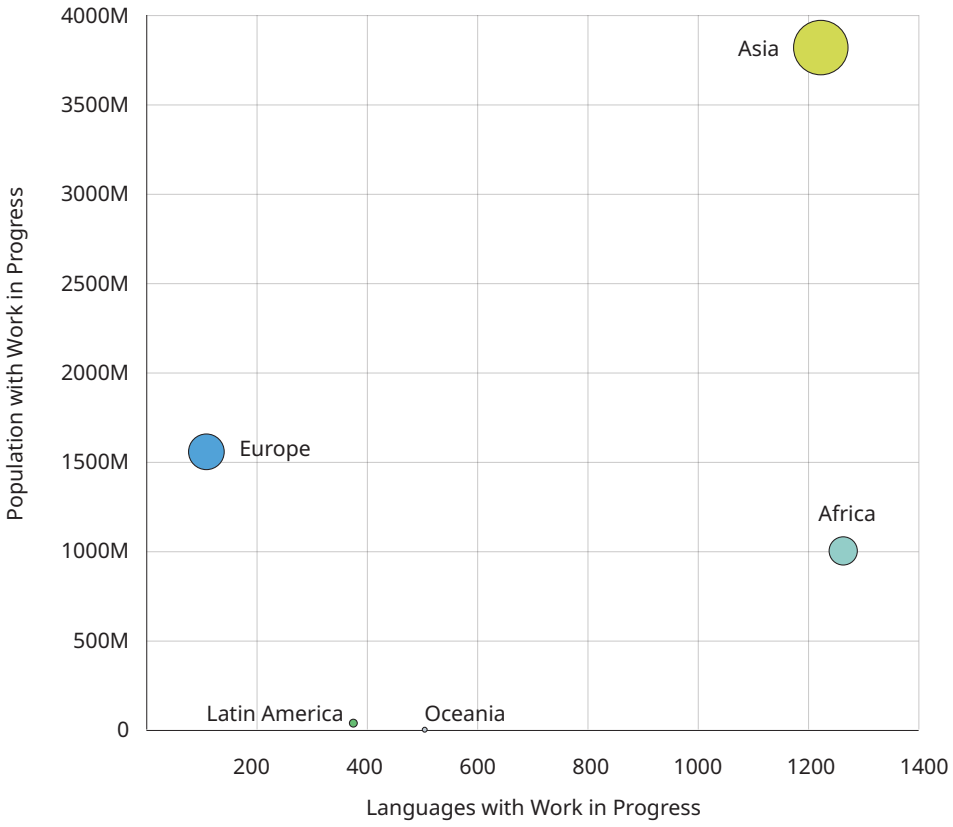
Over 1,000 languages still lack a translation of even part of the Bible. Asia, Africa, and Oceania possess the majority of language groups still lacking Bibles.

Bible translators are currently developing partial or full translations in thousands of languages around the world.

Over 1,000 languages still lack a translation of even part of the Bible.

Organizations are employing new translation strategies, like community mobilization methods, and Artificial Intelligence in attempts to expand Bible access and Bible engagement.

TRANSLATION WORKS IN PROGRESS



Source: Progress Bible, 2023; O = size of population

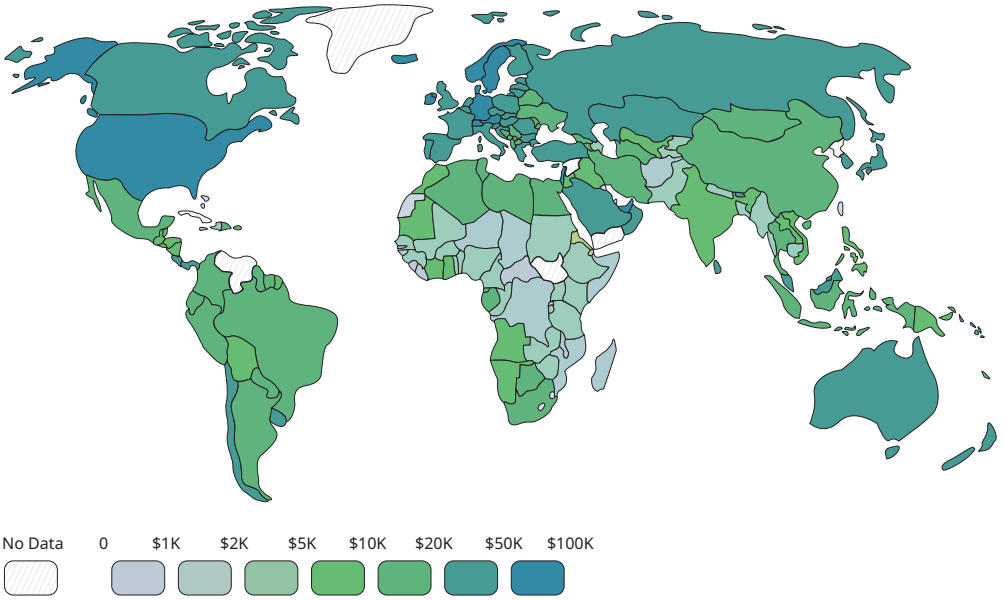
CURRENT STATUS

FINANCIAL GIVING

GLOBAL INEQUALITY

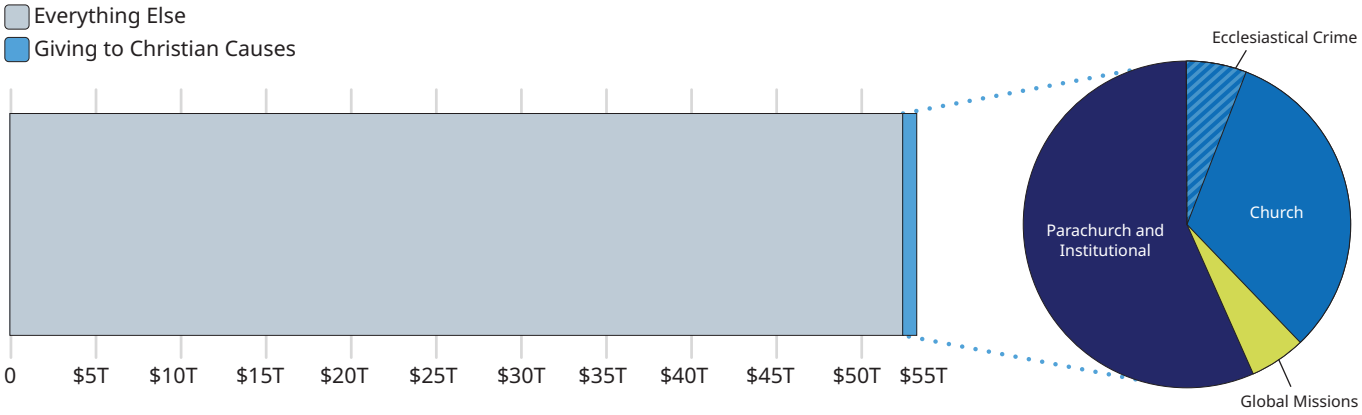
Europe, North America, and much of Oceania remain the wealthiest regions in the world. Many Gulf nations are also wealthy but vast divides exist in those nations between the rich and the poor. Western nations drive charitable giving, although growing economies in Asia are pushing increases in giving in the Global South. Despite great wealth existing in the Christian community, a sliver of that wealth goes to Christian causes with a tiny percentage invested in global missions.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT PER CAPITA



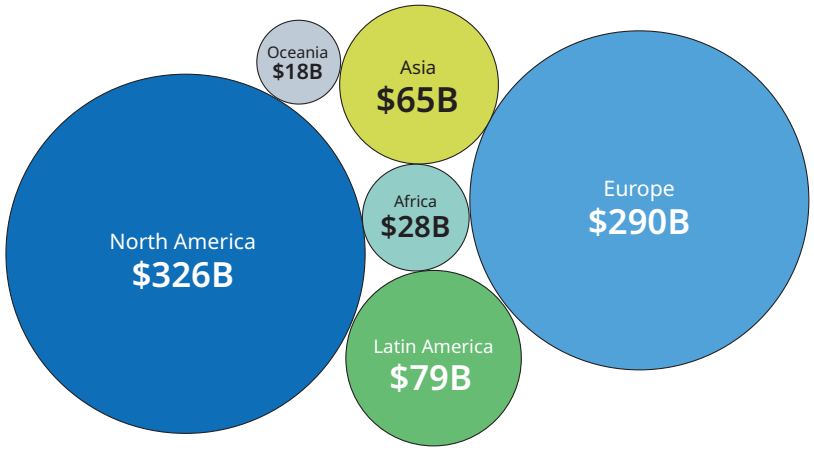
Source: OurWorldInData, 2020; K = Thousand

CHRISTIAN SPENDING



Source: World Christian Database, "Status of Global Christianity in the Context of 1900 – 2050," 2022; T = Trillion, See p. 941 for ecclesiastical crime definition

CHURCH INCOME BY REGION



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, 2022, pg. 941; B = Billion

CHRISTIAN INEQUALITY

Comparing church income by region versus the regions where Christianity is growing reveals stark financial and resource inequalities in the global church. Most Western Christian wealth stays within the Western church.

As Christianity continues to grow in the Global South while shrinking in the Global North, addressing financial disparities in the global church is a key issue.

One of the primary consequences of the divide is an abundance of investment in a declining Christianity and a growing Christianity institutionally hamstrung by minimal resources.

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP

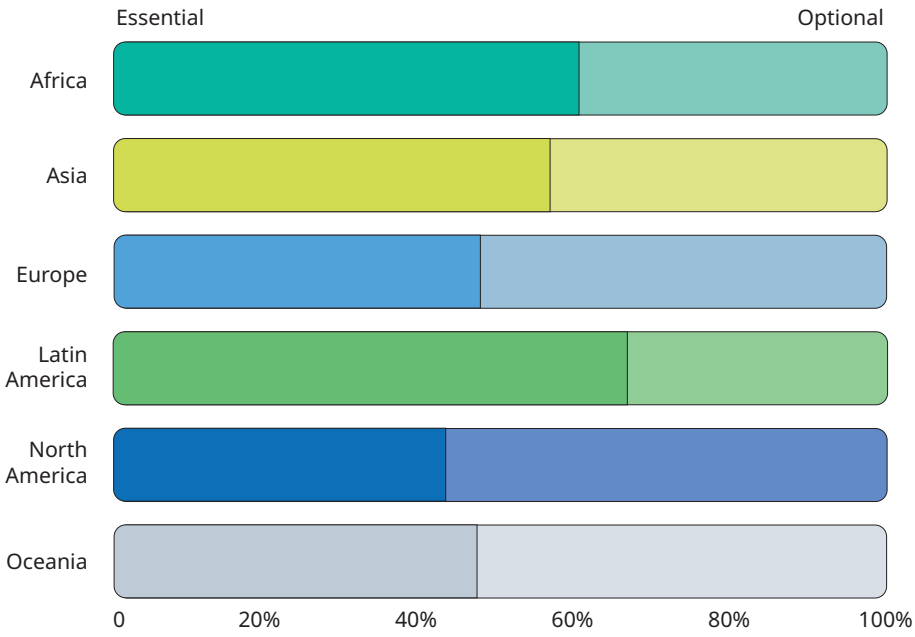
OPTIONAL COMMISSION

When a survey asked 1,500 global Christian leaders about the level of commitment to the Great Commission in their region, the results did not showcase the importance of the Great Commission. Leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America perceived that 30-40 percent of Christians saw the Great Commission as optional. This number is even higher in the North America, Europe and Australia with leaders perceiving that approximately 50 percent of Christians hold the Great Commission as optional.

These perceptions also extend to the church with global leaders observing that approximately 50 percent of churches in their region are not united by a shared commitment to the Great Commission.

IMPORTANCE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

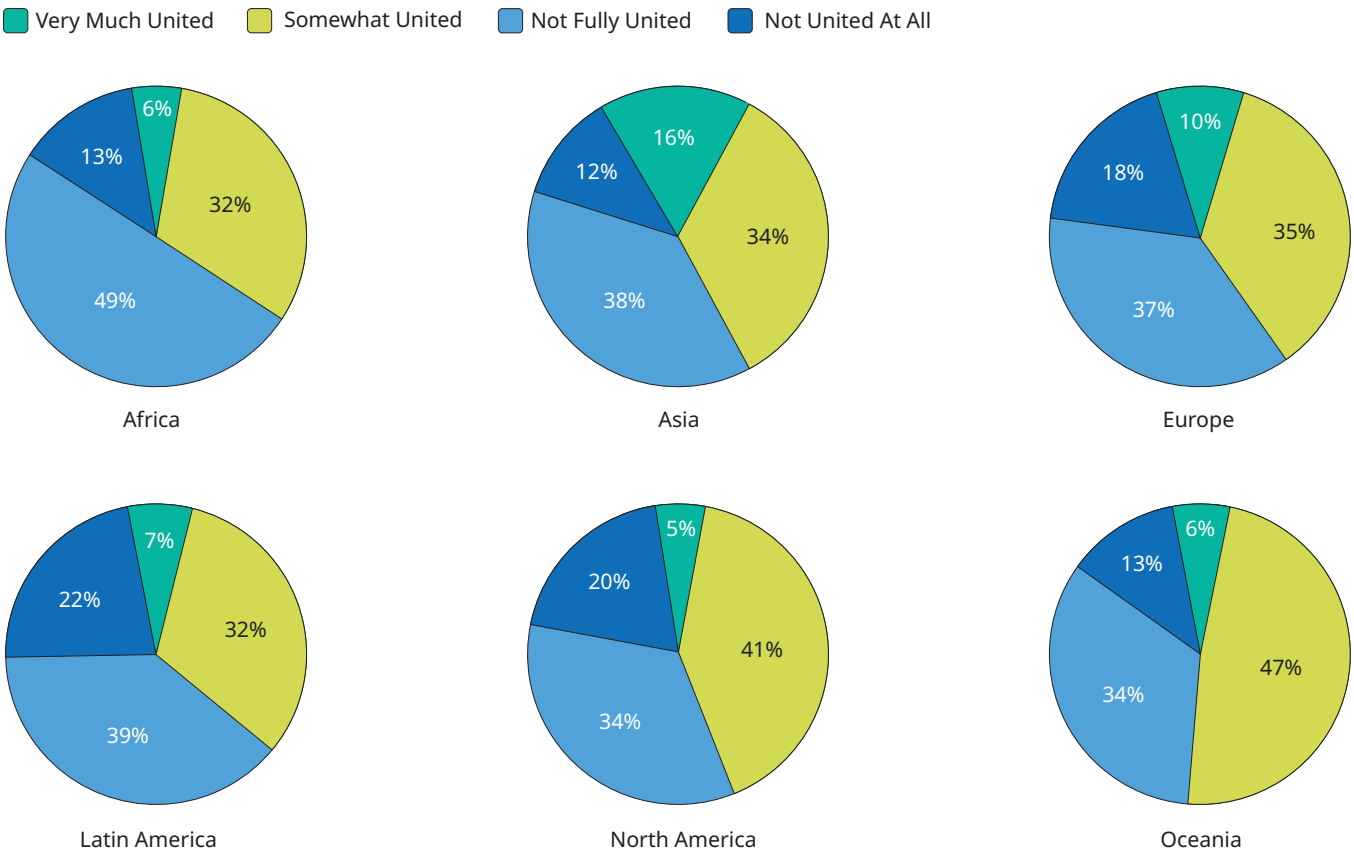
"The average Christian believes sharing the Gospel is:"



Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

UNITED COMMITMENT

"In your perception, are the local churches in your context united by a shared commitment to the Great Commission in your region?"



Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP

LIMITED PREPAREDNESS

The majority of the 1,500 global Christian leaders surveyed believe that less than half of the Christians in their region would be able to say what the Great Commission is.

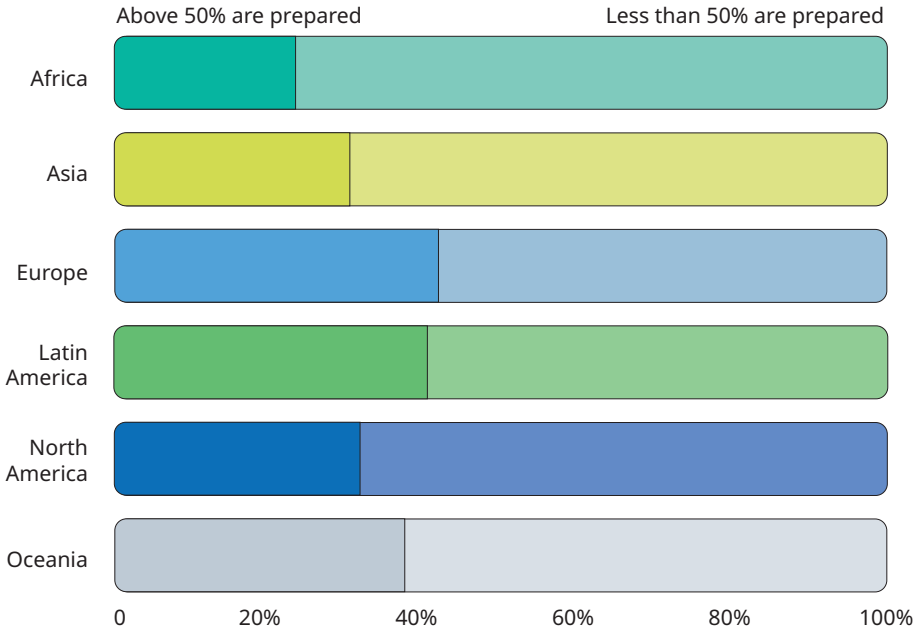
Less than half are prepared to share the Gospel.

When considering individuals in their churches, the Lausanne leaders surveyed perceived that less than half of people in their church felt prepared to share the gospel.

There is an observable correlation between perceived lack of discipleship in the Great Commission and perceived gospel preparedness.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

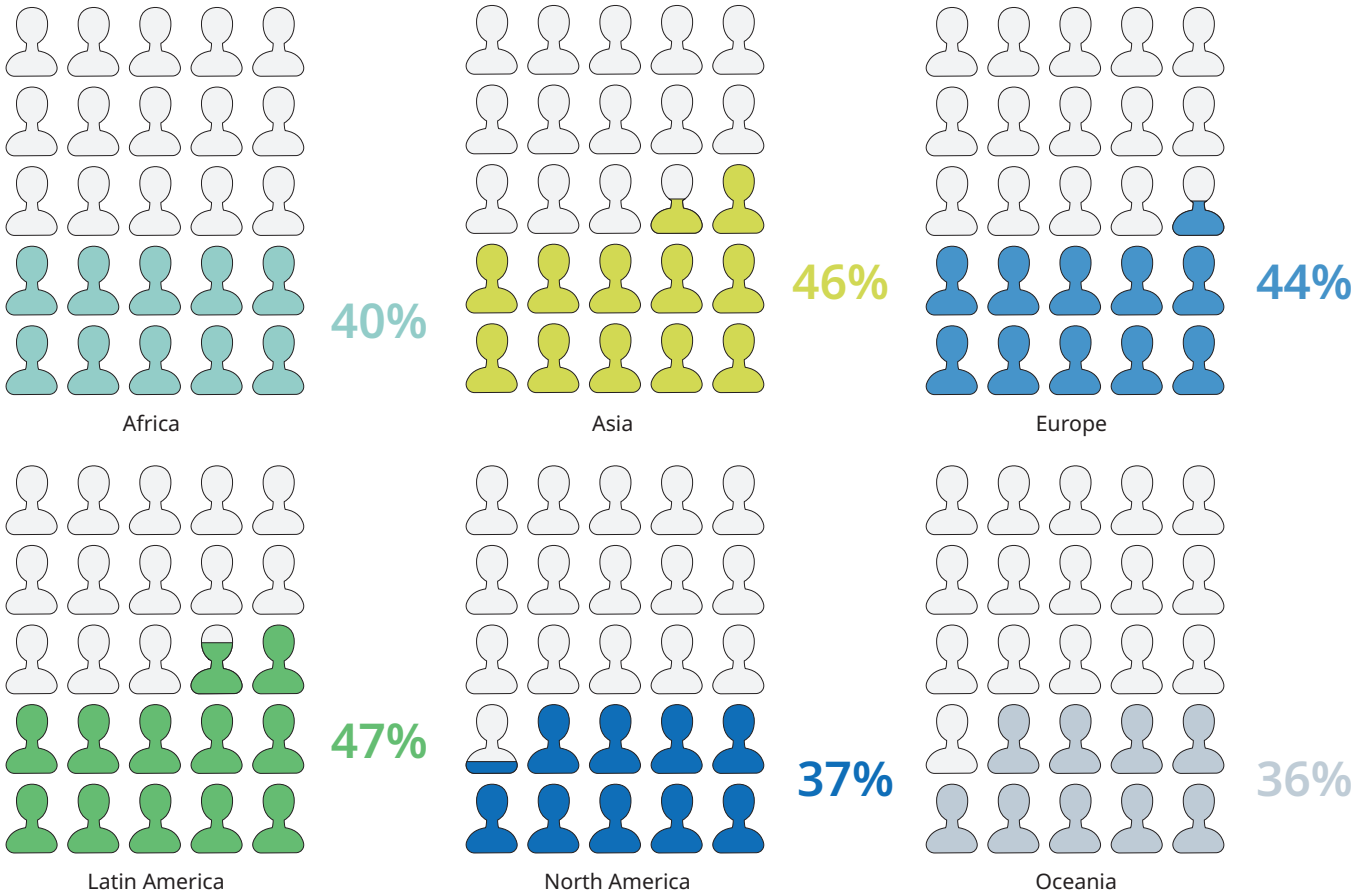
"If you asked four average Christians in your region, how many would be able to tell you what the Great Commission is?"



Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

GREAT COMMISSION PREPAREDNESS

"What percentage of members in your local church would say they feel prepared to share the Gospel with others?"

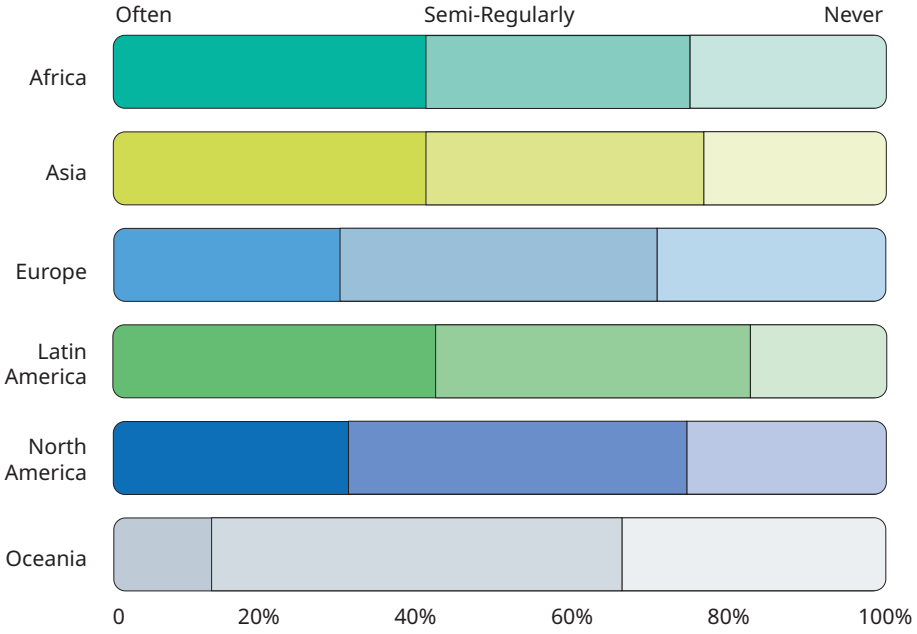


Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP

FREQUENCY OF GREAT COMMISSION TEACHING

"In your perception, how often do churches teach the Great Commission in your region?"



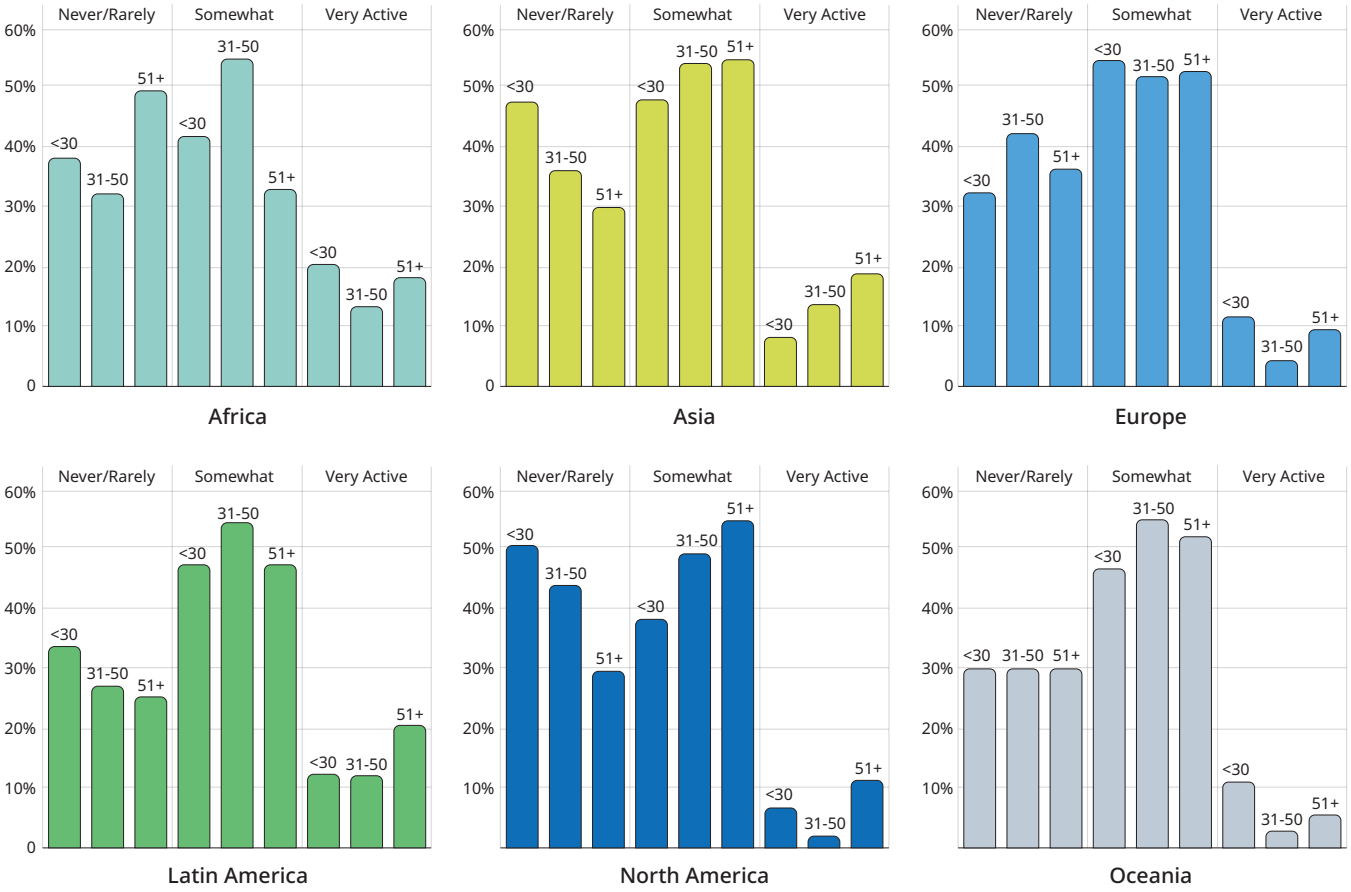
Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

In the perception of 1500 global Christian leaders, 65-80 percent of leaders perceived that churches teach the Great Commission 'often' or on a 'semi-regular' basis. Yet, when asked how active Christians in their context are in the gospel proclamation, leaders responded that they felt less than 15-20 percent of Christians are 'very active.' Further they perceived that 35-40 percent of Christians in their context 'never/rarely' proclaim the gospel. Across the globe, the surveyed leaders felt individuals under 30 participate less in gospel proclamation. Observing that most leaders felt that the Great Commission is taught regularly in their context, but yet also feel large portions of the church are not very active in gospel proclamation brings forth questions about the effectiveness of current Great Commission discipleship.

GREAT COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

"In your context, how active are Christians in different generations in Gospel Proclamation?"



Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

FROM TODAY TO 2050



WHAT IS POLYCENTRIC CHRISTIANITY?



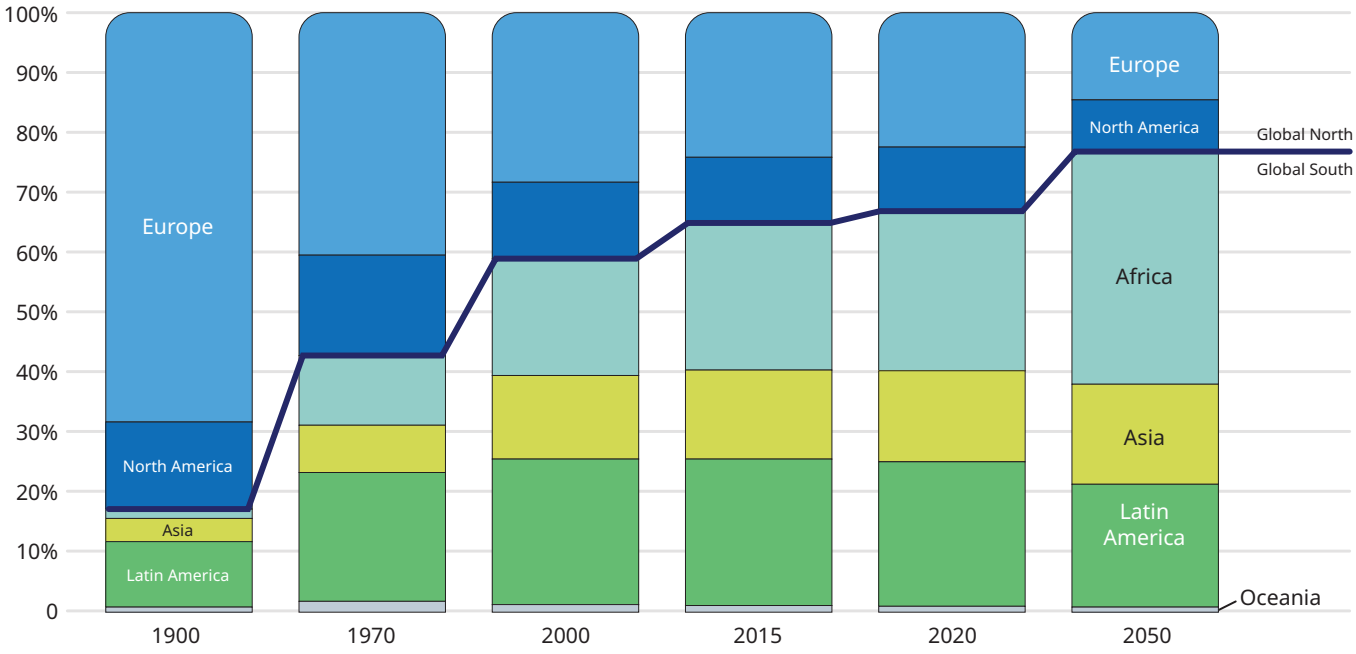
INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a dynamic and living faith which has experienced notable global shifts in the last 100 years, and including the growth of Christianity in the Global South, the rise of Pentecostalism, and the continued addition of denominations, leading to the question, 'What is Polycentric Christianity?'

The following section explores the contextual shifts towards a global polycentric Christianity.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

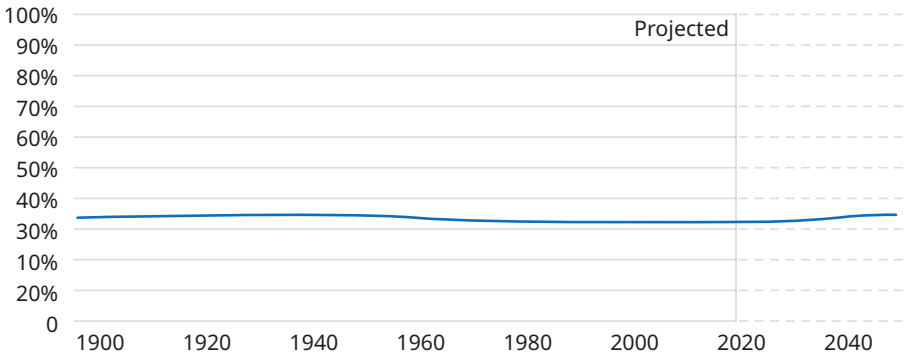


Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16

A NON-WESTERN RELIGION

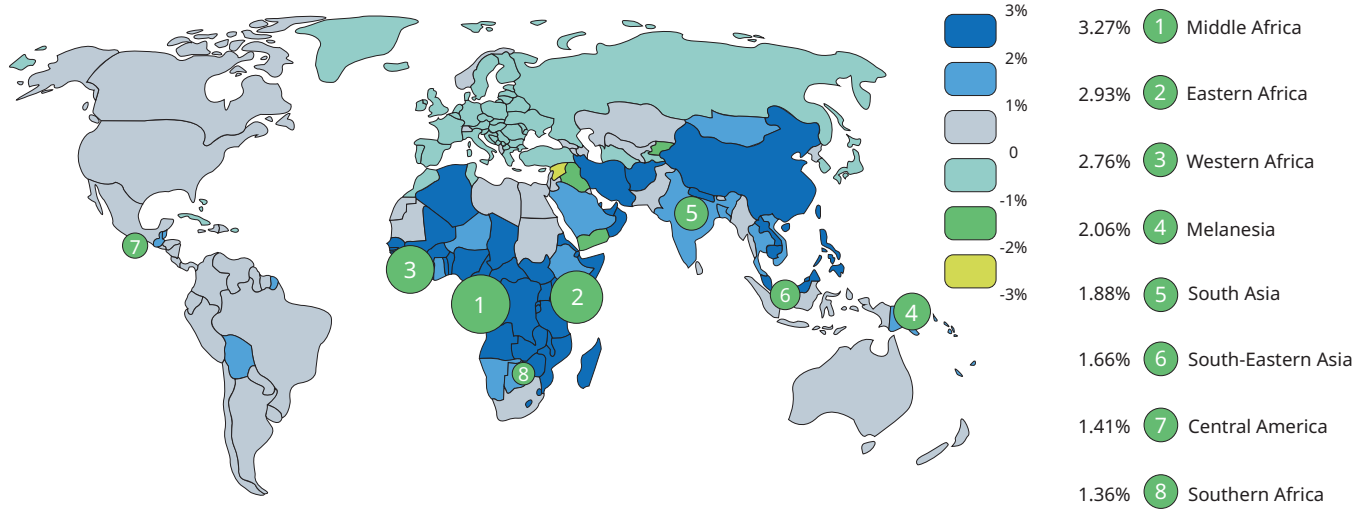
Observing the average annual rate of change per year, by 2050, Africa is projected to have the highest percentage of global Christians. Asia's share of the Christian population will also grow while all other regions' share will be in decline. Europe and North America will become an increasingly lower percentage of global Christianity.

% OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANS



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023

PROJECTED CHRISTIAN CHANGE 2020-2050



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023

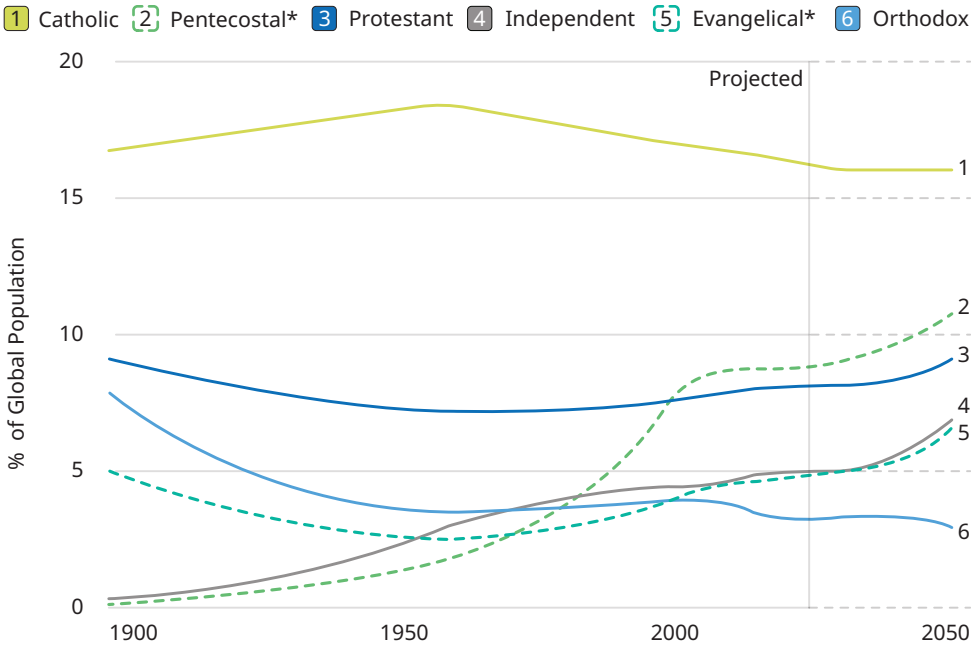
CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

PENTECOSTAL GROWTH

Pentecostal and charismatic expressions of Christianity are the leading edge of Christian growth around the world. Pentecostal Christians are typically more missionary in orientation, placing a high emphasis on lay evangelism through personal networks. Much Catholic growth since the late 20th century has also occurred through the Catholic charismatic movement.

With the exception of the Orthodox, all other Christian traditions demonstrate trends of growth or stability in Africa and Asia in the coming decades.

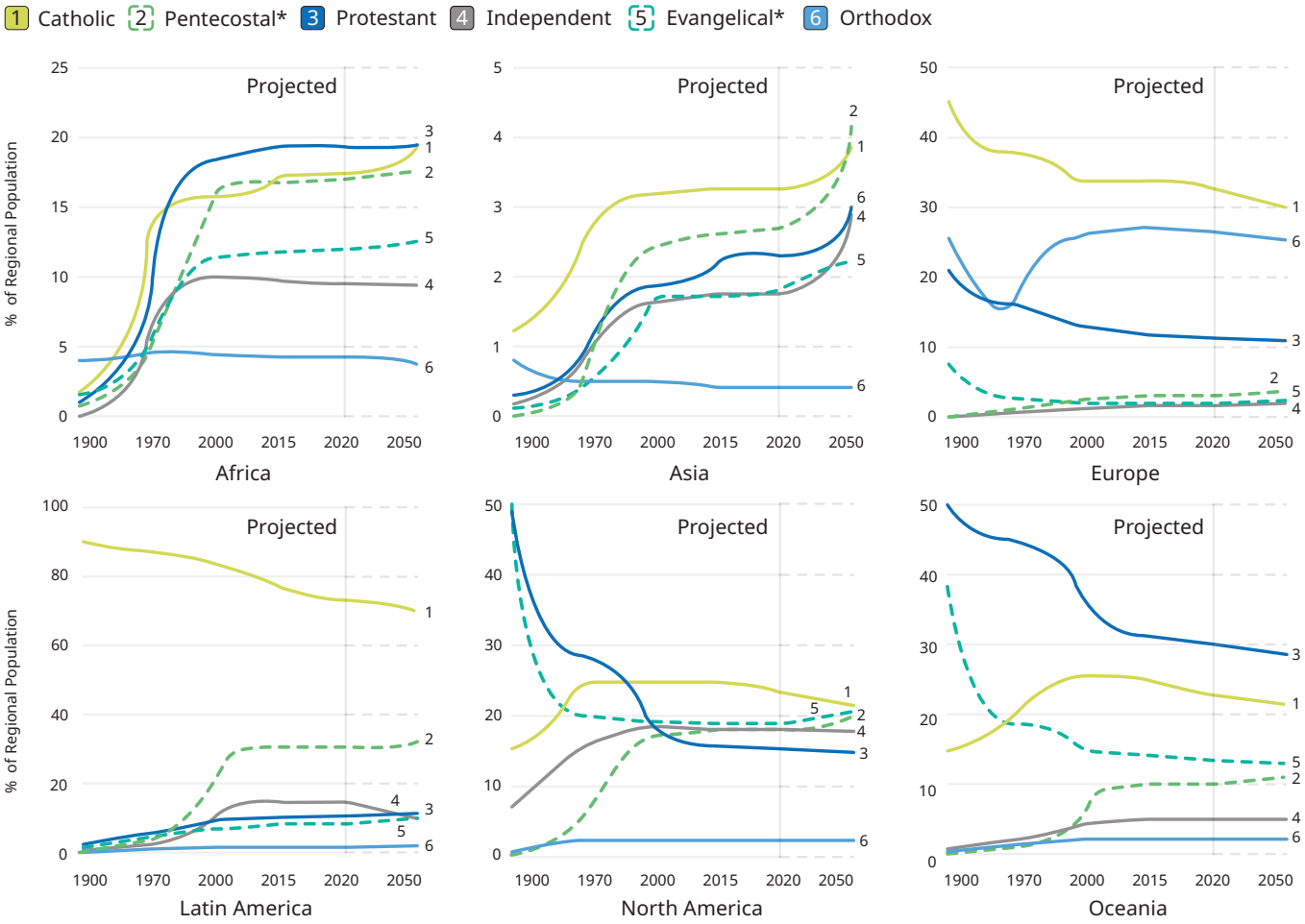
GLOBAL CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS 1900-2050



*These movements are found within the other Christian traditions

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pg. 20

CONTINENTAL DENOMINATIONS OVER TIME

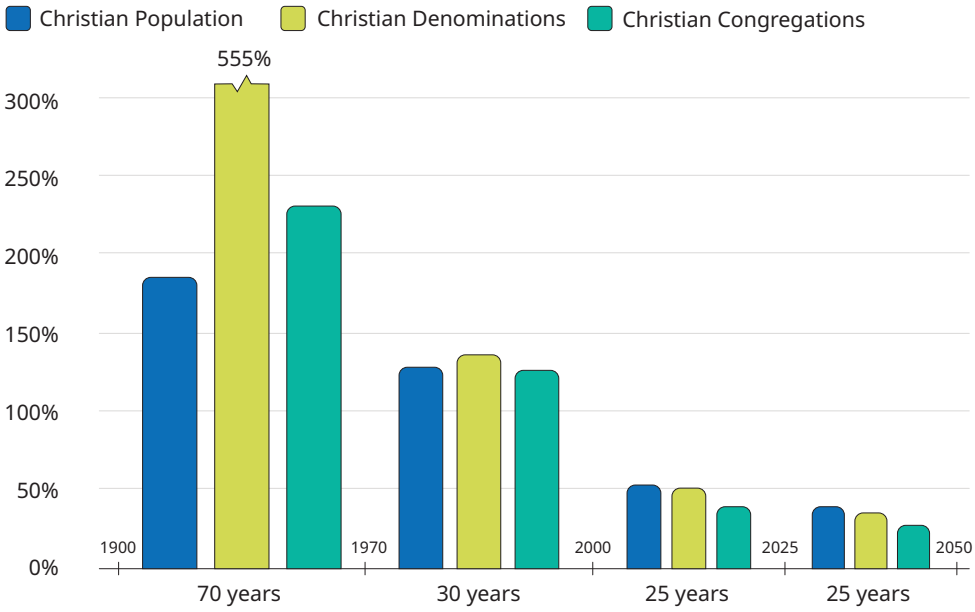


*These movements are found within the other Christian traditions

Source: World Christian Encyclopedia, pgs. 21-26

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

% CHANGE OF CHRISTIANITY OVER TIME



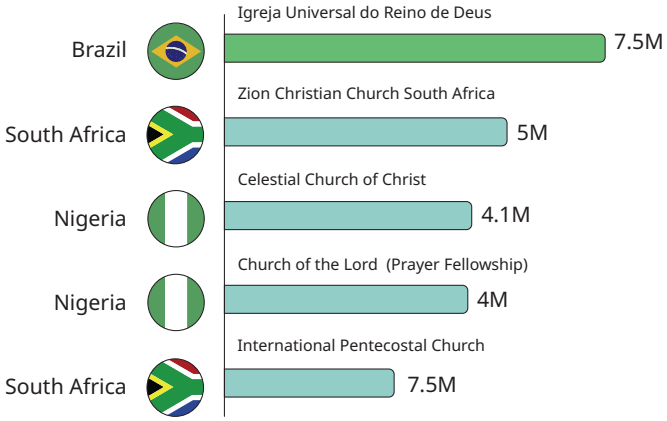
Source: World Christian Database, Status of Global Christianity, 2023

47,000 AND GROWING

According to the Center for Study of Global Christianity, in mid-2023 there are 47,300 Christian denominations/rites. By 2025, it is predicted that there will be 49,000; and in 2050, 64,000. The percentage growth of denominations is higher or equal to the percentage of growth of the Christian population and growth of congregations since 1900.

Globally the largest Protestant/ Independent congregations, and fastest growing mega-denominations, are located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

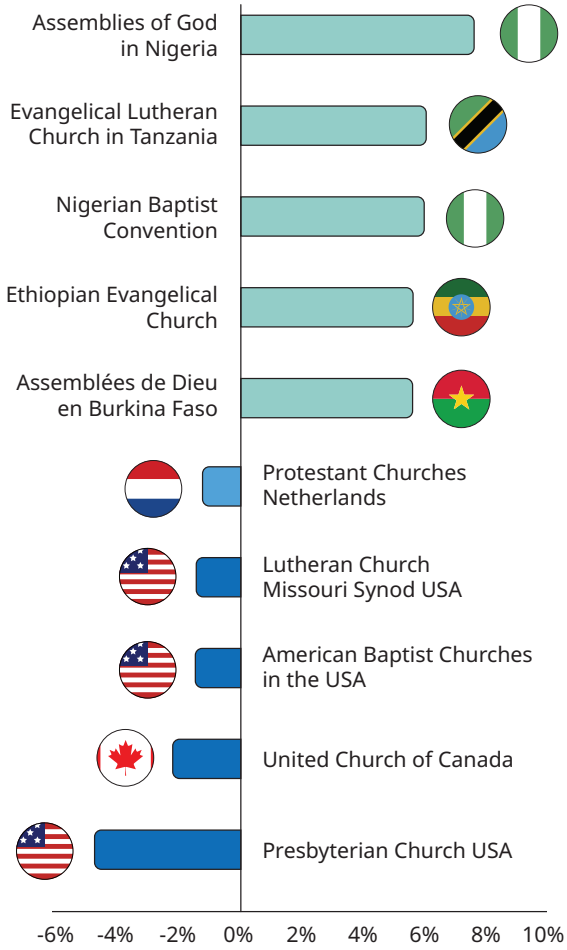
LARGEST INDEPENDENT DENOMINATIONS



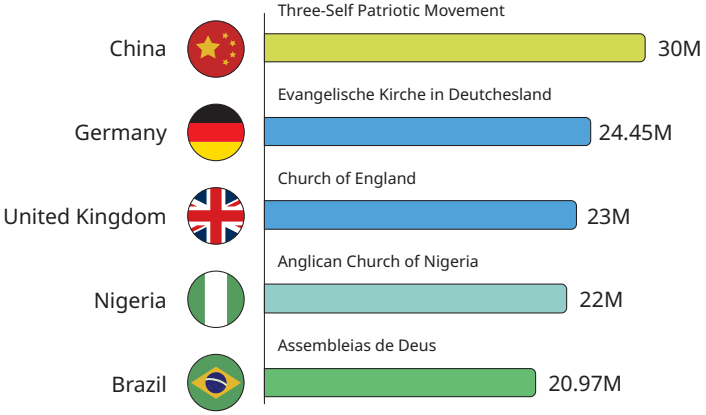
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed July 2023, M = Million

CHANGE IN LARGE DENOMINATIONS

Fastest Growth and Decline, 2000-2015



LARGEST PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

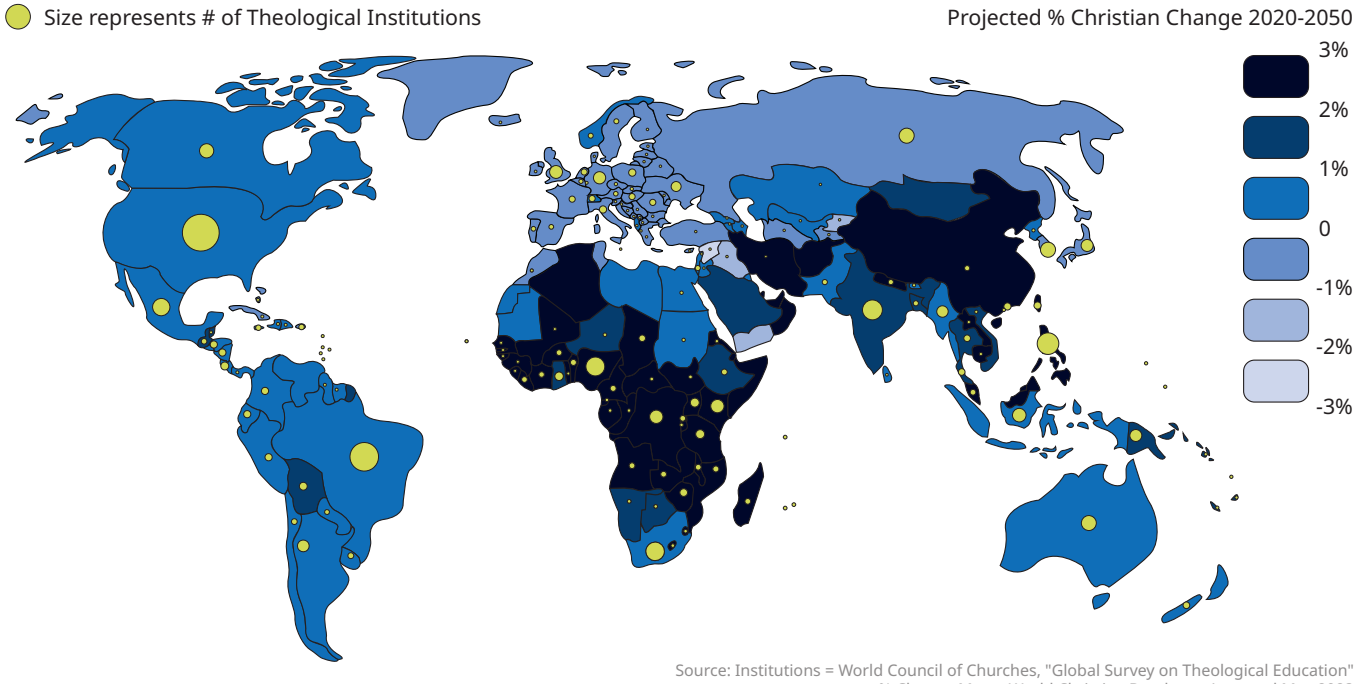


Source: World Christian Database, Accessed July 2023, M = Million

Source: World Christian Database, Accessed July 2023; Protestant Churches with 1M Membership or more

STRUCTURES OF FORMATION

GLOBAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION INSTITUTES



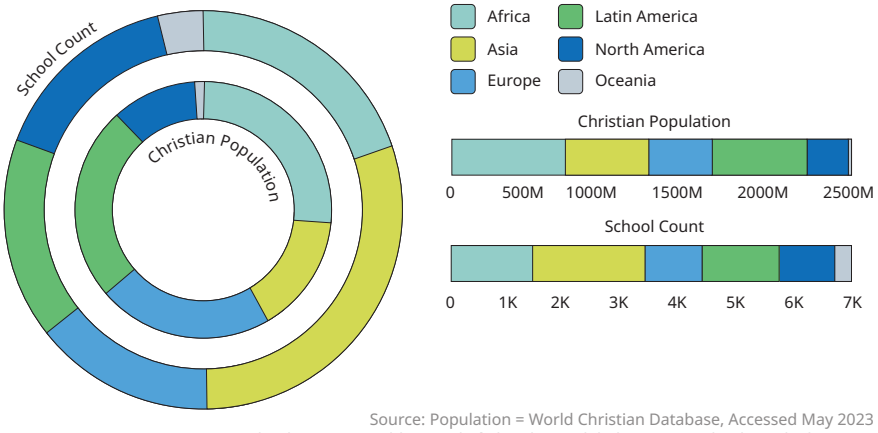
Source: Institutions = World Council of Churches, "Global Survey on Theological Education"
% Change Map = World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023

INSTITUTIONAL IMBALANCE

Africa and Latin America remain under-resourced with theological schools while North America, with a steady or declining Christian population, possesses an abundance of such institutions.

The larger network of institutions in Asia is likely due to over a century of Western missionary investment in countries throughout the continent.

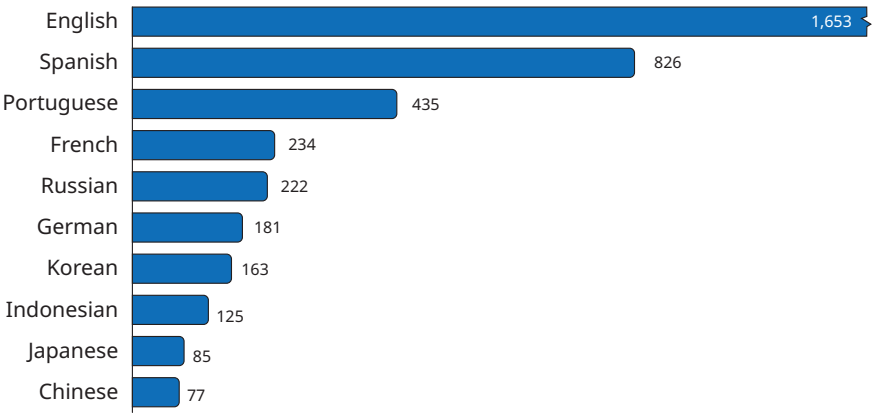
OF INSTITUTIONS VS POPULATION



Source: Population = World Christian Database, Accessed May 2023
School Count = World Council of Churches, "Global Survey on Theological Education"

Africa and Latin America remain under-resourced with theological schools.

INSTITUTIONS BY LANGUAGE



More Christians speak Spanish than any other language, even though English-speaking institutions outnumber Spanish institutions two-to-one. Chinese and Tagalog are the fifth and seventh most prevalent mother tongues respectively among Christians globally. These two language groups demonstrate the need for contextualized structures of formation.

Source: World Council of Churches, "Global Survey on Theological Education"

UNDERSTANDING POLYCENTRIC

CHRISTIANITY




MAJORITY WORLD MISSION MOVEMENTS
pg. 66
RISE OF AFRICA
pg. 60
RISE OF ASIA
pg. 48
EVANGELICAL
CATHOLIC
ASIA
POLYCENTRIC GLOBAL MISSIONS
pg. 35
AFRICA
PENTECOSTAL
POLYCENTRIC RESOURCE MOBILIZATION
pg. 41

POLYCENTRIC GLOBAL MISSIONS

Décio de Carvalho, Larry W. Kraft, Stephanie K. Kraft, Rosemary W. Mbogo, Stephen N. Mbogo

Understanding Polycentric Mission

Any discussion of the future of 'polycentrism' must begin with the evolution of its definition as applied to Christian mission. In 2009 Kirsteen Kim drew attention to geographic centres of influence, 'from one centre (in the West, for example) to "the rest"'.[1] In 2016 Kirk Franklin and Nelus Niemand highlighted the global character of Christianity, having progressed 'from being solely a "EuroAmerican religion" to a global one'.[2] Patrick Fung called it 'from all nations to all nations'.[3] Place mattered.

The discourse matured, however, as Allen Yeh explored polycentricity as 'from everyone to everywhere.'[4] Geography was still important, but not exclusive. The 'who' that was going was also critical. Culture, platform, context, gifting, capacities—these all became integral considerations for the 'poly' (many) receiving and sending centres. Joseph Handley helps highlight the importance of the concept, asserting that that polycentrism meant 'many centers, from everyone to everywhere'.[5]

To lessen the hold of some constraining paradigms that once defined those centers, the authors here elected to circumvent binary terms such as Global North and Global South. We intentionally abstain from using polarizing terms like developing/developed worlds, majority/minority worlds, or even Two-Thirds World. We refer to continents and countries by their names to avoid inappropriate clustering and unnecessarily limiting constructs.

Biblical and Historical Models

Mission has been polycentric from the start. Jerusalem was the church's first mission centre.[6] Following persecution, the church scattered across the Roman world as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the message to Jews only.[7] However, some from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and preached to Greeks as well and many Gentiles believed.[8] Antioch then became the centre for Paul's missionary journeys and of documented church planting throughout the Roman empire. This Antiochian church launched missionaries to Asia Minor. From there Paul then invited migrant Jewish believers living in Europe to become another mission centre, and so God continued to raise mission initiatives from diverse fields.

In the 20th century newer mission centres emerged in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[9] In Latin America, for example, mission efforts began shortly after the first churches were established there, well preceding the 1910 Edinburgh Conference.[10] Timothy Halls observed that Panama 1916 reflected one of many missiologies enacted in Latin America at the time, saying, 'As Latin America was filling up with the gospel [...] it found its paths to the rest of the world.'[11] In 1987 Luis Bush invoked the common meaning of Panama 1916 at the first COMIBAM congress, saying, 'In 1916, Americans [...] declared Latin America to be a mission field, today we gather in São Paulo to declare Latin America to be a missionary force.'[12] Panama 1916 defined a new gospel center and 1987 marked its commitment to grow.

> ***"Mission has been polycentric from the start. "***

The 2016 WEA-MC Global Consultation in Panama[13] highlighted this diversification of mission centres.[14] Bertil Ekström, formerly WEA-MC director, referred to the Panama Canal as 'a sort of a metaphor for an increasingly polycentric world, and for the church as well'. He further noted that as the Holy Spirit sent people into God's mission, he drew from 'most of the corners of the world' and God's people were sent 'to all the nations'.[15]

Recent decades have seen phenomenal changes,[16] as missionary work has become a wonderful mosaic of peoples, cultures, flavors, sounds, and much more.[17] Fung observes, "Today we see churches of all sizes from around the world involved directly in cross cultural ministries (and) partnering with a mission agency is just one of many options."[18] Unlike traditional agencies, many African churches see themselves as centers of mission, bypassing agencies even where they exist. The Assemblies of God-Kenya send missionaries directly to the unreached. This is also happening in smaller churches like the Deliverance Church (Ngong Vet, Kenya), who are sending missionaries to an unreached group abroad. Perbi and Ngugi, working to mobilize the African Church, note, "The history of the World Christian movement is the story of the collaboration between local churches and mission agencies (which) God has used... to advance the gospel right from the first century to date. These structures enrich each other and accomplish more together."

There is great conversation and effort to find equally beautiful and adequate ways to collaborate and not compete. This is an ongoing journey. Six areas are worth further examination on this journey, with three highlighting contemporary shifts and three identifying opportunities for polycentric mission.

> ***"There is great conversation and effort to find equally beautiful and adequate ways to collaborate and not compete."***

Contemporary Polycentric Shifts

Methodology

Despite global demographic shifts, deployment from historic sending centres continues.[19] The Africa Inland Mission (AIM), for example, keeps a hierarchical structure, but collaboration and cooperation now define its methodology to 'see a church for every people group in Africa'.[20] Previously, the question was 'How does AIM accomplish its mission?' Now they ask, 'How do we (including local partners in the field) accomplish our mission?' AIM's African mobilization hubs in Kenya and Tanzania, with a majority being non-AIM staff, reflect this reality. Retaining their objectives, the driver's seat is occupied by locals and partners.[21] Key positions, including regional offices, are now led by Africans.[22] This is novel, since AIM remains a Western agency.

Living interculturally is one way that mission agencies formed in the 1800s can fulfill their mandate in new mission contexts.[23] AIM leadership affirms that living interculturally 'creates a culture within an organization that is recognizable and comfortable, so that not just US citizens but also Nigerians feel comfortable, while all are feeling uncomfortable as well.'[24]

Education

Polycentric mission warrants a devolved, multisectoral approach to educational administration and management. In all educational processes, students, teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers must be intentionally, proactively, mutually, passionately, and consistently involved. Once-receiving fields that are now sending must raise contextual issues to discover homegrown solutions. Traditional sending institutions can no longer monopolize defining terminology. Many current educational approaches were colonial-era legacies that have undergone little or no review. This has inadvertently affected the quality of education, advanced irrelevance and fragmentation in curricula, and immensely contributed to rising societal inequalities. Gaps created by these inequalities resulted in inefficient educational processes exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Polycentrism offers great potential for the design of educational policies and programmes,[25] the improvement of education globally,[26] and the creation of unique programme designs for specific contextual needs.[27] Acknowledging that the history of education is deeply integrated with the history of missions and missionary work, missional leaders, policymakers, and all stakeholders in the education sector can reclaim lost territory to make an impact for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Mental Health

Mental health has a direct correlation with wellbeing and the ability of individuals and communities to flourish.[28] Recent decades saw increased globalization and glocalization as millions traversed the globe for short-term missions and tourism of all kinds, including religious, fitness, education, and entertainment. While these movements enhanced the well-being of some and promoted positive achievements in life or organizational mission, it also left others in poorer mental health due to broken relationships, failed projects, and unmet expectations.[29]

Polycentric mission can enhance people's capacity to focus on their strengths and offer knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes globally. The internet increases the capacity to share beyond local contexts. Social media platforms facilitate sharing images, ideas, skills, and all manner of knowledge. While some successfully create thriving businesses, mission agencies, and educational ventures, others succumb to unhealthy consumerism and frustration. These vast opportunities have led to vices such as cyber bullying, cyber insecurity, and internet addiction. Hence, one of the main tools of polycentricism, the internet, has simultaneously contributed to poor mental health among many communities.

Opportunities For Polycentricism

Research

As God wills and gives capacity, polycentric mission will benefit increasingly from research to mobilize the Church's best-suited representatives to their most-appropriate places of service.

Historically, mission deployment has begun with an analysis of need. At the First Lausanne Congress in 1974, Ralph Winter advocated for the prioritization of unreached people groups. This set the stage for focused deployment based on relative lack of gospel access.[30] By the turn of the century, the church had relatively efficient listings of the world's people groups.[31] Refinements of the strategic definitions of 'need' then followed. Patrick Johnstone categorized long lists of people groups into a pragmatic two-tier hierarchy of 15 affinity blocs and 251+ people clusters.[32] People clusters are now widely recognized as 'useful for big picture thinking [...] strategy development and resource allocation'.[33] The Joshua Project affirms 'the people cluster concept can lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness as the missions force works to make disciples of all nations'.[34]

In addition to need, analyses of affinity can and shall be a source of wisdom for polycentric deployment. Models like the Cultural Dimensions Theory can help cross-cultural workers recognize inter-personal challenges and lower relational barriers.[35] Tools like 'The World Values Survey' can give ambassadors for Christ enhanced understanding of their own and others' values to make relationship-building more thoughtful and authentic.[36]

These emerging resources promoting cultural appreciation of the 'other' also will aid strategic intercession, as research and prayer can be two sides of the same coin. Through informed awareness of the resources of the global church, the needs of the world, and the recognition that no one can do everything, everyone can do something. Intelligent and effective prayer for the whole world can happen anywhere and everywhere.

Migration

Migration has historically been a part of mission. Yaw Perbi asserts that 'Africa's 500,000 international students (10 percent of the global population) are the African diaspora's "best-kept secret." Even if 50% of them are Christians, that's a 250,000-strong army for the Great Commission!'[37] And as Nzathan Moore and Victoria Bfreeze note, 'the surge in the number of African students in China is remarkable. In less than 15 years, the African student body has grown 26-fold, from just under 2,000 in 2003 to almost 50,000 in 2015.'[38] Perbi and Ngugi summarize, 'Christian students in restricted nations [. . .] can be considered a modern mission force funded by hard-to-access nations that need missionaries.'[39]

Further, economic migration continues to create special access to countries not open to traditional missionaries. Kenneth Ross, for ex-

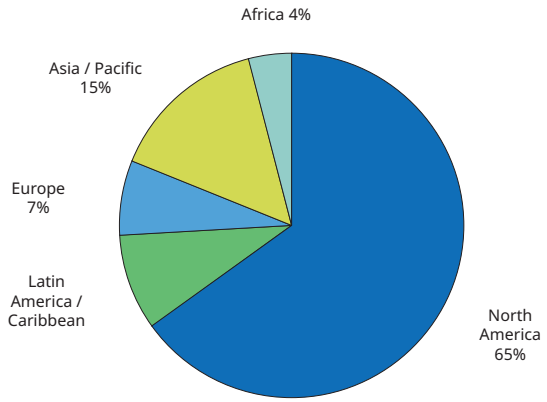
ample, associates the economic hardships in Africa with migrant missionaries.[40] It remains a responsibility of the church in Africa, Latin America, and Asia to be intentional in training migrant believers so that, as they go abroad they can, as with Priscilla and Aquila, be effective witnesses to the gospel.

Resource Mobilization

Mission may not be global at all unless funding for mission is a global reality.[41] While most evangelical wealth is currently held by believers in North America,[42] the simultaneous challenges that face a polycentric church are: (1) how to encourage generosity and accountability in those who hold wealth, (2) how to create healthy channels between those who hold more wealth and those who hold less wealth, and (3) how to create new sources of funding.

> ***"Mission may not be global at all unless funding for mission is a global reality."***

Kirk Frankl in and Nelus Niemandt examined data from five consultations convened by the Wycliffe Global Alliance in 2013–2014 on 'Funding God's Mission'.[43] One goal of this research was to ensure that leadership from the church worldwide could contribute 'as equal partners' in order to 'provide a balanced influence on mission strategy for mission agencies'.[44] Through the listening process, 19 'Principles for Funding' were developed.[45] These principles are pertinent beyond the Wycliffe Alliance and, indeed, beyond agency and church structures.



Source: www.operationworld.org DVD 2010 & World Bank.

Figure 1: The Income of Evangelical Christians 2020

With this expanding collaboration, we can anticipate a wellspring of new resources for missions.[46] God's resources are as boundless as His love. He has collectively placed into our hands and our hearts all that we need to fulfill his commission.

Conclusion

The outworking of increased polycentrism is complicated, but the rewards are greater. With biblical roots, historically-adaptable structures, researched support, and excellent training, healthy ambassadors for Christ can and will disperse globally. There are effective ways to identify, equip, and deploy them, and there are resources to support them to obey the call of Christ. The church of Jesus Christ will send the best at his behest.

Endnotes

1 Kirk Franklin and Nelus Niemandt, "Polycentrism in the missio Dei," HTS *Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no.1 (2016).

2 Ibid.

3 Patrick Fung, "Cooperation in a Polycentric World," 5.

4 Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: 21st Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (IVP Academic, 2016).

5 Joseph Handley and Micaela Braithwaite, "What Is Polycentric Mission Leadership? What the Trinity, Scripture, and Orchestras Can Teach Us About Decision-Making in the Church," *Lausanne Movement*, September 20, 2022. https://lausanne.org/about/blog/what-is-polycentric-mission-leadership.

6 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

7 Acts 11:19

8 Acts 11:20–21

9 Though data is limited, the Middle East was another historic, growing, mission centre. We would be so enriched to learn more of the history of mission in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

10 In 1908 in Brazil, the Brazilian Baptist Convention supported North American and indigenous missionaries in Chile. In 1910 the Brazilian Presbyterian church sent a missionary to Portugal. In 1911 the Brazilian Baptist Convention sent their first missionary to Portugal, followed by a second worker in 1925. In 1928 the Missão Evangélica Caiuá convened as an indigenous agency focused on the tribal peoples of Brazil. In 1948 MEVA, with a similar vision, was established. In 1946 in Peru, AMEN convened, which was established by Pastor Juan Cuevas to reach indigenous groups in Peru, later growing to send missionaries overseas.

11 Timothy Halls, from a verbal presentation at the WEA-MC Global Consultation, Panama 2016.

12 Ibid.

13 The location, Panama, was chosen to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1916 conference.

14 'The Panama conference (1916) originated as a reaction to the Edinburgh World Mission Conference (1910), as mission organizations who worked in Latin America were not invited. The Edinburgh organizers considered Latin America to already be evangelized by the Roman Catholic Church. The Panama organizers disagreed, and as a result, various North American and European mission societies formed the Committee on Cooperation in Latin America (CCLA in 1913) to discuss mission to Latin America. In 1916 it was calculated that 1% of the population of Latin America was Protestant. In 2014 the figure was nearly 20% (Pew Research). The world is changed.' (from an All Nations Christian College article).

15 Bertil Ekström, from a verbal presentation at the WEA-MC Global Consultation, Panama 2016.

16 See Patrick Johnstone, The Future of the Global Church, 238–239. Johnstone notes that in 2000 there were just over 200,000 cross-cultural missionaries, most from North America and Asia, followed by Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. By 2010 Asia had the majority, with expansion in Korea, India, and China. Africa and Latin America saw much growth in that period as well. This resource provides well-researched data from 1900 to 2010 and estimates for the period from 2010 to 2050. Among other aspects, he points to church growth, population growth, mission, migration, health issues, and economic changes.

17 Personal testimony of a missionary who, with his wife and children. experienced this in the late 90s in Central Asia. For seven years, they were part of a multicultural church-planting team, formed by one family from South Korea, one from the UK, one from the US, and one from Latin America. He testified that it is not only possible or doable, but actually of great value and benefit for demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ among those who have not yet heard of or received him.

18 Ibid p.9

19 AIM, with its origins in the US, has operated in East Africa for 135 years (1885–present). Anthony Swanson currently serves as AIM's East Africa regional executive officer.

20 Personal interview with Anthony Swanson by Dr Steven Mbogo, April 2023. Swanson notes that AIM has experienced a drop of about 100 missionaries in the last 10 years, but missionary numbers to East Africa have generally remained constant.

21 Ibid.

22 AIM's central region is led by an African from Botswana.

23 Catholic missiologist Antony Gittens is among those that advance 'living interculturally'. Anthony Gittins, Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis.

24 Interview with Anthony Swanson.

25 The involvement of multiple stakeholders would contribute to diverse beneficial perspectives. For example, education should provide opportunity for choice where 'students should be offered a diverse range of topic and project options, and the opportunity to suggest their own topics and projects, with the support to make well-informed choices' The Future of Education and Skills 2030: The Future We Want. OECD, 2018, https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/about/documents/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf.

26 Ibid. The collaborative decision-making embedded in polycentric processes could have global impact. A multifaceted approach to dealing with unequitable outcomes of education can bridge the rampant issues of access to quality education. For example, education needs to be integrated where "learners should be given opportunities to discover how a topic or concept can link and connect to other topics or concepts within and across disciplines, and with real life outside of school."

27 Ibid. The engagement of local and regional communities in decision making would address specific contextual needs. For example, education should be relevant where "learners should be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. This requires interdisciplinary and collaborative learning alongside mastery of discipline-based knowledge" (OECD, 7). The engagement of local and regional communities can lead to unique programme designs for specific contextual needs. Education should be relevant where ‹learners should be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. This requires interdisciplinary and collaborative learning alongside mastery of discipline-based knowledge.'

28 Won Ju Hwang and Hyun Hee Jo, "Impact of Mental Health on Wellness in Adult Workers," Frontiers in Public Health 9, no. 743344 (Dec. 16 2021), doi:10.3389/fpubh.2021.743344 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8716594/

29 Rosemary Wahu Mbogo. "Biblical Foundations of Short-term Missions (STMs) and Its Implications for Christian Higher Learning." Universal Journal of Educational Research 7. no. 6 (2019): 1395–1401. 10.13189/ujer.2019.070607

30 Ralph Winter (https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2022-11/ralph-winters-and-the-people-group-missiology)

31 David Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia of 2001 contained the first published, full list of the known ethno-linguistic people groups of the world.

32 Patrick Johnstone, "Affinity Blocs and People Clusters," Mission Frontiers, March 1, 2007.

33 https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/why_people_clusters

34 Ibid.

35 Created by anthropologist Geert Hofstede. https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/

36 https://www.iffs.se/en/world-values-survey/

37 Perbi & Ngugi, Africa to the Rest, 124.

38 Nzathan Moore and Victoria Bfreeze. "China has overtaken the US and the UK as Top Destination for Anglophone Students" Quartz Africa, June 30, 2017.

39 Perbi & Ngugi, Africa to the Rest, 71.

40 'A new (or recovered) pattern of missionary activity is emerging in which the poor take the gospel to the rich. Africa is the world's poorest continent and unsurprisingly the one from which the greatest number of migrants originate. It is also the continent with the most vibrant expansion of Christian faith. Hence many migrants come from the new heartlands of Christianity and bring the flame of faith to the old centres in the north where the fire is burning low.' Kenneth Ross, "Polycentric Theology, Mission, and Mission Leadership," Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies 38, no 3 (July 6, 2021): 218.

41 2020 income data from: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.ADJ.NNTY.PC.CD. 2020 evangelical projection from data of Operation World 2010 DVD http://www.orperationworld.org/

42 Kirk Franklin and Nelus Niemandt, "Funding God's Mission: Towards a Missiology of Generosity", Missionalia 43, no. 3 (2015): 390. http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-3-98.

43 Kirk Franklin, "Funding," 385. The data was collected over 18 months, involving 145 people from 51 nations.

44 Ibid.

45 These principles included the awareness that God invites and enables the church worldwide to participate with him in mission; God creatively provides through a diversity of people, means, and resources; sharing resources is an interdependent, relational activity where all are valued and everyone graciously gives and receives; sharing resources must be sensitive and responsive to multiple cultures and contexts; and 'in the process of giving and receiving, the dignity of all is honored and valued through respectful relationships and friendships'. See Ibid, 401-402, for all 19 principles.

46 For example, women are likely to become an ever more significant philanthropic force. See Barna Research, The Impact of Women, The State of Generosity Series, Volume 6.

Authors

Décio de Carvalho is Brazilian. He served with Operation Mobilization for 22 years, on the ship Doulos, as founding member and director of OM Brazil, and on a church planting team in Central Asia. He served as Director of RECOMI - Puerto Rico Missions Network, and Executive Director of COMIBAM.

Larry W. Kraft is a missionary with OC International. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University and Fuller School of World Mission, Larry is an ordained elder in the US and Brazilian Presbyterian churches. He is OC's Global Director of Research Emeritus and a Lausanne Catalyst for Research and Strategic Information

Stephanie K. Kraft serves the Global Research Team of One Challenge. A dual Brazil-USA citizen, she is a UK Trustee of the Global Church Planting Network, an WEA-MC Associate, and is an ACC Coach with the ICF. She is married to Larry, a mother of two, and grandmother of three.

Dr Rosemary W. Mbogo is director for the Institute of the Study of African Realities, the research and consultancy arm of Africa International University, Nairobi, Kenya. An educator specializing in Christian higher education leadership and administration, she is married to Dr Stephen Mbogo. They delight in serving the Lord together.

Dr Stephen N. Mbogo serves as the international CEO of African Enterprise International, a mission agency serving across Africa. He is also the African Regional Director of Lausanne in EPSA and the Chairman of Movement Day Africa. He is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

POLYCENTRIC RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Redina Kolaneci, Kehinde Ojo, Nydia García-Schmidt

Biblical Call to Generosity

The biblical call to generosity is a central theme throughout the Bible. It emphasizes the importance of embracing and living out our identity as stewards of God's world, stewards of financial resources, stewards of our relationships, and stewards of the gospel.

Today, significant numbers of Christians worldwide are responding to the biblical call to generosity by giving to their local churches and for fulfilling the Great Commission. Many are going beyond just giving financially to kingdom work. They are praying for mission workers and caring for them. They are volunteering their time to serve local causes and are witnessing for Christ to their families, in their workplaces and local communities.

> *"The biblical call to generosity is a central theme throughout the Bible."*

Although it is easy to paint a rosy picture of Christians embracing the biblical call to be generous, we would do you a disservice if we did not acknowledge another dimension of this reality. As our world continues to experience dramatic change, significant shifts are also affecting every aspect of Christian ministry including how Christians give to God's mission.

The church worldwide has the financial resources to fulfill the Great Commission, but it is failing to do so. According to research by 'The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity' at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the annual income of all church members worldwide in 2022 was $53 trillion. However, giving to any Christian causes was $896 billion, while giving to missions was $52 billion. This is only 5.78 percent of the money given to Christian causes of any kind.

The kind of activities that inspire Christians to give are changing. A whopping 94 percent of all giving in 2022 stayed mostly in the Christian countries. Eighty-two percent of this giving went towards local churches and 12 percent of the giving was directed to 'Home missions' in the same Christian countries.

Although Christians are generous, they are not investing significantly in fulfilling the Great Commission. Only 6 percent of Christian giving is directed towards mission amongst non-evangelised or unreached people groups. In fact, only 1.7 percent of giving is directed towards reaching the unreached with the gospel.

The ways in which new generations of Christians are being generous are changing. For example, millennials and Generation Z are giving differently compared to Baby Boomers or Generation X-ers.

In some parts of the **Global North giving to churches is declining** and in parts of the Global South the church has not yet developed authentic biblical teaching on generosity.

Growing numbers of **churches and ministries are competing** for a limited pool of resources without much understanding of how to engage in raising funds effectively.

As R. Mark Dillon puts it, 'Successful leaders must possess the theological vision to recognise the necessity of asking, the joy of giving, and the beautiful collaborative nature of advancing the kingdom.'[1]

In this article we delve into some of the challenges for promoting biblical generosity and raising funds for fulfilling the Great Commission in different parts of our world.

Challenges for Polycentric Resource Mobilization

'If every culture has received the great commission, then every culture has the privilege of supporting the great commission.' – Scott Morton, Navigators

The idea of polycentric mobilization of resources is expected and should be the norm given the perspective shared by Scott Morton. When everyone participates in the privilege of giving and receiving, the kingdom of God is built, and God alone takes all the glory. Giving in this instance is not limited to cash, but the concept of generosity of time, talent, and treasures is promoted.

Below are five of the challenges associated with polycentric resource mobilization.

Data collection and collation

There are some challenges associated with collecting and collating giving data especially in the Global South. Einstein's famous quote which states that, 'Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted' is very much applicable here. Although there are inequalities of wealth across the globe, there are not inequalities of opportunities. Every culture has resources that can be used to support missions and ministry in the local context. Many of the giving and generosity that takes place in the Global South is more in the form of generosity of time and talents than in treasures. When giving takes place in the form of treasures, it is not always monetarily. People give resources that are precious and in many cases is not easily translated to cash. Such giving of one's time and presence is of value in the context where this takes place and can be of a higher value than money. The fact that it cannot be monetized makes it more challenging to measure and sadly often ignored in mission circles as tangible.

Donor identity

Given the dominant role that money has played across cultures, othe r forms of giving have not been accorded significant status and acknowledged as important but different. As a result of this, many who have given this way historically do not feel supported and encouraged which inevitably reduce their giving capacity over time. In some ways also, the value associated with the giving has erroneously being tied to the giver, rather that God that has made the giving possible. Sadly, many donors and partners have in themselves tied their own identity to their giving and contributions to missions, and created some kind of imbalance, making those who are not in a position to give materially feel less of themselves, even though they could have given in many other authentic ways.

Emerging mission movements in the Global South

In recent years, many churches in the Global South have invested heavily in cross-cultural missions globally, using resources generated locally. The major challenge is that the record of such huge investment is not made available to the wider church in a way that helps document the impact of such generosity. Members of this national churches have made huge sacrifices to make their resources available but due to the fact that they are not readily captured in a way that makes it easier to measure these donations, the value is somehow lost in the immediate but not to God to whom these giving is directed.

Management of available resources

The allocation and stewardship of these resources have been of great concern. Many churches are poorly managed and boards even where existing do not function well. Deciding on how to effectively and efficiently channel these resources can be a daunting challenge and it has led to mistrust and consequently reduced the zeal with which people give to missions. Ensuring transparency and accountability in operations and financial matters is vital to building and maintaining trust.

Navigating interdependence

Sustainability of resources based on interdependence between local and foreign partners should be the ideal. However, when dependency is encouraged by both local and foreign partners, the goal of sustainability is not attainable, and dignity is lost. There is the need for foreign established missions to promote healthy collaboration and partnership that values all kinds of contribution in making missions possible. Making space for interdependency allows the growth of local initiative, innovations and creativity, enabling the locals to give out of their God endowed resources as necessary.

Opportunities for Polycentric Resource Mobilization

Opportunities to teach regularly about stewardship and generosity in every believer's heart language abounds. Teaching about God's call to generosity only when there is a financial need in the ministry, or the church gives the impression that giving is either a side issue or an uncomfortable topic to be avoided. Every worship service in a local church and every newsletter or thank you note a ministry leader or fundraiser writes are opportunities to teach and inspire Christians to be generous.

A key challenge and opportunity for every church or ministry leader here is to encourage their supporters or their congregation to move beyond 'acknowledging that God is the owner and provider of everything we have' towards a commitment to give because we want to honour God and obey His word. We give with purpose because we want to play our part in fulfilling the Great Commission. We give with joy because our gifts will encourage others to give. We give with compassion because our gifts will help others. We give freely because our hope does not rest on earthly things but on things eternal. Encouraging every Christian to live out their identity as a steward rather than a consumer in their daily lives can result in inspiring then to use their resources in countercultural ways.

Below are four opportunities for polycentric resource mobilization.

Listen to younger givers and get them excited about the Great Commission.

Once they have embraced the biblical call to generosity Millennials and Gen Z donors want to hear from authentic voices about your mission and your impact. They also want to know how their gifts will be used to reach more people with the gospel. What's more they are prepared to donate their time. In fact, over 70 percent of Gen Z and millennial donors say that they would rather donate their time over money. Offering other ways for these young donors to get involved with your mission can enable them to play an important role in fulfilling a ministry's goals as well as their own.

Tell compelling mission stories and make participation in mission easy for everyone.

Tell stories of how God is working through your church or your ministry and how people's lives are being impacted by the gospel. Let the beneficiaries of your mission work speak for themselves. Gather and share their testimonies through videos, photos, and other media to illustrate mission impact. Tell stories of your workers and your ministry supporters also inviting them to share how they responded to God's call to be generous, to pray, to give, and to serve in the mission field.

Make participation in mission easy by providing easy to use and inspiring resources for prayer, as well as a variety of ways to give and to volunteer. Simplifying the participation steps and processes especially for the younger generations of Christians can increase their enthusiasm and participation in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Utilise new technologies and media channels

In different parts of the world churches and ministries today are using new technologies and social media tools in worship and everyday ministry life. These technologies and tools can be used creatively to motivate Christian from all walks of life to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Video, for example, can be a powerful tool to connect workers from the mission field with a church community or a group of supporters. Social media campaigns can engage a whole

segment of young stewards who would not think of writing a cheque or signing up to volunteer their time via a leaflet they got in the mail. Refreshed websites and social media posts can keep a large community of believers up to date with the progress of a Great Commission project they might be praying for and giving to. Using new technology and social media channels will increasingly become a responsibility of church and ministry leaders to engage their congregation or Christian community of supporters in ways they are familiar with.

Say thank you to God and His people

Rejoicing in God's provision through his people and expressing our gratitude God and to every Christian who joins in our mission are the natural response to God's work within our congregations and supporter communities. Showing heart-felt appreciation to generous stewards can nurture their faith and deepen their commitment to God's mission.

> ***"Showing heart-felt appreciation to generous stewards can nurture their faith and deepen their commitment to God's mission."***

Regional Case Studies

Global West: Reimagining Fundraising

This case study delves into how a Christian ministry in the United Kingdom applied integrated biblical principles and best practices of fundraising to revitalise their fundraising efforts. This enabled them to deepen their relationship with current supporters, engage younger donors, and reach their fundraising goals.

Challenges

For several years this ministry struggled to secure adequate financial support for their mission initiatives. The supporter base kept getting smaller and the efforts to engage with new people seemed to bear little fruit. The mindset of 'we do not ask, we just inform people of what we are doing' didn't seem to work any longer.

The ministry faced the challenge of fostering sustainable supporter relationships while remaining true to their Christian values. Unwillingness to view fundraising as a ministry, lack of investment in growing giving and an outdated approach to raising funds seriously hindered this ministry's ability to fulfill their mission effectively. They also highlighted the urgency for a new fundraising and marketing strategy rooted in biblical principles.

Integration of stewardship and transparency

A couple of years ago, under a new leadership team, this ministry re-evaluated its fundraising paradigm, its messages and activities and decided to build its new fundraising strategy on sound biblical principles of stewardship. They started by promoting a new biblical paradigm of fundraising as an invitation to Christians from all walks of life who consider how God's calling to serve him aligned with the calling of the ministry. In this way, the ministry started to see and treat its supporters as partners in a shared mission cause.

Also, they began to emphasise open and transparent communication about the charity's financial practices and demonstrated how every donation directly contributed to their mission project. By providing comprehensive financial reports and testimonies of transformed lives, they established a foundation of trust and transparency that resonated with many of their new supporters.

Breathing new life into their prayer community

In the past this ministry had recognised the importance of prayer in their mission and created and distributed a prayer diary. But recently they went a step further than this they started monthly prayer meetings on Zoom, where supporters, local mission partners and workers are getting together to seek God's guidance and provision.

This emphasis on spiritual unity and reliance on God's provision has really strengthened the bond between the charity and its supporters, especially for younger supporters who want

to have a more meaningful relationship with the charity not just give money.

Encouraging supporters to be good stewards

Recently this ministry launched a roadshow where they visited 16 locations throughout the U.K. to meet with their supporters, to minister to them by sharing biblical teaching on the call to serve the unreached and the marginalised and to emphasise the spiritual significance of giving.

Through these face-to-face meetings in local churches they got the supporters to worship together, to learn from God's word together and to understand the spiritual significance of their gifts, fostering a deeper sense of purpose and commitment to the cause of the Great Commission.

Fundraising events that foster community

For the first time in its history this ministry mobilised and resourced church-based volunteers to host fundraising events that celebrated the joy of giving to missions. Volunteers hosted charity book auctions, concerts, and youth outreach programmes that not only raised funds but also promoted fellowship amongst Christians of different ages.

Impact and sustainable growth

The integration of biblical principles into their fundraising efforts led to a transformative impact on this charity's sustainability and growth. By investing in building relationships with supporters centred on prayer, transparency, and stewardship, the charity witnessed a significant increase in supporter engagement and financial support.

The emphasis on teaching biblical principles of stewardship and community events not only amplified their fundraising efforts but also strengthened the impact of their outreach programmes in the countries where their workers served.

Conclusion

Through the integration of biblical principles and best practices, this charity's fundraising transformation exemplifies the profound impact of aligning organisational strategies with the biblical teaching about stewardship and fundraising. Their commitment to growing generous stewards, transparency, and prayerful community building served as a cornerstone for sustainable growth and strengthened their ability to fulfill their mission of reaching the unreached with the good news of Jesus.

Latin America: A missions movement region in development

The birth of the Latin American mission's movement can be traced to 1985 with the birth of COMIBAM - Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana.[2] Almost forty years later we see this movement in a continued development. Evidence of this is the more than 12,000 Latin American missionaries of which it is estimated that 50 percent are in cross-cultural missions.[3]

> ***"What are we doing today to solidify teaching of generosity and stewardship as foundational topic in missiology?"***

We realize that behind this movement, there is a vibrant church that gives sacrificially and in obedience. However, considering the continued growth of the church in the southern hemisphere which is projected to be in 2050 at 76 percent[4], a consideration needs to be given to assess the giving potential of this 76 percent. What are we doing today to solidify teaching of generosity and stewardship as foundational topic in missiology? The theology of missions for the church today should follow the same example from the early church. Matters of economy were for the early church a theological issue.[5]

After teaching an online seminar on 'generosity and stewardship', we asked participants to fill in a short survey. The purpose of the survey was to measure the degree of teaching on these topics. We were able to gather excellent feedback, 171 responses which represent the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

1. 'Is it common to talk about generosity in your church?'

- 50 percent = Yes
- 50 percent = Split between No and Almost Never

2. Are there teachings in your language (educational resources) on stewardship, administration, accountability, generosity?

- 33 percent = Yes
- 67 percent = No

3. In your opinion, what is the relationship between generosity and accountability?

- 40 responses = Completely related
- 30 responses = No relationship or more or less related
- 68 = No response

The survey included more questions, however the data is currently part of a formal Ph.D. research and will be shared in a later date.

First, we acknowledge the efforts behind the church engaging and teachings on the subject. The Bible is considered authoritative on the matter. However, the higher percentage seem to indicate a need for more dialogue, teaching. It suggests a low engagement on these topics. Why?

We should not jump to quick and simplistic interventions. We need new frameworks to assess the situation. Similar to how other complex issues around the world are studied and analyzed, we also need to grow in our assessment of frameworks and interventions which recognize the complexity of an environment, however an environment that can change if the proper interventions are done.

All three questions are very much related, each providing a window into the context. They can help create dialogues and forums from where we learn and exchange experiences. Who is leading them? How often? We advocate for more spaces where we learn and discuss future ways to address our development needs.

For discussion:

- What frameworks do you consider are critical to understand the challenges in giving and stewardship in the region of Latin America?
- If research is key, how can we encourage more research and qualitative and quantitative data to emerge from within Latin America?

Endnotes

1 R. Mark Dillon. *Giving and Getting in the Kingdom: A Field Guide.* Moody Publishers, 2012.

2 Julio Guarneri. 'COMIBAM 1984-2000: Historical Analysis of a Majority World Missionary Network.' Dallas: Dallas Baptist University, 2017.

3 Sam Masters. 'A New Missionary Era' *Reaching & Teaching International Ministries.* https://rtim.org/a-new-missionary-era/. Accessed March 5, 2023.

4 Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing. 'World Christianity and Religions 2022: A Complicated Relationship.' *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46/1:71–80. 2022.

5 Justo Gonzalez. *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money.* Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002.

Authors

Redina Kolaneci is the founder of Christian Fundraising Consultancy based in the UK. For over two decades, Redina has taught and trained hundreds of local church and ministry leaders on biblical principles of stewardship, on growing generous givers in the local church, and much more. She was the first-ever Stewardship education consultant serving with Stewardship and is the author of What Does Love Require?, a series of Bible studies on generosity. Redina serves as a catalyst for the Lausanne Movement Ministry Fundraising Issue Network

Kehinde Ojo is the IFES program director for indigenous support development. Kehinde was born and raised in southwestern Nigeria. In 2011 Kehinde was invited by IFES to pioneer a new global program to help national movements in IFES become sustainable in their local fundraising for ministry effectiveness. His brief included developing a work plan for the program and identifying and equipping a global team to work with him. He trains and mentor leaders regularly in the Africa, Eurasia, Caribbean, and Latin America regions of IFES. Kehinde serves as a catalyst for the Lausanne Movement Ministry Fundraising Issue Network

Nydia R. García-Schmidt was born in Monterrey, Mexico. She and her husband Jim became members of Wycliffe US in 1999. She has held three regional leadership positions in the Americas, experiences which have provided deeper understanding of mission's context. She has witnessed the sacrificial generosity from the church but has also learned that one main challenge missionaries and organizations have is finding local financial resources. Nydia is currently doing a PhD with Oxford Centre for Mission Studies on generosity and stewardship. Nydia and her family have lived in the Philippines, Indonesia, US, and now lives in Mexico City with her husband Jim. Nydia and Jim have three adult sons, Andrew, Paul and Joseph.

RISE OF ASIA

Bong Rin Ro, Babu Karimkuttickal Verghese, Fenggang Yang

Economic Growth and Social Problems in Asia

Asia is the largest continent in the world. Among the total world population of eight billion people now, 60 percent live in Asia, and 92 percent of the Asian population is in South, East, and Southeast Asia. These proportions may not be properly perceived by most people who live in Asia or elsewhere, whether they are leaders or laypeople, and whether they have engaged in Christian missions or not. The lack of comprehension of these simple facts and their enormous social significance may have multiple reasons. Although these reasons cannot be fully covered in this article, we simply invite our readers to take a close look at Asia with a fresh perspective.

Economic Growth

The rise of Asian economies has received much attention. Japan was the first industrialized Asian country. After more than a century of economic development, Japan's nominal GDP (gross domestic product) has remained the third largest in the world, larger than that of Germany, the United Kingdom, or France. Since the 1980s, China has grown into the second largest economy and may overtake the United States as the largest in the next decade or so. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Four Asian Tigers (or Four Little Dragons)—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—maintained high levels of economic growth and joined the ranks of the world's wealthiest societies.

Following the models of Asian Tigers, the Tiger Cub Economies of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam have maintained steady growth in recent decades. India's economy has grown into a powerhouse. If economic growth continues in the coming decades, Asia may produce half of the global GDP by 2040. By 2050, the world's five largest economies are projected to be China, the US, India, Indonesia, and Germany.

However, there are some uncertainties of continual economic growth in Asia due to domestic politics and international relations. In fact, Central Asia has bogged down in domestic conflicts, and West Asia has been entangled in wars for decades. Moreover, the economic development is uneven, and economic disparity has remained a common social phenomenon.

The economic growths have led to a series of dramatic social changes. The most visible change is urbanization. East Asia and the Pacific is the world's most rapidly urbanizing region, with more than 50 percent of the population living in urban areas now.

> ***"East Asia and the Pacific is the world's most rapidly urbanizing region"***

By 2050, 68 percent of the world population may live in urban areas, and most of the increase is going to take place in Asia. The number of cities has increased, the size of the cities has grown, and some metropolises have expanded into megalopolises and conurbations that connect multiple cities and towns. Seven of the largest metropolises in the world are in Asia: Tokyo, Delhi, Shanghai, Beijing, Osaka, Mumbai, and Dhaka; and each has more than 20 million residents. Traditional ways of life in preindustrial communities can no longer continue as usual, and each year millions of new urban residents must learn to traverse in the new urban setting and live amid diverse cultures. Hundreds of millions remain in rural areas, and their lifestyle is also changing along with economic development. In the meantime, in most of the urban areas and underdeveloped rural regions, there are significant numbers of people living in poverty.

The second obvious change along with economic growth and urbanization is the rapid increase of the new middle class. In 2020,

about two billion Asians could be considered members of the middle class based on their levels of income. By 2030, the number could rise to 3.5 billion, accounting for two-thirds of the middle class in the world. In comparison, middle class membership in the Americas based on the same levels of income is expected to reach only 689 million by 2030. The Asian new middle class presents enormous consumer markets, thus shaping corporate strategies and driving international relations of both the developed and the developing countries. The members of this middle class are expected to adopt appetites for new technologies and more inclusive attitudes toward diverse cultures and lifestyles.

At the higher end of the wealth spectrum are the millionaires and billionaires (in US dollars). Asia leads in growth in these categories of rich and superrich people. Since around 2010, there have been more millionaires in the Asia-Pacific region than North America or Europe.[1]

The number of millionaires in Asia is projected to double from 30 million households now to 76 million by 2030. In Singapore, 13.4 percent of the population is projected to become millionaires, whereas China and India will have the highest numbers of millionaires in absolute terms. Meanwhile, 'Asia has over 950 billionaires, outnumbering all other regions'.[2] In between the billionaires and millionaires are the centimillionaires, who are primarily made up of tech titans, financiers, global CEOs, and heirs of the superrich. According to a report, the US has the largest number of centimillionaires (9,730), China the second (2,021), India the third (1,132), followed by the UK (968), Germany (966), Switzerland (808), Japan (765), Canada (541), Australia (463), and Russia (435).[3] The centimillionaires are more likely to establish residency in multiple countries, since multinational living is key to their wealth management strategies. They are important movers and shakers of national, regional, and global economic development, political change, and international relations.

Demographic Developments

Along with uneven economic development and rapid urbanization, Asian populations are on the move. Large numbers of people have been migrating both within country and across national borders. According to China's census of 2020, there were 376 million floating population—migrant workers who move around to find jobs. An estimated 24 million international migrant workers were hosted in the Asian-Pacific region. There were about seven million students undertaking their education outside of their home countries. In the United States, 70 percent of international students are from Asia. There were also 5.5 million refugees and asylum seekers from Asia who were forcibly displaced due to conflicts and wars such as the ones in Afghanistan and Myanmar.[4] Asian diasporas in Americas, Europe, and Africa have become significant presence in many countries, and they play important roles in local societies by linking the countries of their residence with those of their origin.

Together with the rising prosperity, there has been rapid decline of mortality rates and fertility rates, which lead to aging societies. In 2020, nine of the top 10 countries with highest number of people over the age 65 were in Asia: China (172 million), India (91 million), Japan (35 million), Russia (23 million), Indonesia (17 million), Pakistan (10 million), Thailand (9 million), Bangladesh (8 million), and South Korea (8 million). By 2050, one in four people in Asia, or about 1.3 billion people, will be over the age of 60.

"Together with the rising prosperity, there has been rapid decline of mortality rates and fertility rates, which lead to aging societies."

Birth rates have declined sharply in Asia. While a total fertility rate below the replacement level of 2.1 is now the norm for advanced economies, the lowest rates are found in East Asia, with only 1.2 births per woman. The world's lowest fertility rate is in South Korea, hovering around 0.7 to 0.9. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan follow closely, with China's rate at 1.3 in 2020. Indeed, about three in 10

women in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore are permanently childless. Many demographers and economists of labour markets have expressed concerns about the pending population crises in East Asia. The changing population structures will have important consequences to community life and social stability.

Religious Pluralism

Asia is home of multiple axial-age civilizations. Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originated in West Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism originated in South Asia, Confucianism and Daoism originated in East Asia, and there are also Shamanism and folk religions widely spread throughout Asian societies. Economic growth in Asia has given boosts to traditional cultures, including traditional religions. Meanwhile, atheism has been the official ideology in China, Vietnam, and North Korea. Asian products of films, cuisines, and practices of yoga, tai chi, and taekwondo have become popular in the West. Moreover, Buddhism, especially the various traditions that were formed or metamorphosed in East Asia, has found increasing reception in Europe and North America. Karma and reincarnation have entered the cultural conscience of many people in the West. On the other hand, Christianity has been growing in most Asian societies and diasporic communities around the globe.

In recent years and the near future, both the economic growth and social problems in Asia have been and will be more conspicuous in the People's Republic of China (mainland China). Besides the population crises described above, the rise of Asia has also come with increased risks of wars. After decades of peace in the post–World War II international order, the rising nationalism in the growing economies may lead to geopolitical rivalries, nuclear threats, and wars in some areas of South, East, and Southeast Asia.

Christian Missions In East Asia

The world has dramatically changed and is still changing in all areas of human civilization. Asia has also significantly changed in the last 50 years regarding political conflicts, socioeconomic development, educational and scientific advancement, and the resurgence of Asian living religions. Since the end of World War II, some countries in Asia have experienced rapid church growth, while there has been a decline in other nations.

Rapid Church Growth

It is exciting to observe the rapid church growth in several Asian nations.

Korean Church

Korea, which had been one of the poorest nations in the world during the Korean War (1950–1953) with a GNP (gross national product) of USD 67 in 1953, became one of the ten wealthiest nations in the world with a GNP of USD 34,189 in 2022. Before the first two American Protestant missionaries (Horace Underwood and Henry G. Appenzeller) arrived in Inchon Harbour on Easter Sunday in 1885, Koreans followed Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism. However, the Korean church's Total Evangelization Movement in the 1970s produced rapid church growth, evident from the so-called description 'Six New Churches Every Day'. In 2017, there were 10 million Protestants with 60,000 churches and 5.8 million Roman Catholics who comprise 11 percent of the 50-million total population in Korea.[5]

Philippine Church

Spain colonized the Philippines for 333 years (1565–1898). The Catholic population was over 81 percent of 110 million people in 2022. America colonized the country from 1898 until the Japanese invasion in 1942. The Philippines is the most Christianized nation in Asia. Filipino Protestants represent about 11–12 percent of the population. With a low GNP of USD 3,460 (2021), there were 10 million Filipinos in diaspora, including one million in the Middle East.

Singaporean Church

The island nation with 5.7 million population had a 19 percent Christian population in 2020. Among this Christian population, 63 percent was Protestants, and 37 percent Catholics. In 2016, 67 percent of Singaporean Christians were university graduates, highly educated

upper-middle-class people. Most Christians are ethnic Chinese (74 percent); the government is very sensitive about Chinese Christians witnessing to Malays (13 percent). The Pentecostal churches and the charismatic movement in the Anglican church brought spiritual renewal and church growth. With the highest GNP of USD 54,920 (2020) in Asia, Singapore Christians face materialism which challenges their faith.

Hong Kong Church

Hong Kong was under British colonial rule until 1997 when it became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Among the current population of 7.4 million, about 15 percent or more are Christian, two thirds of them Protestant and one third Catholic. Until recently, the numerous churches, parachurch organizations, Christian publishing houses, and seminaries had served as training bases of Christian ministries and missions for mainland China and Chinese diasporas. The Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism (CCCOWE) has networked with Chinese Christian churches around the world and encouraged evangelism to Chinese diasporas and cross-cultural missions. However, the political change of greater integration with mainland China in recent years has made it increasingly difficult for Hong Kong to serve as training bases. It has also led to emigration of many people, including Christians.

Taiwan Church

After World War II, Christianity once grew rapidly in Taiwan until the end of the 1960s. The 1970s began with political crises when the Republic of China in Taiwan lost its membership in the United Nations to the People's Republic of China. The Christian growth became stagnated amid social turmoil, political repression, and emigration. The Christian population has hovered around 5 percent of the total population of 23.6 million people. Christians in various traditions and social backgrounds played different but significant roles in the democratic transition from the 1970s to the 1990s. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan has become one of the freest societies in the world in terms of religion, press, and political participation. Many traditional and new religions are thriving. Christianity has grown, albeit slowly. Some charismatic churches have grown significantly and planted numerous churches in Taiwan and the diasporic communities around the Pacific Rim.

China Church

Mainland China has been under Communist rule since 1949, when there were about one million Protestants and three million Catholics. In the first three decades, there was severe suppression on all religions, including a ban between 1966 and 1979. In the era of economic reforms and opening to the outside world between the late 1970s and early 2010s, five major religions were allowed by the authorities, including Christianity (Protestantism) and Catholicism. Christianity had extraordinary growth in the reform era. According to the party-state authorities, there were 3 million Protestants and 3 million Catholics around 1980. By 2010, the number of Protestants reached 58 million and the number of Catholics 9 million, according to the Pew Research Center's estimates, which would be 5 percent of the total population. Several other sources have given much higher estimates.

> ***"If the Christian growth continues in a very modest rate, in one or two decades there will be more Christians in China than in any other country in the world."***

If the Christian growth continues in a very modest rate, in one or two decades there will be more Christians in China than in any other country in the world. In the new era under Xi Jinping rule since 2012, Christian churches have been under severe repression. Officially approved churches are under tightened control; house churches are banned with new regulations; and dozens of Christian leaders have been jailed, including Pastor Wang Yi, the Early Rain Presbyterian Church in Chengdu.[6]

Nevertheless, more than fifty thousand churches under the Three-Self Patriotic Movement

Committee remain open for worship service except during COVID lockdowns. There are probably more house churches remaining active in small groups and online meetings. Moreover, some house church leaders have actively mobilized Chinese Christians for overseas evangelistic missions. There are at least a few hundred missionaries from China working in Southeast Asia, Central and West Asia, and Africa.

Indonesian Church

Indonesia is the largest Islamic nation in the world, in which 87 percent of its total population of 273 million are Muslims. After the failure of the communist coup in 1965, President Suharto ruled Indonesia from 1965 to 1998 under the Pancasila Principles that recognized five major religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism). According to Pancasila, every Indonesian had to choose one religion against atheistic communism, and many chose Christianity. The church grew in Timor Island in 1965 with miraculous incidents; the average church growth from 1990 to 1995 was 12 percent. Since the fall of President Suharto in 1998 and the sharp reactions of fundamental Muslim groups against rapid church growth, the government authorities have applied more restrictive measures against Christian activities.

Thai Church and Myanmar Church

Thailand and Burma are two strong Buddhist nations, in which Buddhists consist of 94.5 percent and 80 percent of the countries' total population, respectively. In 2013, the ethnically Thai Christians numbered 183,000 (0.3 percent), and those from various tribal groups numbered 400,000, 42 percent of the total tribal population. Most of the three million Myanmar Christians are among the nine main tribal peoples, including Karens, Kachins, Shans, Chins, and others. They belonged to the Myanmar (Burma) Baptist Convention, which Adoniram Judson founded in 1813–1850. The tribal mountain people were primitive animists whom most ethnic Thai and Burmese Buddhists disregarded, but they responded positively to the gospel.[7]

East Asian Missionary Movement

The Great Commission is given to all Christians around the world. The concept of Asian missions started in the 1970s through the Lausanne Movement.

Asian Missions before Lausanne Congress

Before the Lausanne Movement in the 1970s, Asian churches sent cross-cultural missionaries to other countries. In 1912, the Korean Presbyterian Church (KPC) General Assembly commissioned three Korean missionaries (Park Tae-ho, Sa Byong-soon, and Lee Dayoung) to Shandong Province, China. Eight more missionaries went to China and served for 21 years (1937–1957) in 1921. In 1949, KPC Women's Missions Committee sent Chung Syung-won to Taiwan; in 1956, KPC sent one Korean couple (Choi Chan-yong and Kim Soon-il) to Thailand. The Christian students at Ewha Christian Women's University in Seoul sent two graduates to Pakistan in 1964. In 1968, Rev. David Cho founded the Korean International Missions (KIM) to train Korean missionaries.

Arise of Asian Congresses of Evangelism

Thousands of Asian church leaders attended the Lausanne International Evangelism and Mission conferences and the Asia Pacific Congress of Evangelism in Singapore in November 1968. The Asian church leaders started their national evangelism and mission conferences in their countries. The Japanese leaders held Japan Congress of Evangelism in Tokyo (1974), Kyoto (1982), Shiobara (1991), Okinawa (2000), and Kobe (2016). For the International Tokyo Olympics 2020, the Japanese church set a goal for the 2020 Vision for Japan in 2015 to increase the number of churches from 8,900 (as of the year 2000) to 10,000; the number of Japanese missionaries from 510 to 1,000; and the number of Japanese Christians from 543,816 to one million. Singapore held the Anglican Congress of World Evangelization (1989), the 4th Asian Baptist Congress (1992), and the Joshua Project 2000 in Southeast Asia Conference (2000). The Thai Church held Vision 2000 Thailand (1996) with a goal of 600,000 Christians (and 6,000 churches) from

260,000 (as of the 1980s). Other Asian nations conducted similar evangelism congresses.

Growing Asian Missionaries

Three Asian countries are especially noteworthy for sending many missionaries. First, the Korean church had sent 1,645 Korean missionaries to 87 nations by 1989; by 2021, however, the numbers spiked to 22,210 missionaries in 170 countries. The total estimated number of Korean missionaries, including those excluded from official statistics, is over 30,000. The Korean GNP per capita income increased drastically from USD 5,883 in 1990 to USD 34,189 in 2021. The rapid economic growth in South Korea in the 1990s helped the Korean church send more missionaries. The Korean World Missions Conference in 2006 launched the One Million Tent-Making Professional Missionaries Movement in 2020, mobilizing the whole Korean church for world missions.

The house church leaders in China conducted three Mission China 2030 Consultations in Hong Kong (2015); Jeju Island, Korea (2016); and Chiangmai, Thailand (2017); planning to send 20,000 Chinese missionaries by 2030. Chinese Christians wanted to emulate the 20,000 Western missionaries in China. There are now only 1,000 missionaries sent from mainland China.[8]

Operation World (2001) reported 44,000 Indian missionaries from 440 mission agencies, 60% working cross-culturally. The majority of Indian missionaries were commissioned from South India to the vast majority of the Hindu and Muslim population of North India, who had different languages and cultures. Over 440 Indian missionaries ministered in foreign countries.

The Asian economy rapidly developed in the twenty-first century; the Asian churches began to send many cross-cultural missionaries globally.

New East Asian Mission Strategies Changing Asia demands a new mission strategy to achieve the Great Commission. The main interest in missiological and theological discussions from 1960 to the 1990s in the Asian church was 'contextualization'. It promoted the independence of the national church from the colonial mentality of depending on foreign mission organizations and personnel, emphasizing the positive values of some of the traditional cultures.

Today, the new mission focus is 'globalization' because the world has shrunk to a global village with the massive development in communication and transportation. Each country has unique characteristics, and each national church must develop new mission strategies. Asian churches have applied several new mission strategies.

Cross-cultural Missionaries within the Country

Most Asian nations have many ethnic groups with different languages and cultures. Over 60 percent of 30,000 Indian missionaries work within India. Operation World reported that Myanmar had 3,160 cross-cultural missionaries with 40 mission agencies, but only 60 of those missionaries worked in other nations. Sri Lanka had 717 missionaries from 18 mission agencies, but only five of those missionaries worked in five other nations.[9]

Diaspora Missions

Millions of Asians immigrated to other nations in Asia, North America, and Europe, and Asian Christian immigrants established their overseas mission agencies to send cross-cultural missionaries. The Korean World Mission Council (KWMC) was founded in 1988 to mobilize Korean Americans at the Billy Graham Center of Wheaton College in Illinois, and Azuza Pacific University in California. Several Chinese overseas mission agencies were established in North America: Great Commission Center International (Thomas Wang) in Sunnyville, California; Ambassadors for Christ (David Chow), Paradise, Pennsylvania; Global Enrichment Mission Center (Susan Choo) in Irvine, California. Others were established in the United Kingdom, such as the Chinese Overseas Christian Missions (Mary Wong) in London.

Professional Missionaries

Most Asian nations, particularly ones in Southeast Asia, are not economically strong enough to send a large number of missionaries. The 2021 GNP per capita income in several Asian

countries were as follows: Malaysia (USD 11,109), Thailand (USD 7,066), Indonesia (USD 4,332), Philippines (USD 3,460), and India (USD 2,256). Therefore, strategies to send 'tent-making' professional missionaries who can support themselves on the mission field through their professions need to be developed.

Reach Foreign Residents in Each Nation

International students, businesspeople, foreign diplomatic residents, and many other foreign visitors reside in each nation. In essence, the mission fields came to our doorsteps. The domestic church must therefore find ways to reach these foreigners with the gospel. For example, many Korean churches started foreign language services for workers and students from Myanmar, Nepal, Indonesia, and many others.

Challenges in East Asia

Materialism and Secularism

A growing number of Christian young people either leave the church or become inactive in church when they finish their university education. Secular education and materialism have deeply affected their Christian faith, causing less interest in Christian missions.

Religious Persecution

Persecution against Christianity has sharply increased in the twenty-first century from three main anti-Christian forces: Islam, Communism, and Hinduism. Christians in Islamic nations (Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia) experience various degrees of persecution. Pakistan's blasphemy laws deem blasphemy against Islam punishable even by death. In Malaysia, strict Islamic laws forbid one to touch others' bodies or certain parts of their bodies. Indonesia's restrictions against the church grow daily, and so does China's increasing persecution against house churches. In the Northern Hindu states in India, radical Hindus have attacked Christians in their region.

Necessity of Spiritual Renewal

The task of the Great Commission involves spiritual warfare. The Asian church, particularly its leadership, needs to renew its spiritual life. The Fourth Lausanne Congress can significantly stimulate the Asian church to actively engage the Great Commission mandate of Jesus Christ and develop a specific new mission strategy for its own use.

The Rise And Irony Of India

By 2050, India's GDP is estimated to grow up to USD 30 trillion . However, the statistical figures of the economic growth of India are an irony. Its growth is a 'bubble', as the ground reality is less than prosperous.

"Persecution against Christianity has sharply increased in the twenty-first century from three main anti-Christian forces: Islam, Communism, and Hinduism."

According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects, India's population is expected to rise to 1.66 billion by 2050. That means all of them have to have food, shelter, and clothing, as well as to live with dignity, freedom, and fundamental human rights. According to studies conducted in 2022 by World Economic Forum and World Bank, adolescents and young adults (ages 15–29) comprise 27.2 percent of the total Indian population of 1.4 billion. By 2050, every fifth Indian will be an elderly person that will need to receive care. Though statistics would show India as a fast-growing economy, over 90 percent of the wealth is owned by about 10 percent of the population. The rich are becoming richer day by day, and the poor poorer.

In the 2022 Global Hunger Index, India ranked 107th out of the 121 countries. The largest number of people experiencing poverty in the world (228.9 million) lived in India in 2020, said the 2022 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). There are 1.77 million homeless people in India, according to the 2011 census consisting of single men, women, mothers, the elderly, and the disabled.

Regarding the quality of healthcare, India has just five beds for 10,000 Indians. The Human Development Report 2020 showed that out of 167 countries, India would rank 155th on hospital bed availability. About 1.34 doctor was responsible for caring 1,000 Indian citizens as of 2017. The infant mortality rate in India is the second highest in the world, as the World Health Organization (WHO) has recently reported in 2023. Regarding the quality of life, India is among the least happy nations, ranking 126 out of 150 countries. According to National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), 164,000 people committed suicide in 2021 alone. The WHO estimates that India has the 41st highest suicide rate globally, as of 2019.

National literacy rate was estimated at 74 percent in 2011. However, the real functional literacy rate would be only 30 to 40 percent. India is one of the most illiterate and poorest countries in the world. There are estimated 26.8 million disabled persons.

India has 766 districts and 640,000 villages. However, urbanization is growing at an alarming rate. These urban regions lack infrastructure. Urbanization also brings challenges to evangelism. Drugs, alcoholism, domestic violence, and human trafficking are major issues to be addressed. With the skyrocketing inflation and unbelievable disparity between the rich and poor, India is becoming a severely famished land. A large population may die of hunger due to the increasing unemployment rate. A number of financial institutions, banks, and business corporations are going bankrupt, and the investors suffer heavy loss. Foreign currency reserve is dwindling, and production is decreasing.

Foreign investors are reluctant to invest in India because of the nation's financial instability and violence toward certain ethnicities. Lies and fear prevail. The rich minority exploits and oppresses the poor majority, controlling the government through money and media to suit their right-wing agenda. Christians are among the most hounded communities in India. These socioeconomic and political disparities are detrimental to the implementation of the Great Commission.

Christian missions in India

India, the most populous nation in the world, is on the move. God who has put the name of India in the Bible (Esther 1:1, 8:9) is watching over her. The 1.41 billion souls living in this Asian subcontinent are precious to him.

To understand the rise of India and the impact of the Great Commission in the nation, three questions need to be discussed: What are the challenges that missionaries and believers face in India? Do we see any opportunities of evangelism despite, and even arising from, those challenges? What are some strategic ways to move forward to further the impact of the Great Commission in the nation?

Challenges

In order to follow the Great Commission in this land full of hardships, believers must be equipped to face challenges with courage and conviction, expecting and enduring them (2 Tim 3).

A reengineering of our mission is the greatest need. First, we must identify the challenges of evangelism in India today, both external and internal.

The external challenges include the following:

- increasing persecution and secularization;
- religious fundamentalism and nationalism;
- caste rivalries and social stigma;
- poverty and illiteracy;
- population explosion;
- migration and demographic changes;
- globalization and urbanization;
- political corruption and lack of transparency;
- and cultural conflicts and pluralism.

The internal challenges include the following:

- lack of vision for the Great Commission;

- leadership failure in inspiring and challenging the believers to win souls;
- complacency or shame in sharing the gospel;
- lack of systematic planning to reach the unreached;
- internal quarrels and disunity among the congregation members;
- lack of accountability and stewardship;
- lack of empowerment of women, children, and youth for gospel penetration;
- shortage of workers, sowers, and reapers;
- limited financial resources;
- lack of tears for the lost;
- lack of proper understanding of the Word and the world;
- lack of training for evangelism and discipleship;
- and lack of evangelistic tools, such as sufficient copies of the Bible.

Persecution

Persecution of Christians in India, which began in late 1990s, has now turned very vicious with the right wing religious and political ideology of making India a Hindu religious nation.

Historically, Christianity in India is birthed in blood, with the martyrdom of its first messenger St. Thomas two thousand years ago. Even today persecution is the biggest threat in India. Currently, the deadly cocktail of mixing religion and politics with an ideology of hatred is pushing the nation to anarchy and communal disharmony and bloodshed. The anti-conversion bill enacted by the few state governments has strengthened the anti-Christian communal terrorists to further torture Christians. In Gujarat's Dang District, hundreds of churches were burnt, and believers were brutally attacked in 1998. This culminated in the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines (54 years) and his two sons, Philip (11 years) and Timothy (6 years), in Manoharpur, Orissa, on 23 January 1999.[10]

Again, the world was stunned by the brutality of the anti-Christian violence that engulfed the jungles of Kandhamal, Orissa, from August 2008. Churches were burnt, Christians hounded out, and their houses plundered and torched. Journalist Anto Akkara, who wrote four books on Kandhamal carnage and produced three documentary films, revealed: 'Over 300 churches and nearly 6,000 Christian houses were reduced to ashes or damaged, rendering more than 56,000 people refugees in the jungle region . . . . Yet Christian faith stood out shining amid the ashes . . . . While more than 100 Christians became martyrs for their faith, hundreds of others were lucky to survive after they were brutally tortured for refusing to renounce their faith'.[11]

Since 2014, persecution of Christians in India has become almost a daily affair. Arson, looting, torturing, and killing of Christians, in vicious organized hate campaigns is turning as a pogrom of religious and ethnic cleansing of Christians in India by the fascist right-wing ideologists. From December 2022 to April 2023, there were a series of attacks in about 33 villages of Bastar, Chattisgargh, displacing about one thousand Christians from their own villages. Those displaced were threatened to denounce their Christian faith and convert to the 'majority's religion'. In refusing, they would have to leave their village or face dire consequences, even death.

Christians in India are attacked in three ways: physical, mental, and financial. Physically tortured, they are not allowed to work in their own farms or in those owned by others. Shopkeepers are threatened not to sell groceries or give government ration provisions to Christians. They are not even allowed to draw water from the public well.

In the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, hundreds of pastors and believers have been arrested on false charges and have been languishing in prisons for several months. In Manipur of Northeast India, hundreds of Christian houses, churches, and Bible schools were destroyed from 4 May 2023 onwards. There is no correct count for the numbers of believers killed or displaced. Thousands of the Manipuri Christians have become refugees in their own country. The violence and bloodshed in

the ethnic cleansing of the minorities in India have made international stakeholders reluctant to invest in India. This reluctance is primarily due to the erosion of democratic and secular values of freedom and justice.

Opportunities: The Blessed Minority

The Christians are a minority in India, but their contribution to the building of the nation is amazing. The Great Commission servants continue to labour in a variety of ways to bless and make India a great nation. Linguistically, India is a 'Babel of Tongues' with 1,652 mother tongues, most of them without modern scripts. Over the years, the Bible translators invested their lives to create modern scripts for over 200 indigenous Indian languages. Currently modernization of 180 more Indian languages is under way. Christian missionaries had a powerful impact on India's revolutionary development in various areas: literature, literacy, linguistics, printing and publishing, journalism, agriculture and horticulture, the construction of education facilities from kindergarten to universities, the liberation of slaves and untouchables. Christian missionaries worked to empower Indian children and women in the masculine society and introduced modern health education and healthcare. There is hardly any area where people of faith have not invested their lives to make India a modern nation. For instance, William Carey came to India in 1793 and lived here for 42 years, developed 41 Indian languages, and gave to India 23 new profitable modern items.[12]

Regarding its size, the Christian community in India today is minuscule. No exact figure is available. Latest official census identifies about 2.7 percent Christians out of 1.41 billion citizens. Those who oppose the gospel allege that there could be over 17 percent Christians, and this number is growing. They use this overestimation to justify their desire for religious and ethnic cleansing of Christians.

The Great Commission is not an option but a command. We are saved to save others. As Paul told Timothy: 'Do the work of an Evangelist . . . . Preach the Word. Be prepared whether the time is favourable or not'. Therefore, a slogan to execute the Great Commission effectively could be 'The Cross: Live and Share'. This is what India needs: never dilute the Cross, and never dilute the gospel message, as Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Father of India' once told missionary E. Stanley Jones. When Jones asked Gandhi, 'What would you, as one of the Hindu leaders of India, tell me, a Christian, to do to make Christ naturalized in India?' Jones writes, 'Gandhiji responded with great clarity: "First, I would suggest that all of you Christians, missionaries and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, practice your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central to Christianity. Fourth, study non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them, in order to have a more sympathetic approach to the people"'.[13]

For the effective implementation of the Great Commission, the congregation leaders have to take the lead. Passion for the perishing is the first requirement for being a leader. Systematic teaching and practice of evangelism should be launched in every church. Every leader should pattern Jesus the Leader to be an effective soul winner. Jesus Christ excelled in compassion, courage, confidence, command, communication, care, conviction, clarity, and charisma.

Regarding its size, the Christian community in India today is minuscule. No exact figure is available. Latest official census identifies about 2.7 percent Christians out of 1.41 billion citizens.

In addition to individuals interceding to the Lord, massive national prayer networks will strengthen the body of Christ. The first step of the Great Commission is prayer. Also, Bible, the Word of God, needs to be the centre of all our beliefs and behaviour. We need to seek, submit, store, spread, and be sanctified by God's Word. Every citizen of India has the

right to receive a copy of the Bible. This is the greatest challenge of the Great Commission.

To 'go' is the strategic Great Commission command. It is the mandate of every disciple of Christ. 'Good News to All: Each One Reach One' could be another slogan for fulfilling the Great Commission. Let us commit ourselves to share Christ systematically in our neighbourhood, workplace, and market square. Invite friends to our homes and talk over tea. Personal holiness and harmony with others have to be maintained. Bible expositors and evangelistic preachers should be trained by every congregation and Bible college. Reaching the huge global Indian diaspora with the good news of the gospel should become another revolutionary move.

In conclusion of this analysis, what Billy Graham said on the future of Great Commission is apt: 'Technology alone is insufficient. Strategies alone are not enough. More than anything else, God requires men and women who will give themselves without reserve as living sacrifices in response to the challenge Jesus gave when he said: "As my Father had sent me, even so send I you"' (John 20:21).[14]

Christians need to remember that there is no opportunity without opposition, no victory without vigilance, no winning without warfare. Our divine call is to live, love, and labour for the Lord until he comes. Sow the seed of the gospel with tears, and reap with cheers.

Endnotes

1 Jeremy Grant, "Asia's Millionaires Outgrow Those in N America," *Financial Times*, September 19, 2012, https://www.ft.com/content/a1bdebb2-0212-11e2-8aaa-00144feabdc0.

2 Yuji Kuronuma, "Asia Has over 950 Billionaires, Outnumbering All Other Regions," *Nikkei Asia*, October 4, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/Asia-has-over-950-billionaires-outnumbering-all-other-regions.

3 "The Centi-Millionaire Report," Henley & Partners, October 18, 2022, https://www.henleyglobal.com/newsroom/press-releases/centi-millionaire-2022.

4 "Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2021," International Organization of Migration (IOM), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/2021-AP-Migration-Data-Report_1.pdf.

5 Joon-gon Kim, "Six New Churches Every Day: Korean Church Growth," *Asian Perspective* 17 (Taiwan: ATA, 1978).

6 Fenggang Yang, "Will Chinese House Churches Survive the Latest Government Crackdown?" *Christianity Today* December 31, 2019. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/chinese-house-churches-survive-government-crackdown.html.

7 Bong Rin Ro, *Asian Church History* (Publication Forthcoming, 2023), 12–14, 16, 20–21, 28.

8 Ibid., 46–50.

9 "Missionaries from the National Church" published by Operation World in 2001 gives a much a higher number of Asian missionaries than other missions reports.

10 Vishal Mangalwadi, et al., *Burnt Alive: Staines and the God They Loved* (Mumbai: GLS Publishing, 1999).

11 Anto Akkara, *Early Christians of 21st Century: Stories of Incredible Christian Witness from Kandhamal Jungles* (Thrissur, India: Veritas, 2013), 13.

12 Ruth Mangalwadi and Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture* (Singapore: YWAM, 2006), 45.

13 Babu K. Verghese and Pandit Dharm, *My Encounter with Truth* (Mumbai: Media Concerns, 2008), 112.

14 Billy Graham, *A Biblical Standard for Evangelists* (Grason, 1984), 135.

Authors

Dr Yang Fenggang is Professor of Sociology, the founding Director of the Center on Religion and the Global East at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. He is the founding Editor of the Review of Religion and Chinese Society. He has given many invited lectures and keynote presentations at major universities and professional associations in the US, Asia and Europe. His media interviews have appeared on the National Public Radio, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, Time, Economist, CNN, BBC, etc.

Dr Bong Rin Ro is an Korean-American theologian and missiologist. Dr. Ro served from 1970 to 2000 as a bilingual missionary with Overseas Missionary Fellowship, teaching at seminaries in Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea. He is a founding leader and former executive secretary of the Asian Theological Association as well as former dean of the Asian Graduate School of Theology. He served as the director of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission from 1990 to 1996.

Dr Babu K. Verghese, M.A; PhD; DPIL; DBA; DJ; DPR, is a journalist, historian, and author of 25 books, including Let There Be India: Impact of the Bible on Nation Building. An inspiring speaker, he has lectured in 32 countries.

RISE OF AFRICA

Wanjiru M. Gitau with Seyram B. Amenyedzi, Fohle Lygunda

Introduction

Paul rejoiced with the Colossians, that in their day, the gospel was growing and bearing fruit all over the world (Colossians 1:6). Similarly, we thank God, in gratitude for the well accepted fact that Christianity has experienced rapid growth in Africa over the last century. According to the latest edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia, 26 percent of all Christians live in Africa, granting that Africa holds about 18 percent of the total world population. In relative terms, Africa has the highest percentage of the Christians in the world, followed by 24 percent in Latin America, 23 percent in Europe, 15 percent in Asia, 11 percent in North America and 1 percent in Oceania[1]. Indeed, God has remembered his love and faithfulness to Israel, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God (Psalm 98:3).

The Rise of Africa

While the spread of the gospel testifies to the power of the Holy Spirit, the historic advance of Christianity in Africa has not happened in a vacuum. The continent has undergone monumental waves of social transformation that influence how we imagine the task of the Great Commission in coming decades. For a long time, poverty and disease, underdevelopment, poor political leadership, and lack of modern infrastructure put the continent far behind other regions of the world in terms of social progress. In recent decades, four markers of change have progressively yielded a new narrative, broadly seen as 'Africa Rising'.

An increase in democratic political space: Despite lingering pockets of political instability and recurring flareups, Africa on the whole enjoys greater democratic freedom than it did prior to the 2000s, and when conflict occurs, it is resolved in far less time. This stability facilitates other positive changes.

Visible economic growth: We can see this through a number of developmental indexes. For example, lower child mortality rates, improved access to healthcare, and increased access to formal education at higher levels all contribute to better life outcomes. Young Africans are harnessing the fields of technology, fashion, music, education, entrepreneurship, and financial venture to move the continent from the margins of world affairs into the global limelight. Deep-seated afro-pessimism has given way to the realization that Africa is an emerging market for global goods and services and holds essential raw materials for global industries. This re-appraisal does come with new modes of exploitation, yet for Africans, access to previously out of reach global platforms offer a more level playing field.

Global attention due to population growth: As of 2023, Africa's population is close to 1.4 billion, 15 percent of which is under the age of 15. The population is further expected to double by 2050[2]. The projected increase is expected to be concentrated in a select number of already densely populated countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania. At the same time, in terms of landmass and relative to other continents, Africa is more than capable of holding this population.



Figure 1: 'The True Size of Africa' map produced by Kai Kruse (http://kai.sub.blue/en/africa.html)

Incredible urbanization: At 47 percent urbanization, Africa is experiencing one of the world's fastest rates of urbanization, catching up with much of the rest of the world in this respect. This growth includes infrastructural growth—albeit indebted—innovation to the housing sector, revalued land-rights, crowded high-rise buildings, and fewer of the squalid slums of yesteryear. Reinvigorated cities increasingly feature gleaming skylines and plush housing suburbs alongside consumer retail, local and regional transportation networks, local and international telecommunications, and sporting and entertainment industries. Regional integration and access are creating larger consumer bases.

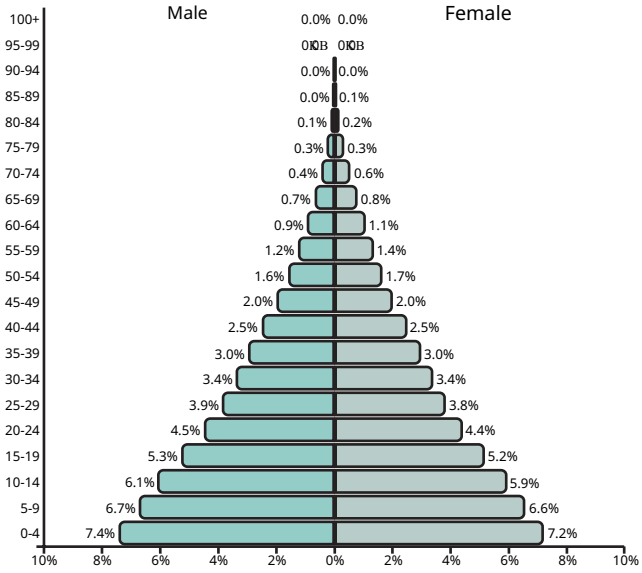


Figure 2: African Population

Prospects for the Great Commission

The four key changes above, namely increase in democratic space, visible economic uplift despite lingering marginalities, rise in populations, and fast urbanization, ought to foreground missional engagement across the continent. Several key areas of focus are highlighted below.

Reaching students at all levels: First, the transition of the African population curve has produced a higher population base, forming a pyramid structure. Exponential growth in the formal education sector correlates with this shift. From 2000 to 2010, nearly all African countries experienced marked advances in primary and secondary school enrollments, and in entrepreneurial tertiary education. Higher education supports democratizing nations and stabilizing economies, thus is a desired good. Education has also been behind the rise of a self-consciously globalizing and technologically and culturally savvy young adult population.

A significant focus needs to go towards evangelizing and discipling students at all stages. In this next phase of Christian mission, it is absolutely vital that outreach and discipleship are focused on emerging adults as they enter tertiary education in colleges and universities. The thriving work of locally led, alumni-funded student ministries such as FOCUS Kenya (Fellowship of Christian Unions) and all related IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students)-Affiliate university student ministries—like NIFES-Nigeria, GHAFES-Ghana, and IFES Afrique Francophonie—offer particularly instructive models of how to evangelize young adults in this next stage of the African continent. FOCUS-Kenya in particular has had enormous impact and may provide models of how to reach university students where such work has not taken root. This is vital, as the college-educated population will grow into a middle-class that will influence trajectories of the rest of the society.

Attention on the transmuting middle-class: In the post-war decades, Western society underwent a similar phase of growth as Africa's current experience. The western middle-class grew from young people who graduated out of universities to become lawyers, doctors, lecturers, managers, administrative experts, entrepreneurs, and a supportive blue-collar class in stable employ. While conditions of changing job markets will not produce long-term stable professions, a substantial, though not representative middle-class base is taking shape in Africa. This raises questions about patterns of secularization and desacralization of the public sphere and the privatization of faith. While societies differ in their exact conditions, it is incumbent on churches to raise awareness of the possibility that up-and-coming generations will increasingly find church irrelevant. A lot of emphasis in this last phase of the African church's growth has been on church planting, largely focused on conversion and numerical increase. Beyond numer-

ical increase, is not clear that any substantive segment of African churches is investing in the shaping of a Christian vision addressed to metamorphosing (literally changing frequently) populations. Theological curricula in seminaries that train pastoral clergy have a role to play in forming such a vision, but there is more to such a vision. In the face of multiple competing secularized visions that entirely edit out spirituality, there is an urgent need for churches to invest consciously in inspiring a biblically shaped ethical and moral vision for their societies.

Reassessing resource dependencies and conditionalities of past mission encounters: If indeed Africa's material conditions have improved, credit is due in part to the Western church—primarily large faith-based organizations like World Vision, Compassion International, Food for the Hungry, and Tear Fund, along with numerous other Western-funded Christian organizations that have pioneered in the betterment of material conditions. This fact cannot be denied. Even individual missionaries, short-term mission teams, and community-based initiatives have shown great solidarity with Africa's impoverished communities through a wide variety of microfinance projects, especially in supporting women, child sponsorship, and orphanages. Recently, doing business as mission has joined the refrain of doing good business to advance material well-being in the name of Christ. In and of itself, economic and even consumer growth for a perennially disenfranchised populace is a desirable good championed by Christian mission.

Looking to the future, important questions must accompany these efforts, particularly as development-oriented work in Africa is backed by 'Mission Inc' in the West[3]. The relationship between Christian compassion on one hand and material dependency (rather than faith) on the other hand must be attended to. Questions of power relations in the co-dependencies, despite collaborative intentions, require reflexive self-awareness on the part of the outsider missionaries and donor-communities. Similarly, tension between genuine material need and accumulative consumerism devoid of a well-grounded theological vision cannot be ignored in the emergent Africa. Further, as Western economies change (decline?) it will be necessary to reassess the patterns of supply and access to institutional resources from the West with attention to the sustainability of organizationally dependent mission initiatives.[4]

Mission: Retrospect and Prospect

In a 2010 centenary review of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, in a chapter aptly titled, 'A New Era of Mission is Upon Us', Robert Priest summarizes four eras that broadly shaped Protestant mission in the previous century[5]. From 1792, William Carey typified the first era when he called for missionaries to establish the church outside of Christendom. From 1865, in the second era, Hudson Taylor mobilized a generation to focus on geographically inland regions that had not had any contact with the gospel. William Cameron, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators (1942) and Summer Institute of Linguistics (1934), exemplifies the generation of the third era, with a focus on 'unreached ethnolinguistic people groups' through Bible translation. A fourth era, as Robert Priest sees it, echoes Ralph Winter in the World Christian Perspectives Movement—the 'kingdom era' where mission came to be understood in holistic terms attending to broadly material needs alongside evangelism. The African continent has been the beneficiary as a missionary receiving continent through these phases of frontier, hinterland, unreached, and humanitarian and holistic mission. Latterly, Africa has come to significantly shape the narrative of World Christianity, evidenced by the claim that the numerical strength of the church has shifted to the global south, along with the nascent narrative of reverse missions. This is the context for imagining what mission engagement in Africa needs to look like going forward. In this next phase, granted the changing population and social dynamics, what Africa needs is to cultivate an integrated theological vision in order to establish the gains of all the evangelistic mission efforts.

African youth: Churches need to be attuned to the relative youthfulness of the population. Socialization that accounts for a Christian vi-

sion cannot be left to state educational institutions, although states should be encouraged to continue to be responsible in promoting formal education. Spiritual formation involves more than youth ministries. It includes the cultivation of a theological habitus that is resiliently pro-youth through intentionally well-discipled churches and church-formed educational institutions. This incontrovertible value of young people for the mission of God is well attested to in the Old Testament. Consider Joseph, David, Jeremiah, Josiah, Daniel, Esther, Ruth, as well as many of Paul's companions like Timothy and Silas.

Developing an ethical and moral vision: Africa needs a Christ-inspired ethical and moral vision that is attuned to an emergent middle-class demographic. The church's tendency has been to casually castigate material well-being, failing to consider the implications of material uplift for a continent persistently ravaged by poverty. A thoughtful moral and ethical vision will be much more helpful, as a significant portion of the population is poised to join the middle-class amid inequality. Such a vision must attest to the authenticity and credibility of Christian witness in the public arena beyond the walls of the church.

Theological deepening and consolidation: It is improper to parrot the notion that African Christianity is a mile wide and an inch deep, or that it is devoid of theological training and resources. In recent decades, much Christian mission effort has gone into starting Bible schools, seminaries, and universities led by local leaders and faculty. In Ghana, for instance, churches have upgraded their seminaries into universities, such as Central University, Pentecost University, and Regent University of Science and Technology. In Kenya, government regulations required an upgrade of seminaries into universities. In Southern Africa, the influence of digitalization has enhanced access to Christian education. Further, global organizations like Langham Publishers, Oasis International, and Tyndale House among many others support theological publishing and access to theological material in Africa. The Africa Leadership Survey revealed that Africans are in fact avid readers of the Bible and a variety of devotional and theological books[6]. ScholarLeader Foundation supports the formation of Christian leaders at the highest levels of education. Advances in technology and accessibility have greatly improved biblical literacy, although it is an ongoing work. Africa is also home to robust Christian radio and TV industries, which disseminate preaching and Christian music. With that said, questions of evangelism and related church planting activities need to be explored from a variety of practical angles, including more professional training and preparation, resource accountability, and necessary ecclesial institutional scaffolding.

Preserving African Christian witness: African Christianity across the board remains patently culturally and theologically conservative, regardless of denominational affiliations. However, competing Christian polarities, often originating from outside the continent (especially from America), have a huge polarizing influence on the witness of the African church within its own continent. Christian leaders, missionaries, and partners will need to think about how these imported rivalries are diluting Christian witness. African Christian leaders must consider the competing theological visions of Christianity (Christianities?), and not just those inspired by a Western liberal progressive moralism.

Improvement of theological curricula: While Africa benefits from a proliferation of theological institutions, a wide variety of seminaries, Bible institutes, and Christian universities are still largely shaped by Western missions in structure and curriculum design. Grassroots church leaders often appraise these as foreign to African needs because they tend to provide generic curricula that still looks more Western than African. Much thought needs to go into reviewing the relationships between training institutions and churches.

Development-oriented mission: Another lingering concern is about development-oriented missionary activity. While attending to social needs is worthwhile, the wide variety of church-related entrepreneurial activity often preoccupies the core witness of the church. Although a great deal is done in the name of Christian mission, it is not clear that biblical-

ly formed theological frameworks have been articulated around these activities, or if those who benefit from these services recognize the difference between Christian organizations and global aid organizations. Quite a bit of literature addresses itself to the fact that the church is the new NGO—non-governmental organization—or rather, FBO—faith-based-organization. A similar critique is leveled against popular Christian media establishments, focused at once on merchandizing a Christian message while lacking a clear biblically-sound theological ethos. These matters are not any different from what is happening in other contexts such as the United States where pragmatic contingencies shape much of Christian activity, but they need to be part of a self-reflective consciousness among African Christians as the church continues to grow.

Continuing participation of women in mission: Women form a significant part of the church in Africa. The last several decades have brought recognition of girls' education across Africa. It is said that to educate a girl is to lift up the whole village. While patriarchy remains a feature of political cultures of much of the region, there has been progress in terms of educational empowerment of girls and the rising public profiles of women. Correspondingly, even though it is observable that women are the majority in churches in Africa, their representation in leadership is minimal, and in some churches it is non-existent. Continued empowerment of women as equal partners in the mission of God alongside the men is going to play a significant role in advancing the cause of mission locally and abroad.

Challenging unbiblical practices and facing new social problems: Certain cultural practices must continue to be challenged. For example, people with disabilities have historically experienced stigmatization in Christian communities. Disability and chronic sickness are often perceived as a curse or a punishment from the gods/ancestors due to some abomination committed by the person, a relative, or an ancestor. Unfortunately, this belief often leads to harmful practices of exorcism instead of increasing the accessibility of ministries. A related issue is the victimization of children and older women through witchcraft accusations, which the church cannot ignore. As with all urbanizing contexts, an emerging problem is the labor and sexual exploitation and trafficking of girls and women. African populations are also experiencing a resurgence of traditional cultural practices that are antithetical to a Christian vision, many of them re-energized by globalization, electronic media access, and economic opportunism. In addition, the church must stay vigilant to the agendas of multiple interest groups inside and outside the continent that pursue God-denying intentions amongst the growing young adult population.

Islamic witness and Christian-Muslim conflict: Although the church's growth is celebrated, religious change is not exclusive to Christianity. Islam has been growing exponentially. The Muslim north remains largely unevangelized, while the two religions meet at the Sahel. Mission organizations like SIM and WEC which were originally Western now recruit African missionaries to the Muslim world, while indigenous mission organizations like Nigerian-based CAPRO are reaching out into Muslim countries. Proclamation witness and church planting into the majority Muslim north may be the vital breakthrough of the next few decades.

Meanwhile, Christian-Muslim conflict persists. While countries like the Gambia and Senegal offer models of peaceful coexistence, countries on the Sahel boundary line are experiencing tensions. Christians in boundary areas have often been victimized by terrorist anarchy. As populations are expected to increase, conflict will continue to be a fraught issue, especially when politically motivated and resource-driven, as in northern Nigeria and the horn of East Africa. It is critical for Christians to discern underlying issues and engage in appropriate dialogue, inter-faith cooperation, reconciliation, and civic mobilization of respective authorities. Certainly, evangelism among majority Muslim communities remains a core focus.

Conclusion

As the Psalmist sang long ago, Ethiopia (Africa) has indeed stretched out her hands to God as she brings her tribute of praise to God alongside the nations (Psalm 68:31–35). Along with Israel, she who was once desolate is now

called Hephzibah, 'The Lord delights in her, she belongs to the Lord' (Isaiah 62:4). Yet, as Isaiah saw in that ancient day, those who call on the name of the Lord today on behalf of Africa cannot give themselves rest. While we rejoice in God's amazing grace towards the continent in this last remarkable century of growth, there is scarce room to sink into complacency concerning the Great Commission. The enemy prowls around seeking to devour (1 Peter 5:8) through human sin and multiple expressions of cultural, political, and corporate evil. No amount of social transformation can displace the need for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the social transformation that Africa is currently undergoing underscores the urgency of the Great Commission. There will always be new generations that need to hear and be shaped by a gospel vision, because the only enduring power to transform the human condition is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The commission to make disciples, baptize, and disciple remains imperative. Let Africa rise indeed. With her, let us all rise to the occasion to bring the gospel of him of whom the increase of his government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Endnotes

1 Todd M Johnson and Gina Zurlo. *World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

2 *2022 Revision of World Population Prospects.* United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/.

3 See: Jonathan Bonk et al. *The Realities of Money and Missions: Global Challenges and Case Studies* (Pasedena, CA: William Carey, 2022).

4 See Paul Bendor-Samuel. *'Mission, Power, and Money.' in Missions and Money: Global Realities and Challenges* (Pasedena, CA: William Carey, 2022) 138.

5 Robert Priest. 'A New Era of Missions is Upon Us' in Evangelical and Frontier Mission: *Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel.* Beth Snodderly and A. Scott Moreau, eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011) 294-304.

6 See Robert Priest and Kirimi Barine. *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

Authors

Wanjiru M. Gitau is assistant professor of practical theology and world Christianity at Palm Beach Atlantic University, a Christian college in West Palm, Florida. Originally from Kenya, she has a PhD in theological studies and world Christianity from Africa International University (2015). She is the author of Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective (IVP Academic, 2018), which is the story of a thriving church movement in Kenya, the Mavuno Church. The book drew great reviews and won the 2019 Christianity Today's Book Award for the Global Church/Global Missions category. She has co-authored other works, contributed to a variety of journals, and edited volumes on themes related to megachurches, African church history, world Christianity, mission, and Christian leadership.

Seyram B. Amenyedzi is a reverend minister from Ghana and currently a postgraduate supervisor at the South African Theological Seminary. She is a research fellow with the German-South African International Research Training Group 'Transformative Religion: Religion as situated knowledge in processes of social transformation' funded by the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) and the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Fohle Lygunda is the founder of the Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche et d'Innovation (CIRI) in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. He has a PhD in missiology from North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, and a DMin from Asbury Theological Seminary, USA. He is the author of Transforming Missiology: An Alternative Approach to Missiological Education (Langham, 2018). He currently serves as the Tearfund manager of the theological department in Africa.

MAJORITY WORLD MISSION MOVEMENTS

Uchenna Anyanwu, Cristian Castro, David Ro

Introduction

The church in the non-Western majority world of Latin America, Asia, and Africa has exploded in growth. Places previously known as mission fields have sent out new missionary forces. In this report, Castro Cristian provides a descriptive history of the four stages of the Latin American missionary movement and the establishment of COMIBAM Internacional with over 30,000 missionaries sent worldwide. David Ro summarizes the Asian mission movement focusing on Korea, China, and India with mentions of other Asian countries. Uchenna Anyanwu writes about the African mission with the migration of peoples into the West along with missions to unreached peoples within the continent of Africa.

Mission Movements From Latin America

At the 1916 congress of world missions in Panama—organized by foreign missions organizations—Latin America was declared a mission field, and countries were assigned to different international missions. Known records cite that at that time, 50 missionary societies were working in Latin America, of which 235 delegates were gathered; of these, only 27 were Latinos. The official language of the congress was English, making the voice of the Latin American church very small, if not almost null. This fact is relevant, because it indicates that at that historical moment, the small Latin church was not considered a participant in world mission.

On the other hand, the foreign missionaries did not think of Latinos as a possible missionary force, as Pablo Carrillo mentions in his book Huellas en el Desierto: 'It did not cross the minds of the mostly foreign missionary community in Latin America, the idea that the people that were being reached with the Gospel would one day become a missionary force inside and outside of their countries.[1]'

The Inescapable Call: Evangelization in depth

In 1921 the Latin America Mission (LAM) was founded, which would have a very strong impact on the small Latin-American church of that time through evangelistic and social action projects. But at the same time, LAM would greatly contribute to the awakening of the missionary vision in Latin America.

In the spring of 1964, Dr Kenneth Strachan of LAM gave a series of speeches on missions at Fuller Seminary called 'The Inescapable Call: Missionary Work of the Church in the Light of the Urgent Needs and Opportunities of Today's World'. The dissertations summarized the experience and the theological foundation of evangelism in the Depth Movement, which emerged from LAM under Dr Strachan.

The basic tenets of Depth Evangelism were almost universally applied and were decades ahead of what is now commonly accepted by churches worldwide, especially in Latin America. There were very few known missionary efforts in our region in those days. One was the Congress of the Christian work in Montevideo, Uruguay held in 1925. Another was the Pan-American Evangelical Congress in Havana, Cuba held in 1929. Although small, like a grain of sand on a beach, they both contributed to the missionary vision in Latin America.

The Influence of Lausanne in Latin America

The First Lausanne Congress in 1974 is the most important event in the history of evangelical mission. Its influence reached Latin America through the many Latinos who were there, but also through the literature and sub-

sequent consultations organized by the Lausanne Movement. To be more precise, the early pioneers of Latin American evangelical missiology, such as Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, and others, made important contributions at the Lausanne Congress to form a missionary worldview based on a clear understanding of the gospel. The emphasis on the theology of the kingdom of God and the consequences of the church's presence in society changed the direction of world missiology and global missionary action. We praise God for this Latin American cooperation with the worldwide evangelical community.

The Birth of the First Latin Missionary Movements

In 1976 the first national missionary association of the continent—the Association of Brazilian Transcultural Missions (AMTB)—was organized by the initiative of several national leaders and foreign missionaries working in Brazil. Jonathan dos Santos was the first president of AMTB, and the association was founded by uniting nine missionary agencies representing the participation of several denominations. Years later, another Latin American country took on the challenge of becoming a missionary force. In 1982, in the small town of Villa Giardini, Córdoba, Argentina, under the leadership of pastors and missionaries, the World Missions Network (RMM) was born to mobilize the Argentinean church to all nations.

The Birth of COMIBAM: From mission field to force

It is worth mentioning that the leadership of the AMTB and the RMM were at the time prophetic voices for the church regarding the need to take responsibility as a continent in the mission of God. Thus, the Latin American Evangelical Fellowship (CONELA) convened a meeting of leaders in 1984 in Mexico to discuss the organization of an international congress with the purpose of promoting the development of the missionary vision in the region. This first Ibero-American Missionary Congress was held in 1987 in Sao Paolo, Brazil, bringing together more than three thousand representatives from all the Latin American nations, Spain and Portugal, as well as observers from other countries gathered to hear about the global missionary task and make a commitment to the formation of a missionary movement from Ibero-America. It was on that occasion that Luis Bush emphatically proclaimed, 'In 1916, Latin America was declared a mission field. Today, in 1987, Latin America is declared a missionary force.[2]'

From that first Congress, COMIBAM Internacional[3] emerged and developed its relationships with other national, regional, and global networks, helping to establish working groups, convening consultations, producing books in Spanish and Portuguese, and initiating the publication of the magazine Ellos y Nosotros (Them and Us). In the 1988 edition of Operation World, Patrick Johnstone reported a total of 1,314 missionaries from Latin America. That number rose to more than 4,482 in 1995. Of these, 1,364 were ministering outside their country, and 2,126 were involved in cross-cultural work.

God moved in the church throughout the region, strengthening national missionary movements where they already existed and giving birth where they had not yet been formed. Some countries had been sending missionaries since the beginning of the 20th century and had also established national networks of missionary collaboration, but the 1987 Congress sparked a strong awakening to promote cross-cultural missionary work.

National Missionary Cooperations (CMN) in Ibero-America

Over the years, the movement began to organize itself, appointed a board of directors, elected an executive director, and established a small office. But without a doubt, what had the greatest influence was the birth of the national missionary movements, today called National Missionary Cooperations (CMN) in the different countries of Ibero-America, thus becoming an arm for the national church—a space for organizations, ministries, and missionaries—with the purpose of sharing experiences and resources, and coordinating together missionary efforts from their countries to the world. To date, 25 National Mis-

sionary Cooperations have participated in COMIBAM[4]. These 25 national missionary cooperations are part of the eight collaborative regions of COMIBAM: Iberia, North America, Mexico, Central America, Caribbean, Andean, Southern Cone, and Brazil. Currently, the national missionary cooperations have a combined total of more than 1,000 participating and collaborating missionary organizations.

COMIBAM in Movement

We can conclude that throughout these years, COMIBAM Internacional has been a space for the gathering of national missionary movements of the region and the church for the purpose of strategy formation and for the building of relationships that have the potential to enhance collaboration with the global missionary community. A very conservative estimate reveals that approximately 10 to 15 percent of the church participates actively or directly in global mission. Today we register more than 30,000 missionaries sent by churches to more than 200 countries, with an estimated monthly financial investment of USD 15,000,000. Of the total number of missionaries sent, approximately 17,000 missionaries come from Brazil and 1,200 from Argentina, which indicates that the remaining 11,800 missionaries come from the other 23 member countries of COMIBAM. In the recent Consultation of Unreached Peoples held in Panama, the missionary movement of Ibero-America committed to accompany the church in the task of praying and taking the gospel to at least 1,850 unreached people groups. Today, we must say that by God's sovereign grace, COMIBAM Internacional is fulfilling its mission and remains dedicated to its vision, mission, and values.

Mission Movements From Asia

The church in Asia—working in a context populated by 5,300 unreached people groups living according to a complex mix of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Communism, and various folk religions—is now participating in global mission. In the 20th century, despite numerous religious and political challenges, growing nationalism and persecution, societal turmoil through urbanization and globalization, and the influences of secularism and materialism, Christianity in Asia has grown twice as fast as the population, representing 8.2 percent of the population of 4.5 billion people. As the Western missionary movement reaches 'old age' and navigates a different set of conditions[5], the Asian church is preparing for the challenge of global mission in this next century.

South Korea

During its period of rapid industrialization and urbanization, Korean society was characterized by tremendous instability. The rapid changes fostered a breakdown in the traditional family structure, labor disputes, a gap between the rich and poor, and deterioration of social norms. Within this context of social instability, Christianity played a significant role in addressing societal issues by providing a spiritual and moral compass. Several strengths of the Korean church have included 1) early dawn prayer meetings, 2) vibrant Sunday worship, 3) tithing and stewardship, 4) theological education, 5) social engagement, and 6) emphasis on mission. South Korea's missionary movement was the fruit of evangelistic crusades, student movements, and explosive church growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Christianity in South Korea is estimated at around 32 percent of the population, including 9.2 million Protestants (18 percent). In 2020, pre-COVID-19, 22,259 South Korean missionaries were serving overseas.

A large portion of Korean missionaries are cross-culturally ordained pastors. Most are supported by churches and mission agencies who focus on evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership training. Many Korean missionaries are involved in church planting in harsh, remote areas, with some engaged in holistic ministries for the poor. The Korean church and mission have recently plateaued due to secularization, a general disinterest in religion among young people, and the possible impact of mega-church scandals. For this reason, the Korean missionary population is gradually aging.

China

China's explosive house church growth in the 1980s in rural communities and church growth among intellectuals in the cities after 1989 laid the grounds for a missionary movement. Christianity in China is estimated at around 6 to 7 percent of the population, with around 90 million Christians (estimated at 60 million house church and 30 million TSPM Christians). Christianity grew by addressing societal issues during urbanization. The average salary in China's top-tier cities is now comparable to Seoul, South Korea, becoming a financial resource for missionary sending. In the mid-2000s, unregistered house churches in the cities started to rent office space, transitioning from the home to more open, larger-sized congregations. Churches began to collect offerings to pay pastoral salaries and support ministries, including missions. However, the tightened religion policy in 2018 leading to increased persecution, combined with COVID-19 in 2020, have directed churches back into their homes.

China's missionary movement, Mission China (formerly Mission China 2030), has emerged among the unregistered house churches in the cities. The official Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church is prevented by law from conducting evangelistic activities outside the walls of the local church building, but some nonetheless persist in indirect evangelism through addressing social concerns in their communities. House church leaders hosted several large annual Mission China conferences overseas and have declared a goal 'to send 20,000 missionaries by 2030'. Mission China activities moved online during COVID-19 with prayer and mission mobilization. Over 200,000 people have taken Kairos, an online missions mobilization course. A separate Back to Jerusalem movement has sent hundreds of missionaries Westward, primarily from rural Henan and Anhui. The Wenzhou church also has some mission involvement through its extensive overseas entrepreneurial businesses.

Mission China's 'core strength' is a sacrificial missionary spirit birthed from a context of persecution. Suffering has prepared the church to send missionaries to harsh unreached areas. Persecution has also created innovative solutions to minister in closed societies hostile to Christians. Coming from a significant sized Christian population in a large country with geopolitical power and economic strength also contributes to Chinese pastors' sense of mission responsibility for the world. However, amidst increase political persecution in the current political climate, it is unlikely a mass movement of missionaries would emerge. Though hard to verify, an estimated 2,000 mainland Chinese house church missionaries serve cross-culturally overseas.

India

India's church growth in the mid-nineteenth century can largely be credited to evangelization focusing on poorer members of society. The working class is receptive to the gospel, particularly in rural areas and among migrants in urban slums such as the Dalits, the outcast 'untouchables' in the Hindu caste system. The church's expansion in the last fifty years has generally centered in Southern India. India's missionary movement began to reach traditional Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic majorities in northern India. Indian missionaries are involved in 'cross-cultural' church planting among the 2,138 unreached people groups (UPGs), with 99 percent of missionaries working cross-culturally amongst ethnic groups within the country. Indian missionary growth 'has also led to a change in understanding of the title "missionary", a term traditionally used only to describe those who came from abroad and associated with "white" people'[6]. Christianity in India is estimated at 4 to 5 percent, comprising over 50 million Christians. The India Missions Association (IMA) has previously claimed 60,000 Indian workers with 300 indigenous mission agencies working in India.

India's main strength is the availability of a large number of volunteers. Missionaries are often bi-vocational, combining ministry with a job or receiving support from the diaspora or overseas. Christianity in India has been viewed with hostility as a foreign religion, and the church is experiencing growing

persecution. Conversion laws have been used to accuse Christians of using illegal means to proselytize. The decline in democratic freedoms for the church escalated after Prime Minister Modi's victory in 2014. The recent rise of nationalism has witnessed the removal of foreign influence with increased aggression towards local churches. The new tightened environment has decreased mission activities for a season, but a new indigenous church movement is taking place among the high-caste Hindu communities in Northern India.

Other Asian Countries

Other Asian countries are also participating in missions. The number of Filipino overseas missionaries involved in cross-cultural work is around 2,000. A Filipino church in Manila with 200,000 members has commissioned over 150 missionaries, with many planting cross-cultural churches across Asia. Thousands more overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) active as domestic helpers, nannies, construction workers, engineers, architects, nurses, IT specialists, chefs, seafarers, and more are also crossing cultural borders with the gospel. Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore have also witnessed significant church growth. Christians are estimated at 9 to 20 percent of the population. In Indonesia, around 1,000 indigenous workers are involved in cross-cultural church planting among the 130 unreached groups within the country. Malaysia also has a similar number of cross-cultural workers in many of the 157 people groups, including several hundred cross-cultural missionaries sent overseas. Hong Kong has commissioned 670 overseas career missionaries (2023), Taiwan has sent 600 (2017), and Singapore has at least 428 (2019).

Arise Asia

A new dynamic of Asian mission movement is on the horizon. Asian leaders from the Asia Evangelical Alliance, Asia Theological Association, CCCOWE, Movement Day, and the Lausanne Movement met in 2022 to discuss the future of the Asian church and its mission, primarily within the Asian context. In July 2023, over 1,800 students and young people from 37 Asian countries gathered at Arise Asia with the theme of global mission to 'go where there is no gospel'. Several hundred cross-cultural mission commitments were made by young people with an average age of 25. An Arise Asia movement is gaining momentum from Millennials and Gen Z. The church in Asia is at a turning point in history, transitioning from a missionary-receiving to a missionary-sending continent.

Mission Movements From Africa

Redemptive accounts in the Scriptures are replete with migration narratives. From Abraham's call to baby Jesus in Egypt, we read of peoples on the move and God's use of those moves to weave the tapestry of peoples' redemption. The past one and half centuries witnessed the movement of Europeans across the world engaging in exploration, colonization, commerce, and Christian missionary activities[7]. Migration trends began to reverse from the mid-twentieth century. The phenomenon of South-North migration has attracted broad scholarly discussions as well as narratives of mission movements within Africa and from Africa to the rest—an aspect of global migration trends. Thus, the phenomenon has occasioned the movement of Africans (not only within the African continent itself but much more beyond Africa) evidently leading to potential mission movement from Africa to the rest.

Insofar as the potential for mission movements involving African immigrants is concerned, more and more African immigrant congregations are emerging in several cities in Europe, North America, and Oceania—host regions for many African immigrants. African immigrant Christians are planting churches in the cities of their host countries in the global North. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), for example, now has two dioceses in the United States and Canada. The numerical strength of Nigerian Anglican priests and other African Anglicans—some of whom studied in seminaries in the United States and hold PhDs and DMin degrees—is growing. The churches they are planting usually begin with a few families. As their numbers increase, they purchase religious places of worship belong-

a few families. As their numbers increase, they purchase religious places of worship belonging to declining American mainline Protestant denominations.[8] Some of the clergy have taken up positions as pastors of some of these mainline American Protestant churches. This trend is not peculiar to Nigerian Anglicans.[9]

The Spirit of mission is also moving in North Africa where Egyptian followers of Jesus (from both Presbyterian and other Protestant denominations) are forming mission-sending structures. What makes this exciting is that some Egyptian followers of Jesus now share the vision to take the gospel to the rest of the Arab world. The Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, for example, has incorporated mission training in their curriculum. A missionary movement from Egypt to the rest of the Arab world can be expected to emerge in the coming quarter of a century.

What potential roles, then, could African churches and African missionaries serving outside Africa play in missions in the coming quarter or half of the century, particularly within their immigrant geographical context?

Historical Movements from Africa

African indigenous mission organizations—both denominational and non-denominational—have been emerging since the mid-1970s.

The Second Consultation of the Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI) was held in Abuja, Nigeria, between September 5 and 9, 2011. The Consultation's declaration states in part: 'We believe God has sufficiently prepared and endowed the African church for taking the Gospel to every part of our continent and of the world.'[10] How can African immigrant followers of Jesus be true to such a commitment to express their faith in the lands where they now live?

One example of repute of the non-denominational African indigenous mission organizations sending cross-cultural workers is Calvary Ministries (CAPRO)—an organization started in northern Nigeria in 1975.[11] The Evangelical Missions Society (EMS) is another example—a denominational mission organization of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). From Egypt to the Arab world are a few emerging organizations that for security reasons we need not name at this time. Amidst the emerging movements from Africa to the rest, challenges and opportunities exist.

Missional Opportunities for the African Church

With major changes on the African continent and in the world come critical missional opportunities for the African church. Below are just a few of the opportunities available and emerging.

- **Global Denominational Leadership:** As the numerical strength of mainline American and European churches declines, African Christians could seize the opportunity to become members and pastors of those churches. Already there are a few African pastors who, having completed studies at well-respected evangelical seminaries in the United States, are today serving as pastors of all-White American mainline congregations within the United States. Furthermore, the diasporic African Christian populations could become a missionary force irrespective of the current trend of most majority-African immigrant churches in their host countries.
- **Global Scholars:** As some African Christians train in theological institutions in the global north, they could become a missionary teaching force within the Western world. Some have obtained their PhDs and are publishing scholarly materials in reputed international peer-reviewed journals. These could impact theological training in the coming quarter or half of this century when their scholarly writings gain ascendency into required readings of seminary syllabi in North American and European theological institutions.
- **Spiritual Emphasis:** Most African Christians from evangelical and Pentecostal backgrounds emphasize prayer and spiritual power. Andrew F. Walls asserted that when he arrived in West Africa, it struck him that while he was 'happily pontificating on . . . a patchwork quilt of diverse

fragments that constitutes second-century Christian literature, [he] was actually living in a second-century church. The life, worship and understanding of a community in its second century Christian allegiance was going on all around [him]'[12]. The fervency in prayer and awareness of the impact that spiritual powers have in peoples' lives and society are evident among African evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Thus, the presence of Africans working with non-Africans in global mission could provide some spiritual and prayer impulse among their colleagues of non-African origins.

- **Vibrancy of Youth and Women:** Yaw Perbi and Sam Ngugi present some potential and persistent problems.[13] Among these is the vibrant faith of youths and women. Whereas the younger generations of many European and North American Christians are becoming 'nones' (without faith affiliation), African Christian youths, on the other hand, are vibrant and passionate in their faith. This is even more true of women. The influence of women in mission has continued to grow in the last twenty-five years, and we can expect that women's power and influence will continue to make significant contributions toward cross-cultural global mission in the next quarter of the century. Often, the contribution and impact that women make in the spheres of Christian ministries and mission are, however, downplayed. Leaders in mission, Christian education, and churches need to identify and harness the power of Christian women in the various ministries of the body of Christ, particularly in mission.

Challenges for African Mission Movements

With all that said, a challenge that African missionary movements must seek to overcome, lies with breaking through the cultural barriers that hinder non-Africans from being drawn to their message and mission.

- **Cross-Cultural Outreach:** African diasporic churches need to become intentionally inclined to proclaiming the gospel to those who are non-Africans. In a paper presented at a MANI conference, Dr Emmanuel Bediako observed that '. . . African Diasporic churches are made up of about 99% Africans or people of African descent, and they are mostly reaching out to African migrants'[14]. Inasmuch as missionary potential exists among African immigrant populations in the West, a close observation of the trends depicts a lack of missionary engagement that transcends the homogenous boundaries of the African immigrant Christian demographics. Put differently, the majority of African followers of Jesus engaging in Christian ministry in their host countries are doing so within the homogenous spheres of their cultural milieu, thus lacking a cross-cultural engagement of unreached peoples of non-African origins. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed.
- **Cross-Cultural Contextualization:** African diasporic churches need to adapt their ways of doing church to cultural norms, values, and communication styles in their host countries. Africans' conceptualization of time is an example. Some diasporic African churches can spend two to three hours in a Sunday worship service, and then another hour of 'fellowship after fellowship' at the end of the worship service. A Caucasian American invited to such a worship service is unlikely to stay beyond an hour and a half and may not return. Besides the issue of the cultural concept of time, there exist several other cultural nuances that must be reevaluated. The principles of contextualization must also be applied to avoid repelling non-Africans who might show interest in the message and worship of African diaspora Christians.
- **Cultural Discrimination:** Other challenges include visa and immigration restrictions, financial capacity, and racial discrimination and prejudice. In addition to possessing a good self-worth in Christ and

a self-concept grounded on God's word, African Christians engaging in global mission in contexts where they face racial discrimination and prejudice will require resilience and the capacity to navigate the challenging social dynamics in which they may find themselves.

In sum, with the shift of Christianity's center of gravity to Africa in the last few decades, the church in Africa possesses immense potential for a global missionary movement in the coming 25 years, but that must be done in collaboration with the full global church. The potential needs to be explored, the existing opportunities seized and made most of, and the challenges critically and constructively overcome so that the nations will be glad and sing for joy.

Conclusion

In a new era of global mission, a new missionary force has emerged from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The new dynamic in global missions is poly-centric, drawing from multiple centers across the majority world. These new missionary sending centers have their own unique strategies, methods, and challenges according to their cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts. This is just the beginning of a new missionary era that is deeply connected to a global mission community. The Great Commission's call rests equally on believers worldwide—to bring the gospel message to the unreached peoples of the ends of the earth; to go to where there is no gospel.

Endnotes

1 Pablo Carrillo. Huellas en el Desierto (PM Internacional, 2010) 20.

2 Luis Bush. 'Our History'. COMIBAM Internacional. www.comibam.org.

3 The title of the 1987 gathering was later changed from 'congress' to 'cooperation'. The resulting mission movement of the same name—the Ibero-American Missionary Cooperation—is also known as COMIBAM Internacional.

4 You can learn more about COMIBAM's CMNs at https://comibam.org/es/cooperaciones-misioneras/.

5 Andrew Walls. The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996) 261.

6 Mats Ekström and Marianna Patrona (eds). Talking Politics in Broadcast Media: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Political Interviewing, Journalism and Accountability (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011) 232.

7 Brian Stanley. The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990).

8 Mainline Protestant denominations include 'principally the Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches' whereas 'conservative denominations [include] the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal and Holiness churches, and some [others]'. Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, and Melissa Wilde. 'The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States. Survey Research Center (SRC) (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2001) 2.

9 The same is true of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), The Church of Pentecost from Ghana, the Assemblies of God from Africa, Christ Embassy of Nigeria, the Deeper Life Bible Church of Nigeria, the Methodist Church Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and other church denominations with ties in Africa, whether they are mainline denominations or African-initiated churches (AICs).

10 'MANI 2011 Declaration.' MANI (Movement for African National Initiatives, 2011).

11 CAPRO is an acronym for Calvary Productions, a name that later was changed to Calvary Ministries, but the acronym (CAPRO) by which the ministry was known was retained. In Francophone countries, it is known as Action Missionnaire Interafricaine (AMI). See: Festus Ndukwe, ed. From Africa to the World: The CAPRO Story: The Birth and Growth of a Mission (Lagos, Nigeria: CAPRO Media, 2019).

12 Andrew F. Walls. The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996) xiii.

13 Yaw Perbi and Sam Ngugi. Africa to the Rest: From Mission Field to Mission Force (Again) (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2022) 49–99.

14 Emmanuel Bediako. 'Africa in Missions: Africa Doing Missions in Diaspora.' Presentation at MANI (2011). Accessed Jan. 18, 2021) slide 31. https://maniafrica.com/mani/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Diaspora-Africa-in-Mission.ppt.

Authors

David Ro serves as the Executive Director of Arise Asia, an emerging missions movement arising in Asia among Millenials and Gen Zs. He is also the Regional Director for the Lausanne Movement in East Asia. After several years of pastoral ministry, David joined OMF to reach urban students and young people in East Asia. David previously served as the Director of the Christy Wilson Center for World Missions and Adjunct Professor of Church Planting and Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has an M. Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an MBA from Peking University, and a Phd from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies with expertise on the missions movement from China.

Cristian Castro has developed his pastoral and ministerial ministry for 25 years full time with the Association of National Evangelical Churches of Costa Rica (ACIENA) and Bible Churches of Costa Rica (AIBC). He is an ordained pastor and serves full time. He was director for 12 years of FEDEMEC (Federación Misionera Evangélica Evangélica Costarricense), a Latin missionary agency focused on unreached peoples and unbiblical peoples, with 30 years of existence. In addition, he has served as national director of COMIBAM Costa Rica (CMC) and is currently the Executive Director of COMIBAM International, the Ibero-American Missionary Cooperation, a network of 25 National Missionary Cooperations. He has a diploma in Business Administration from the Technological Institute of Costa Rica (TEC), a bachelor's degree in Ecclesiastical Resources Administration (Theology) from the Evangelical University of the Americas (UNELA), a master's degree in project management from the University for International Cooperation (UCI) and a diploma in "Family Accompaniment" from EIRENE, Argentina. He is currently pursuing a master's in leadership Formation (MAFL) at Calvin Seminary. He currently lives in the city of San Jose, Costa Rica with his family from where he coordinates his missionary ministry.

Uchenna D. Anyanwu, PhD. Uchenna is a missiologist serving with Calvary Ministries (CAPRO). He volunteers as a mission advocate with Frontier Fellowship. Uchenna's PhD dissertation, titled Pathways to Peacebuilding: Staurocentric Theology in Nigeria's Context of Acute Violence, is published under the American Society of Missiology Monograph Series. His MDiv and MA in Intercultural Studies degrees were from Gordon- Conwell Theological Seminary—where he is completing a graduate degree in Mental Health Counseling. Uchenna is an ordained minister in the Anglican Church.

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF HOPE?



INTRODUCTION

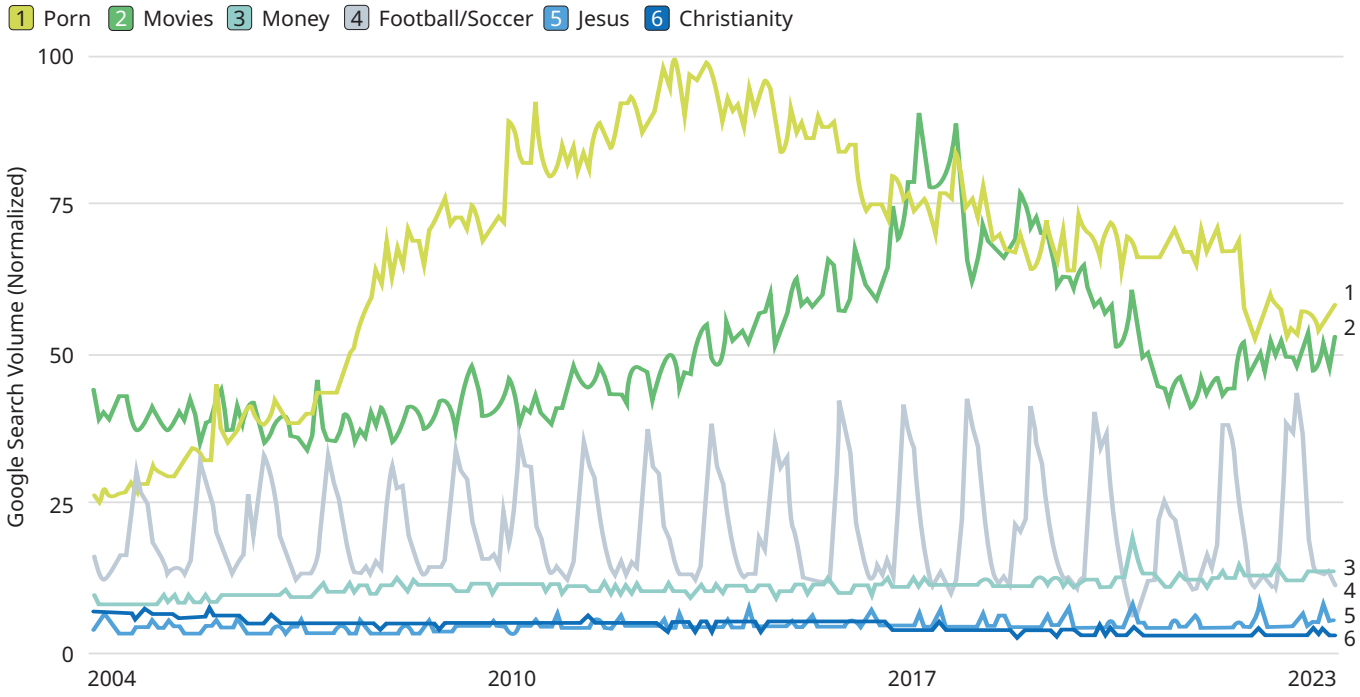
The Christian gospel is a message of hope for all. However, it is not the only promoted avenue of 'hope' in our contemporary world. From competing world religions to secular ambitions and pleasures, the world is continually asking, 'What is the source of hope?'

The following section explores the context shifts in hope including the Islam, secularism, science, transcendental values, the self, and worldly religions.

GLOBAL INTERESTS

FOCUS OF GLOBAL ATTENTION

Global internet search volume



Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends)

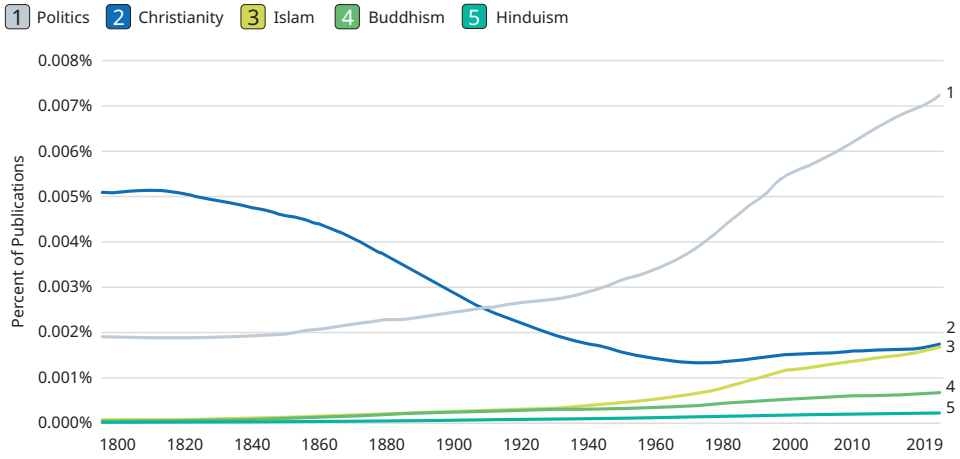
DECLINING INTEREST

As the world becomes more digitized, data provides a snapshot of global interest and priorities. When considering global religions, the interest in Christianity, both in digital and physical print, is declining. Islam has seen a steady growth of interest in print, now nearly matching Christian publications, and surpassing digital search interest.

Digital interest in Christianity is meager compared to sex, money, and entertainment.

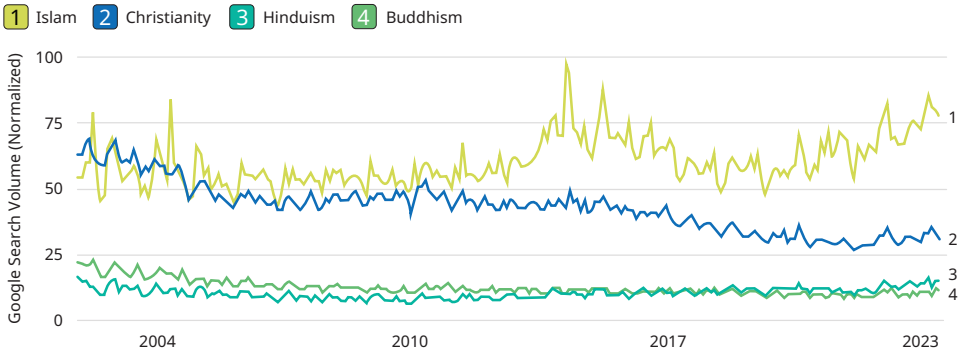
Overall, religion is not the current global focus, as reflected in digital search volume. Topics like Christianity and Jesus are a minority of searches compared to terms like 'porn, movies, football, and, money.'

GLOBAL PUBLISHING FOCUS



Source: Google NGram, English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

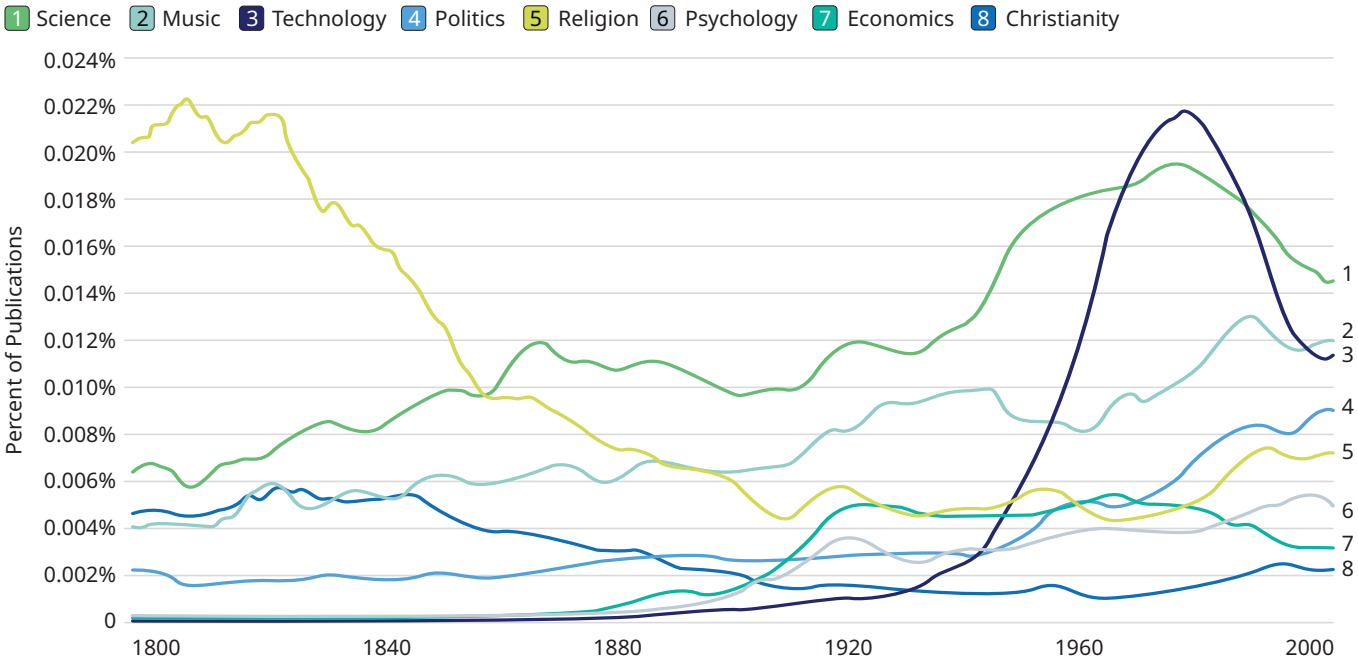
GLOBAL INTEREST IN WORLD RELIGIONS



Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends)

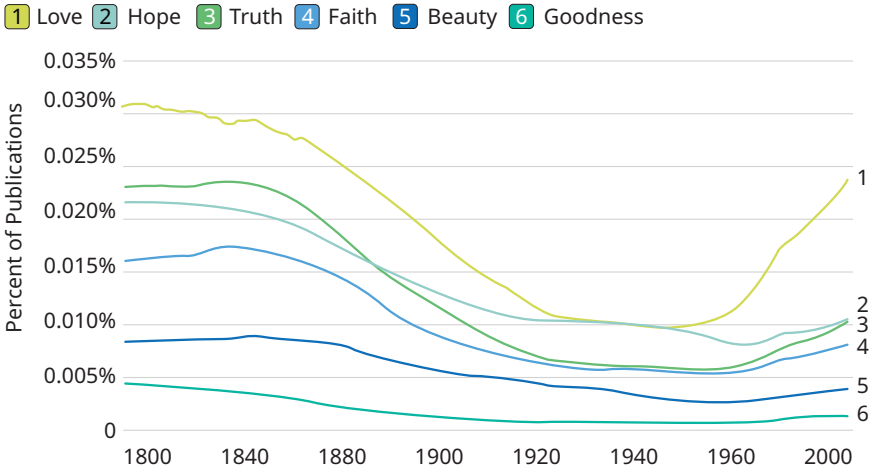
GLOBAL VALUES

KNOWLEDGE AREA PRIORITIES



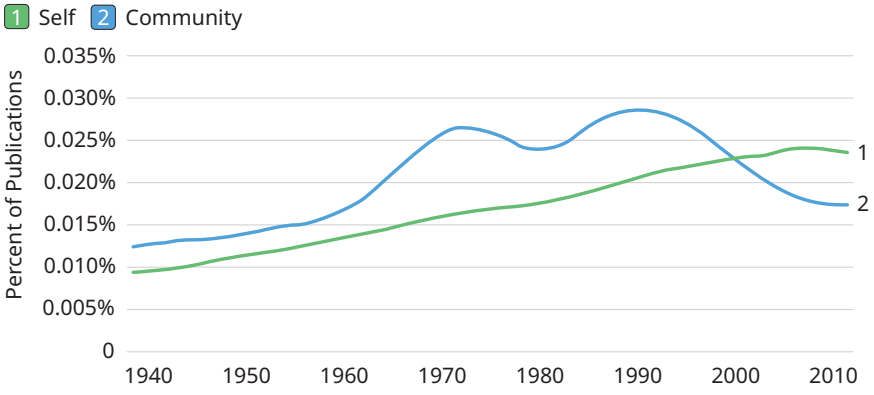
Source: Google NGram (https://books.google.com/ngrams/), English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

TRANSCENDENTAL VALUES



Source: Google NGram, English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

PRIORITIZATION OF SELF



Source: Google NGram (https://books.google.com/ngrams/), English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

CHANGING VALUES

Since 1800 there has been a massive shift in publication focus areas. In 1800 religion was the primary publication interest until science surpassed it in the mid-1800s. In the last century interest in religion has been surpassed by several fields including politics, music, and technology. Christianity is lowest listed of all fields. In recent decades, however, religion, and Christianity are trending upwards.

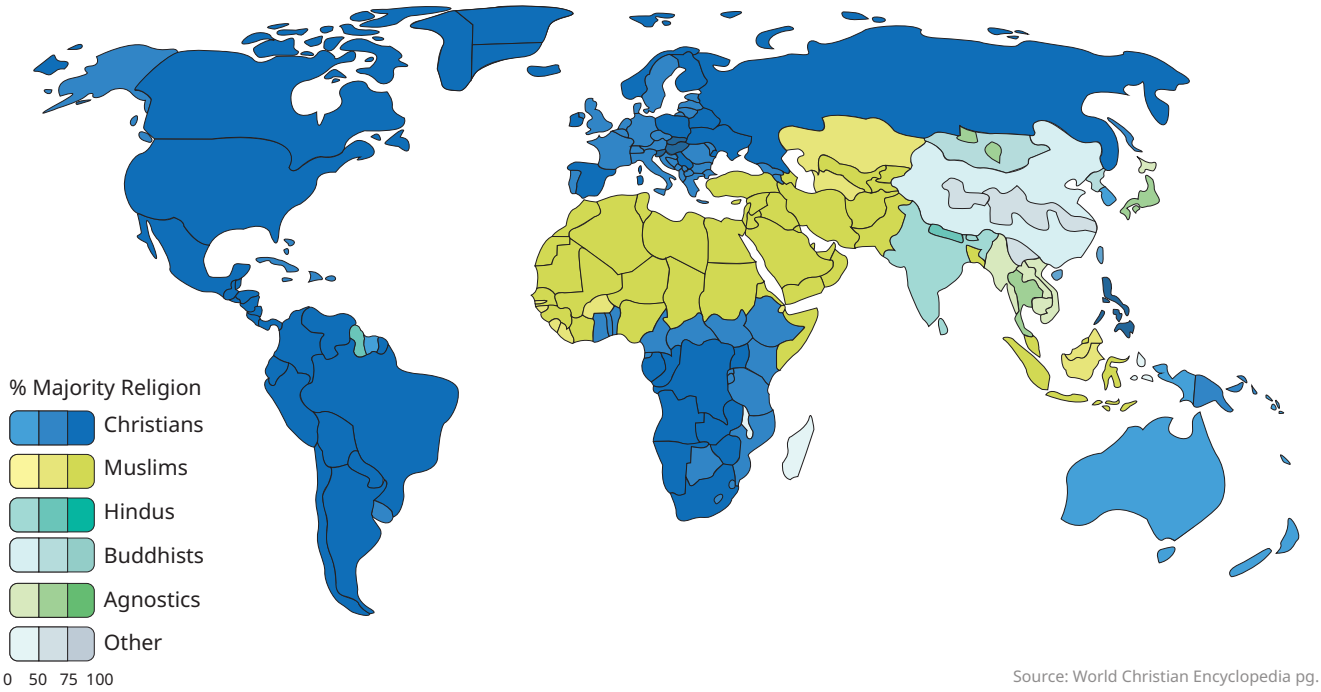
Love, Science, and the Self are the leading global values.

When observing interest in transcendental values, we are living in a time where 'love' is the highest, and supreme value. Truth, having fallen below hope, is now making a reemergence to its historic place as a key interest.

Most notably, the last 15-20 years has seen a fundamental reorientation of the prioritization of self over community.

WORLD RELIGIONS

MAJORITY WORLD RELIGION 2020



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pg. 28

GROWING RELIGIOSITY

Contrary to predictions of mass secularization by Western academics in the middle of the 20th century, the world is more rather than less religious compared to 50 years ago. Religious renewal in atheistic communist and post-communist contexts is the main reason for the shift.

Asia remains the most religiously diverse continent.

Asia remains the most religiously diverse continent, and Africa has witnessed a rapid decline of traditional religions leading to a near even split between Islam and Christianity.

Religious renewals have also led to heightened restrictions on religious liberties around the world. Religious conflict will continue to shape mission efforts as we move into the heart of the 21st century.

WORLD RELIGION PERCENTAGE 2020



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pg. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16

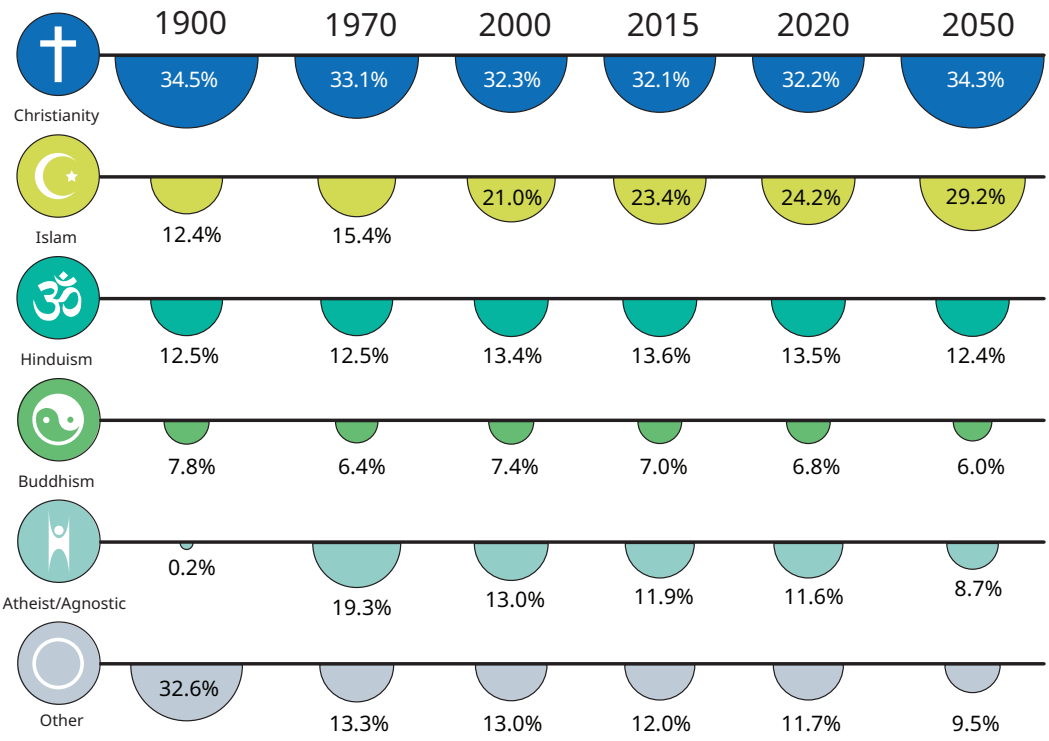
WORLD RELIGIONS

WORLD RELIGIONS OVER TIME

SHIFTING TRENDS

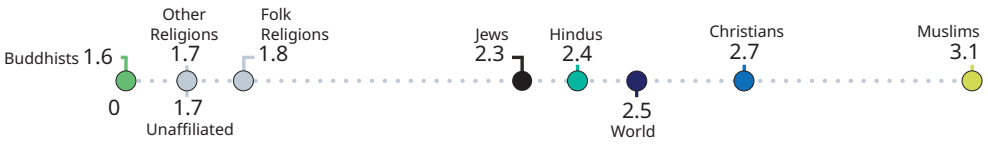
Christianity has remained around one-third of the global population for the last 150 years, even as the shift of the Christian center of gravity has moved to the Majority World.

Islam has witnessed the most substantial growth, while other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism have remained stable across the last century. Agnosticism and Atheism have seen a marked decline in Asia and Europe while Anglophone North America and Oceania have seen rapid growth.



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16

WORLD FERTILITY RATE BY RELIGIONS 2010-2015

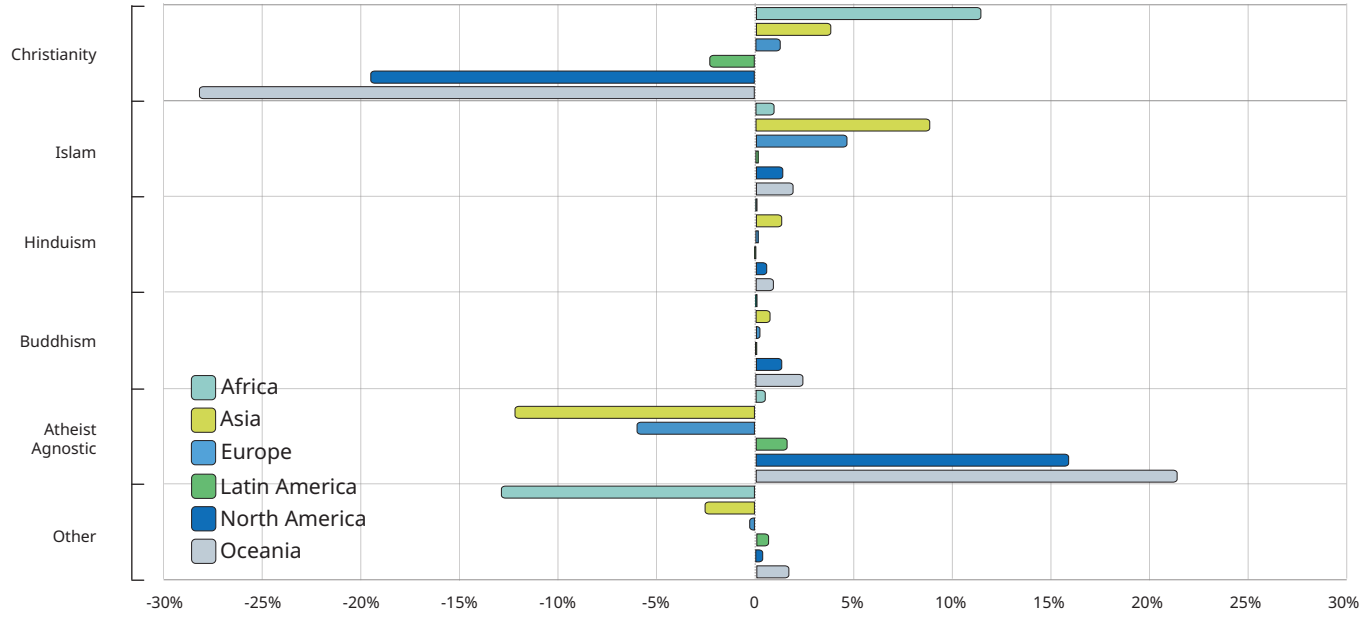


Source: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections," 2010-2050

FAMILY GROWTH

Christianity, and most notably Islam, will continue to grow in part through above average fertility rates, driven especially by the African context.

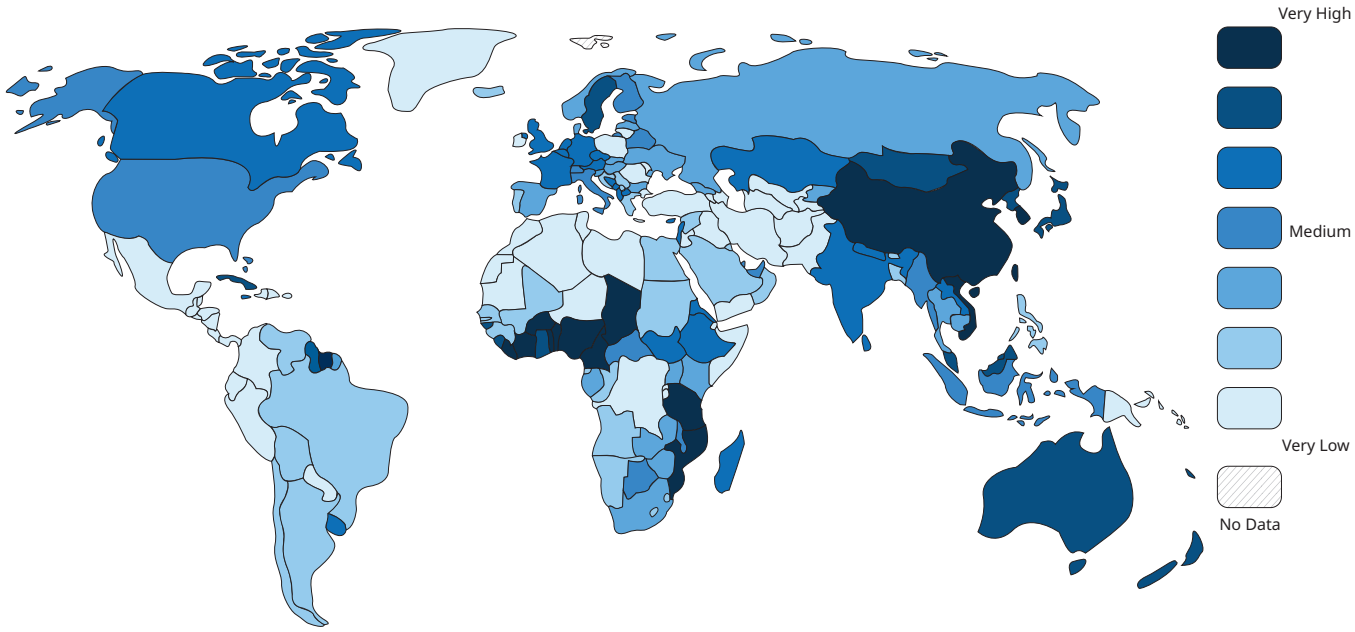
% CHANGE IN GLOBAL RELIGIONS 1970-2020



Source: World Christian Encyclopedia pgs. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

GLOBAL RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

OUT OF TOUCH

Aside from Hindus, Christians are the most likely religious group to be unfamiliar with witnessing to their faith in contexts where they are the minority. Buddhists, on the other hand, are the most likely to live in places where they are the minority faith.

Because of growing rates of migration and urbanization, Christians living in cities are more likely to have contact with people of other faiths.

DIVERSE ASIA

Christians in Asia are most likely to be familiar with witnessing to their faith in contexts of religious difference.

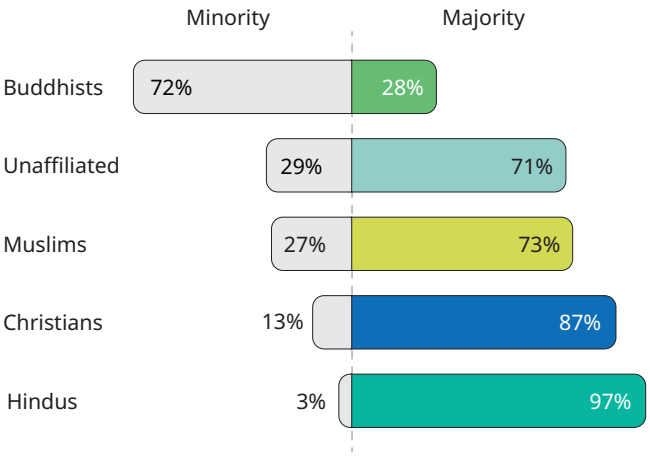
Singapore is the most religiously diverse nation, with four religious groups – including Christianity – making up over 10 percent of the population. Followers of Jesus from places like Singapore will increasingly serve as models of witness in an increasingly religiously diverse world.

CHANGING WEST

The growth of the unaffiliated – those claiming no religious belonging – is perhaps the most significant religious trend in Western nations. While Islam has grown some in Europe through migration, North America still has very low rates of religious diversity (especially when removing the unaffiliated, who are almost uniformly post-Christian). Also, most immigrants to North America – and even to Europe – identify as Christian.

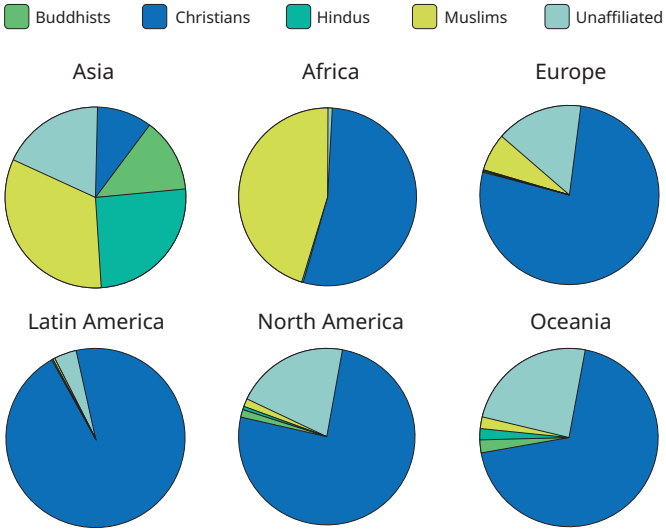
MAJORITY AND MINORITY

"Percentage of religious groups that live in countries where its adherents are a majority or minority."



Source: Pew Research Center, "Global Religious Landscape"

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY BY REGION



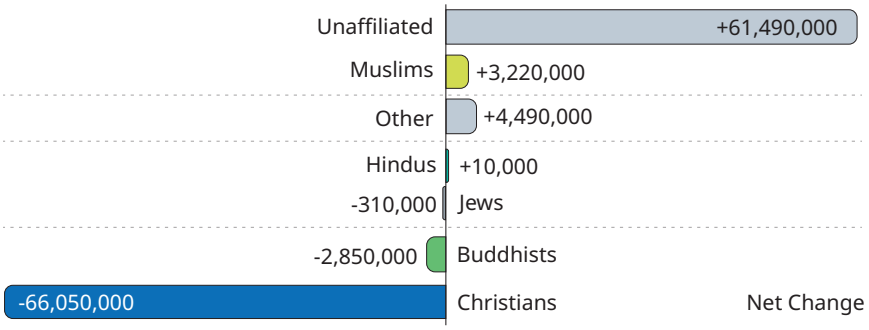
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

HOPE

SECULARISM

RELIGIOUS SWITCHING

Projected Cumulative Change due to Religious Switching, 2010-2050



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections," 2010-2050

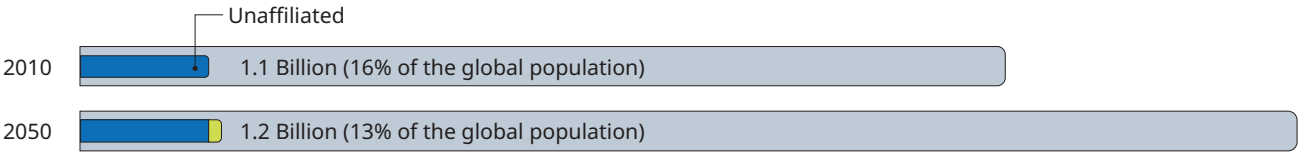
SECULAR REVIVAL

The most dominant global religious change in the coming decades will be those leaving Christianity for unaffiliated.

The shift will be concentrated in Europe and North America and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America.

Regions with the highest current rates of the unaffiliated are Western Europe and East Asia.

% OF GLOBAL POPULATION



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections," 2010-2050

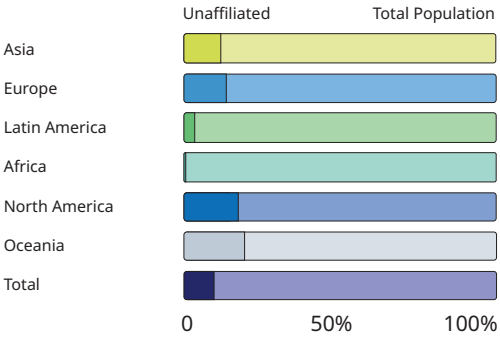
DECLINING WEST

While many in the West will leave Christianity, the unaffiliated will shrink as a percentage of the population. This is due, in part, to declining birth rates in wealthy nations and population booms in Africa and parts of Asia, regions that will likely retain high rates of Christian and Muslim adherence.

NOT ATHEISTS

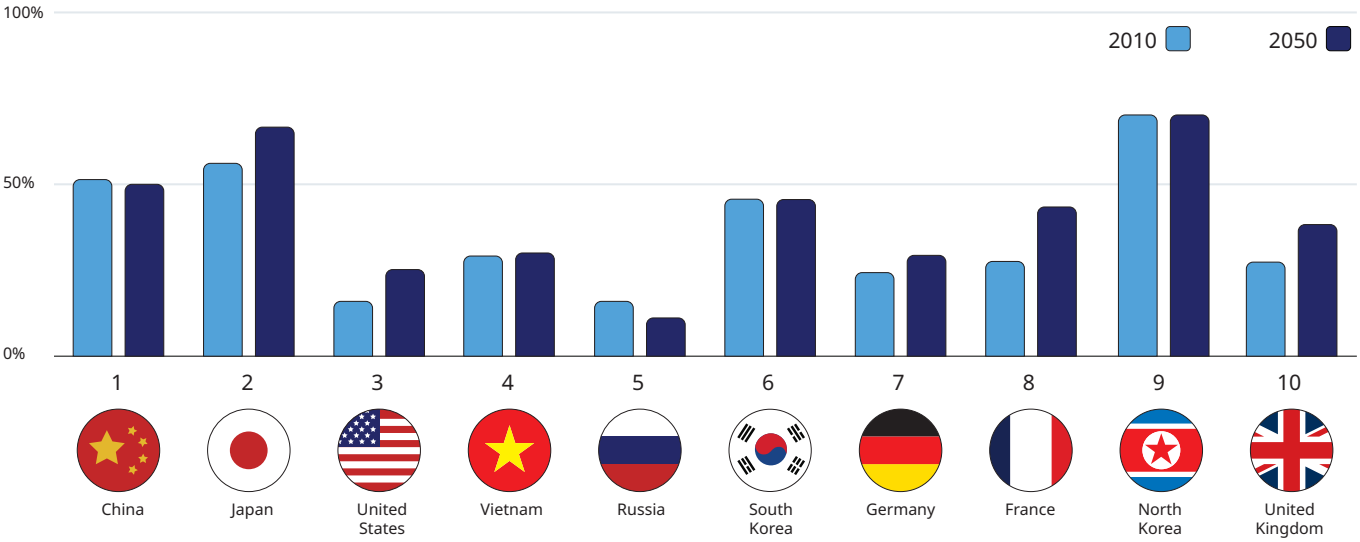
Most unaffiliated are not Atheists, and in the West most unaffiliated hold very Christian ideas about God and humanity. The unaffiliated are simply those who do not affiliate with any religion. High levels of wealth along with shrinking social networks are the most dominant factors associated with disaffiliation.

% UNAFFILIATED BY REGION



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

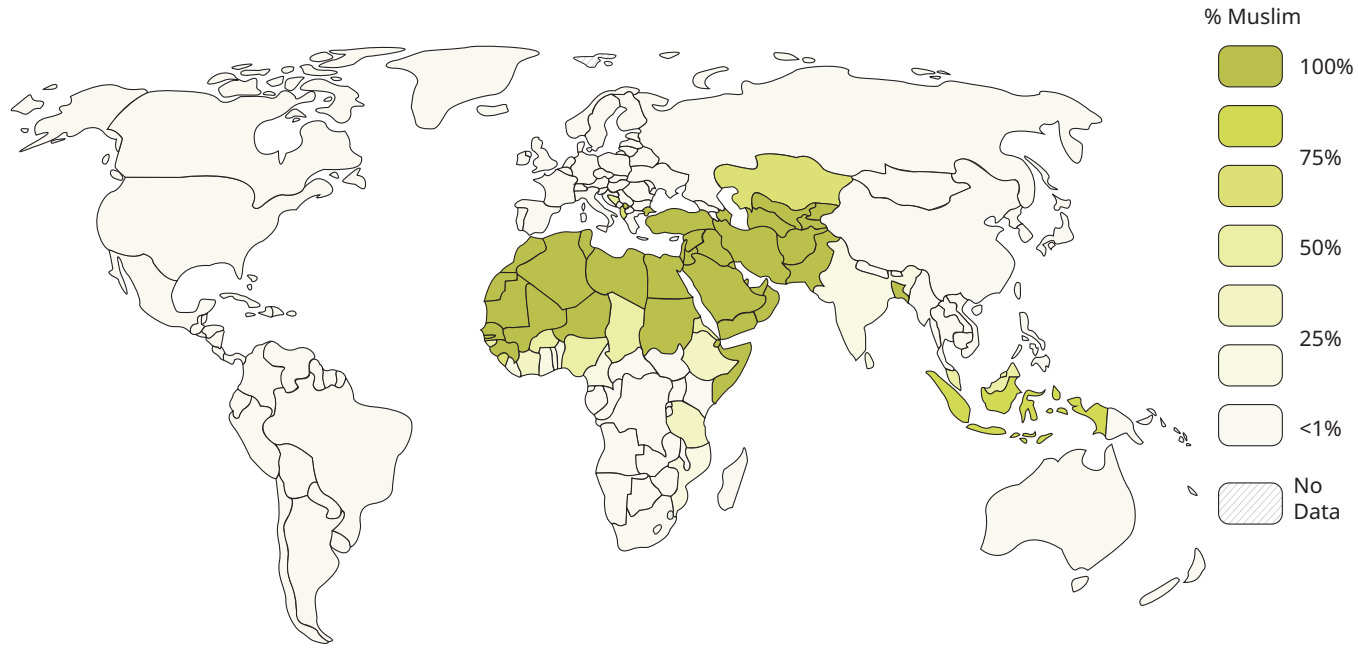
COUNTRIES WITH LARGEST % UNAFFILIATED



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections," 2010-2050

ISLAM

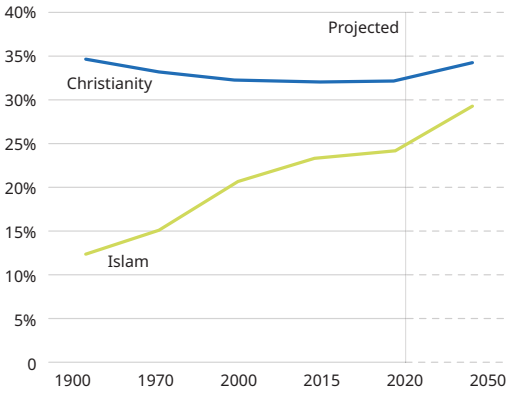
GLOBAL MUSLIM POPULATION



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

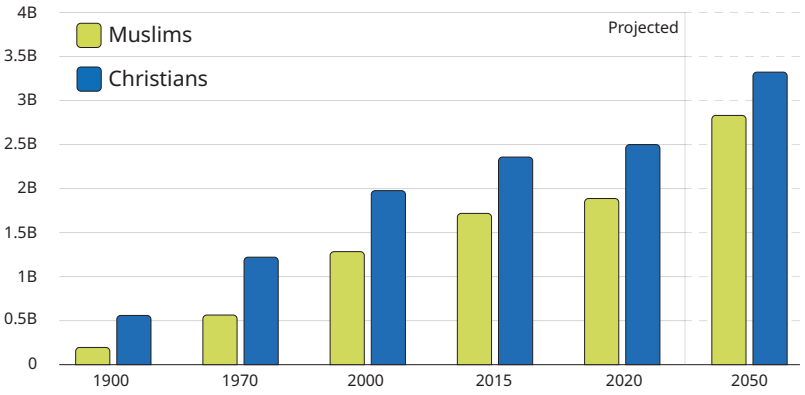
GROWTH PROJECTIONS - 2050

% of global population



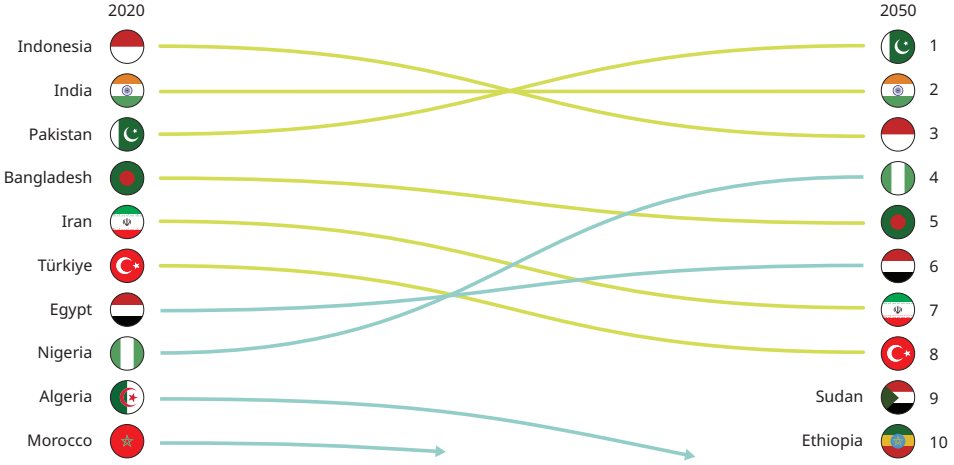
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

Share of global population



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023; B = Billion

LARGEST MUSLIM POPULATIONS



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

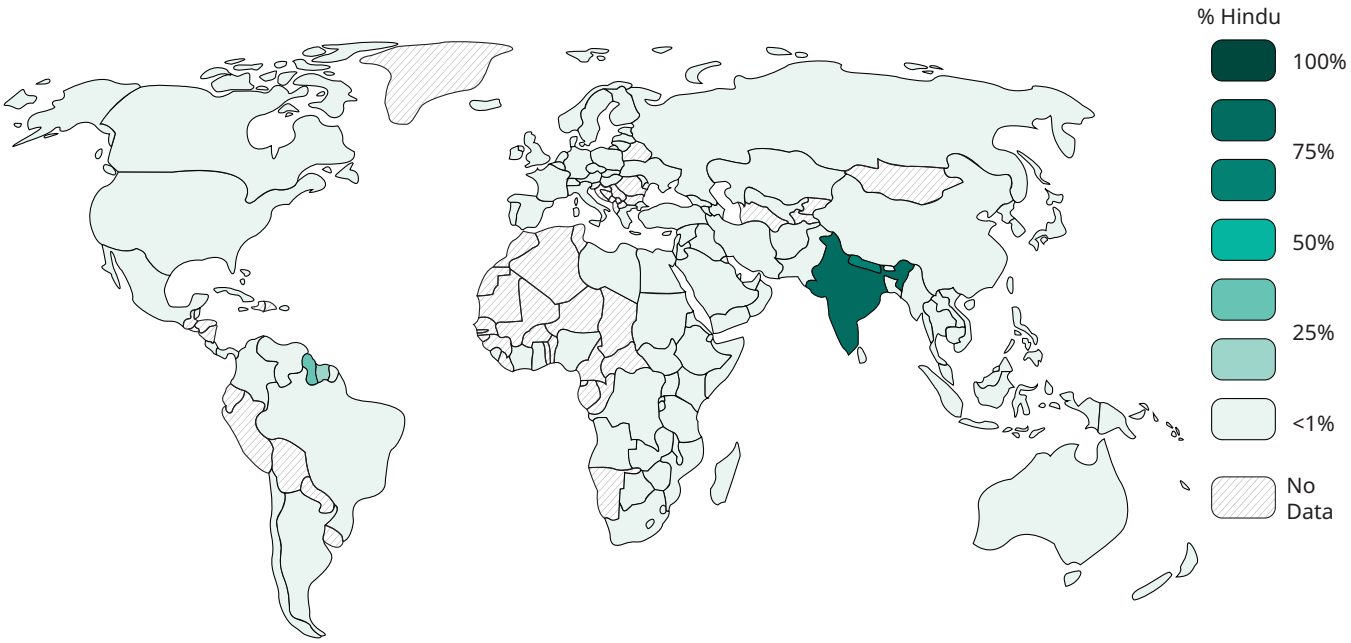
ASCENDANT ISLAM

Islam will likely remain the fastest growing world religion. The growth of Islam when compared to the historically steady global percentage of Christianity, indicates that Christians and Muslims will share an increasingly equal portion of global population. Countries with the largest Muslim populations are predominantly in Asia, with the notable exception of Nigeria who is expected to rank 4th in 2050.

HOPE

HINDUISM

GLOBAL HINDU POPULATION



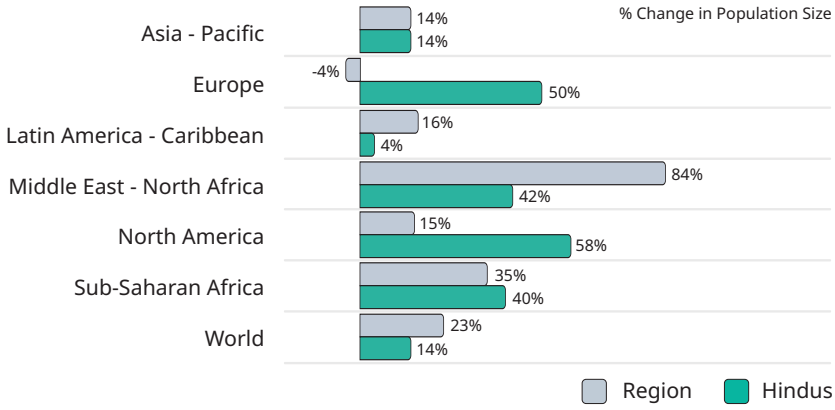
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

A SOUTH ASIAN RELIGION

Hinduism remains concentrated within India – along with Nepal – and the Indian diaspora. By 2050, the United States will have the world's fifth largest Hindu population.

India will continue to be a center of religious conflict with the rise of Hindu nationalism combined with the country soon having the world's largest Muslim population. Higher birth rates among Muslims will cause its population to grow faster than India's Hindu population.

HINDU POPULATION GROWTH 2020-2050



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

LARGEST HINDU POPULATIONS



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

CENTER STAGE

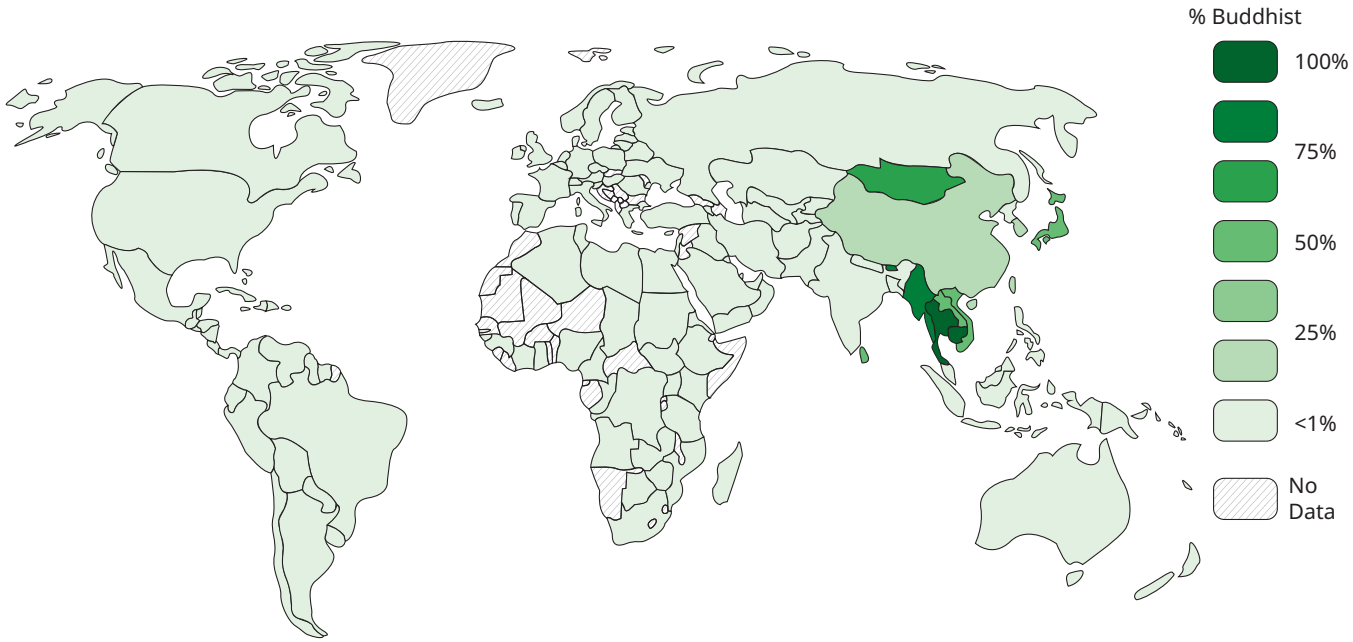
As India passed China as the world's most populous nation in 2023, Hinduism will remain central to global affairs.

Conversion into Hinduism from other religions, however, is not common. Thus, even as the religion spreads globally through the diaspora, its growth will be more minimal than other world religions.

HOPE

BUDDHISM

GLOBAL BUDDHIST POPULATION

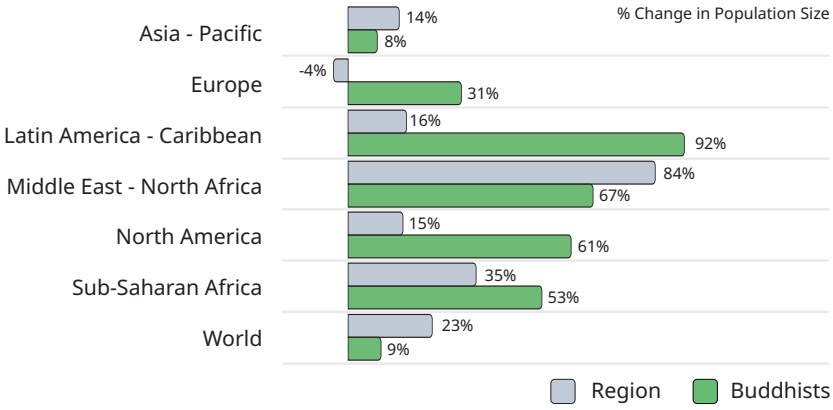


Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

ASIA AND ITS DIASPORAS

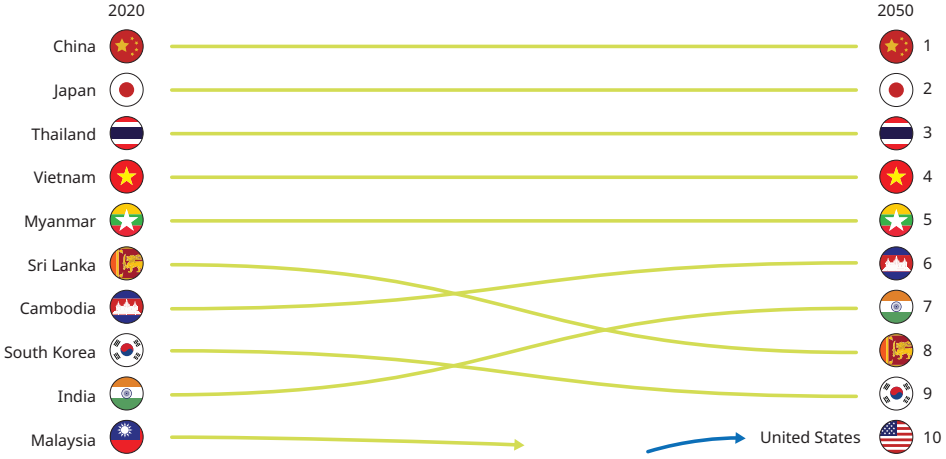
Buddhism is still predominantly a religion of East, South, and Southeast Asia. Theravada Buddhism dominates in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka, and Mahayana Buddhism in Japan, South Korea, China, and Vietnam. Most Buddhist growth in North America, Europe, and the Middle East is caused by Asian migrations to the regions. Asian immigration will eclipse Latin American immigration in the United States and Canada in the coming decades, making Buddhism more prominent in those contexts.

BUDDHIST POPULATION GROWTH 2020-2050



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

LARGEST BUDDHIST POPULATIONS



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

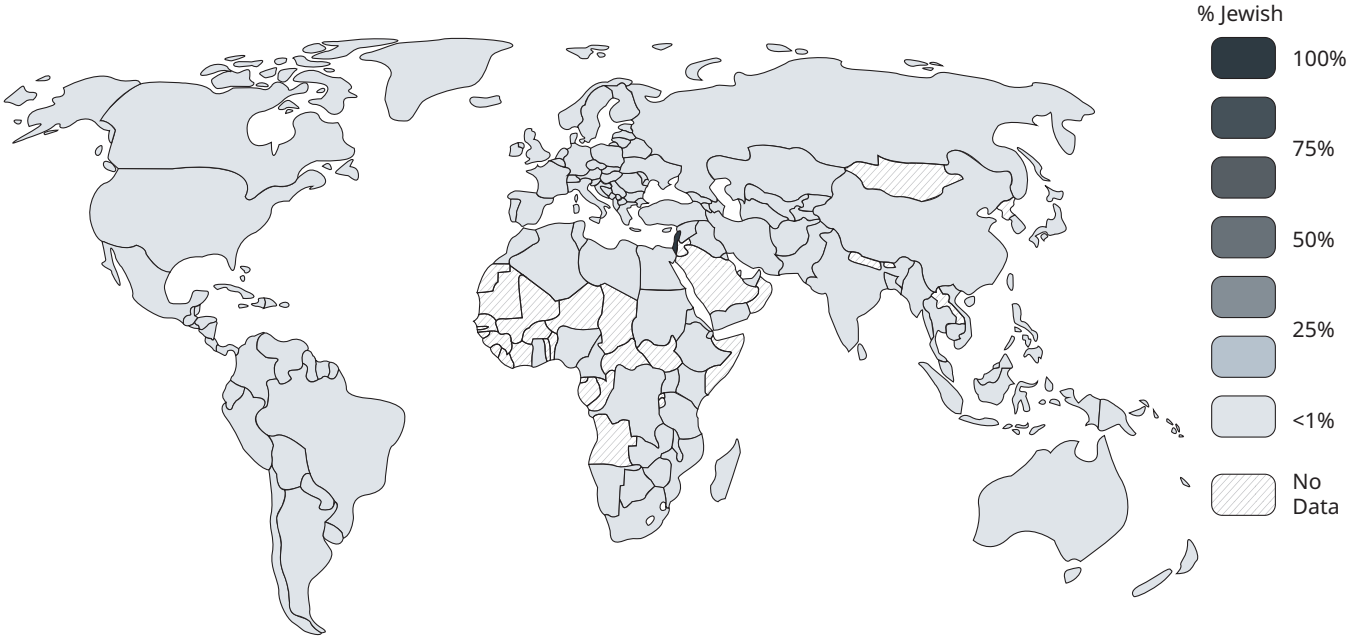
MISSIONARY FAITHS

Some Buddhist majority countries – like Thailand and Japan – have been some of the most resistant to Christian missionary efforts for over a century.

Like Christianity, many expressions of Buddhism seek converts to the religion. While still a tiny minority of the global Buddhist population, many Westerners have been attracted to forms of Buddhism such as Zen.

JUDAISM

GLOBAL JEWISH POPULATION



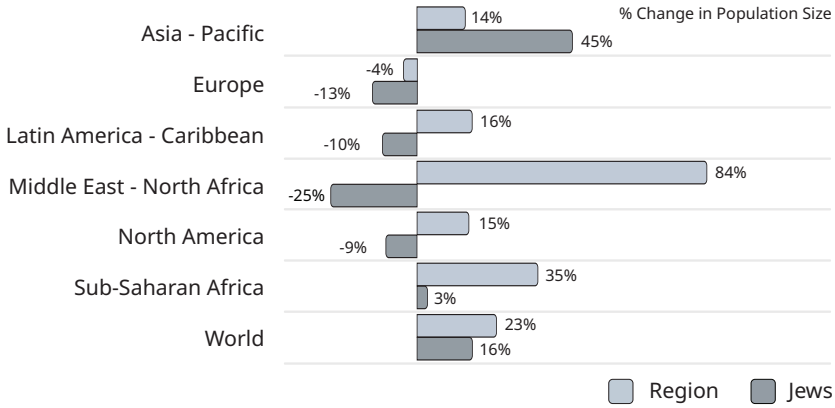
Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

JUDAISM SHIFTS

Because of 20th century European migrations, more Jewish people live in the United States than in any other country. Israel, however, is predicted to have the world's largest Jewish population by 2050.

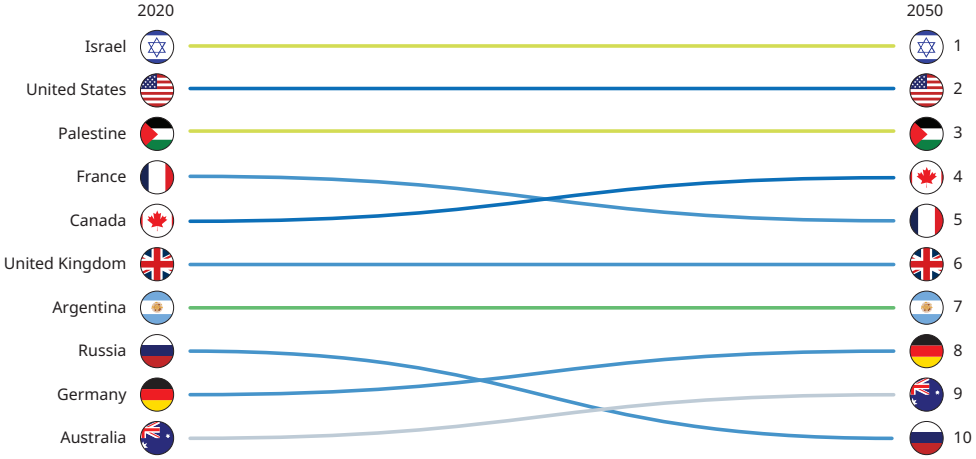
More Jews identify as 'Secular' (Hiloni) than any other category. And while Judaism is expected to grow modestly in the coming decades, it is projected that only 16 million people (or 0.2 percent of the global population) will be Jewish in 2050.

JEWISH POPULATION GROWTH 2020-2050



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

LARGEST JEWISH POPULATIONS



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

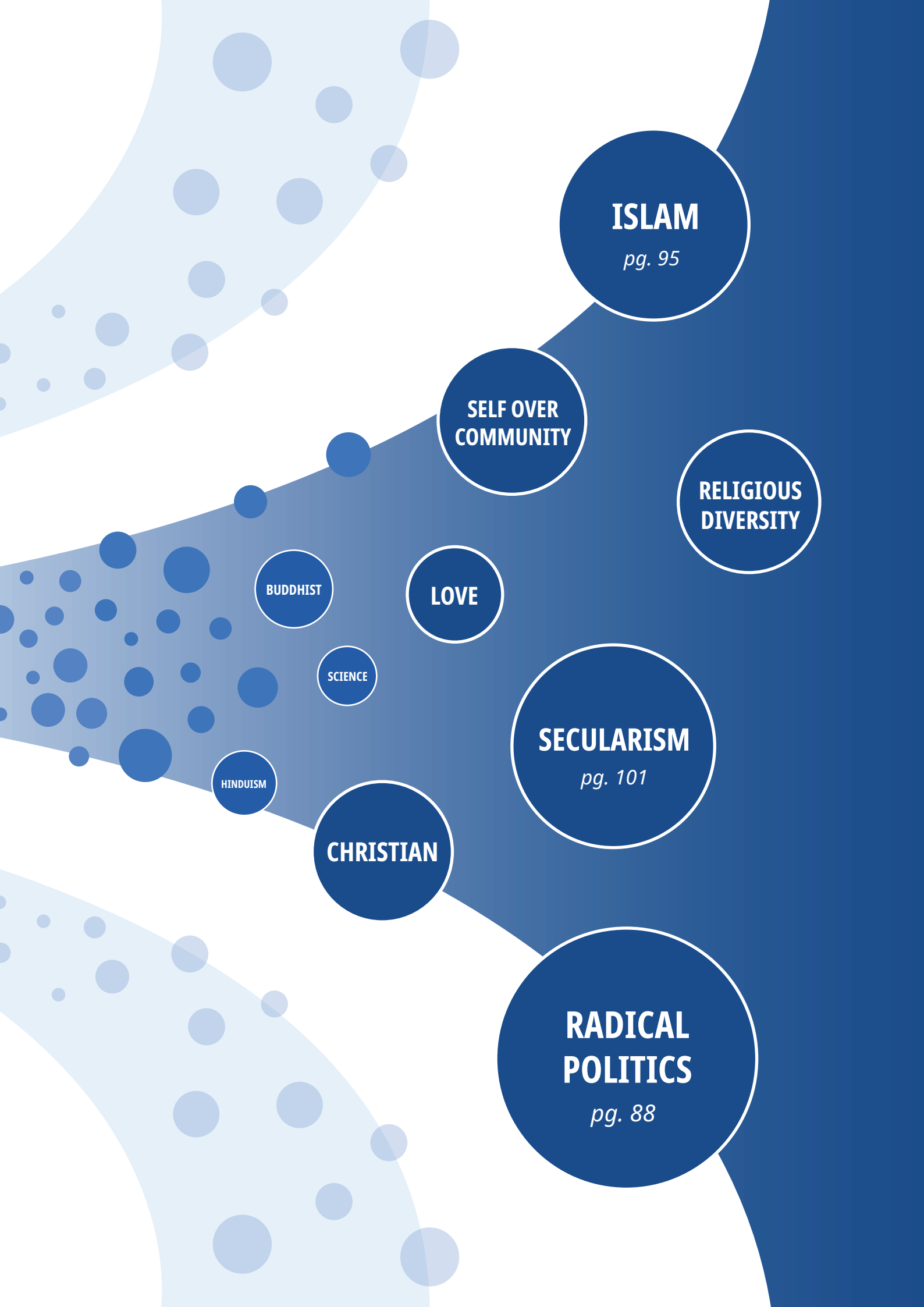
The large US Jewish population has frequent interactions with the country's Christian majority.

The situation is different in Israel, where only two percent of the population identifies as Christian, the majority of which are Catholic and Orthodox. Muslims, however, make up over 20 percent of Israel's population.

UNDERSTANDING

HOPE




ISLAM
pg. 95
SELF OVER COMMUNITY
RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
BUDDHIST
LOVE
SCIENCE
SECULARISM
pg. 101
HINDUISM
CHRISTIAN
RADICAL POLITICS
pg. 88

RADICAL POLITICS

Melba Maggay, Kosta Milkov, Jack Sara

In the early '90s, with the collapse of the Soviet system and its breakup into nation-states as drawn from the old maps, Francis Fukuyama announced that what we were seeing was 'the end of history'. The great ideological battles were over, and all we were left with were boring technical questions on how to grow our economies. This pronouncement proved to be premature. Fast forward to the present, where we are seeing in Russia's war against Ukraine the resurgence of autocracy and the scramble of Western powers to defend sovereignty and other such ideals of the 'free world'. Global alignments are being re-figured, this time not just along the old ideological lines, but also along civilizational borders.

Culture is becoming a form of legitimation for countries becoming assertive about their newly awakened self-identity. China's rise is fueled not just by its mammoth economy, but by its ancient self-identity as the Middle Kingdom and its desire to erase the history of its century of humiliation in the hands of Western powers. In light of this new world power alignment, the smaller Southeast Asian countries talk of 'Asian values' as being against criticisms of autocratic rule and pressures to interfere in the internal politics of strong-fisted member states. Pushback against democratization has intensified globally. This is due in part to disillusionment over democratic institutions rendered dysfunctional by systemic patterns of political behavior derived from colonial influence or sanctioned by religion. This socio-political trajectory of the world, born of the 1990's, has spurred a new wave of radical politics.

The Current and Potential Future of Radical Politics

Grounded in a critical examination of existing power systems, radical politics seeks transformative action and envisions a future with more equality and justice. One of the key demands of radicals is a reevaluation of exploitative and growth-oriented economic structures, which are seen as a cause of the crisis and as an engine of its perpetuation. It is essential to recognize and appreciate the boldness and courage behind such demands.[1] On one hand, growing disillusionment with traditional political institutions can fuel the emergence of radical movements, highlighting the need for alternative approaches. On the other hand, polarization, social division, and the rise of populism can pose challenges to the traction and effectiveness of radical politics. Its critique and vision are shaped by the geopolitical and cultural context. Acknowledging the potential of and the obstacles faced by radical movements allows for a more nuanced understanding of their impact.[2]

"Grounded in a critical examination of existing power systems, radical politics seeks transformative action and envisions a future with more equality and justice."

The term 'radicalism' predates the term 'extremism', having been around for more than 200 years. It has a diverse history, although in recent times it has been associated with various leftist political ideologies. It is crucial to understand its broader historical context and its associations with ideals of individual and collective freedom, democracy, and social progress.[3]

When it comes to religious radicalism, it is often portrayed in a negative light, characterized by violence, fanaticism, and perpetuation of patriarchy. There are, however, leftist religious forms of politics that have emerged. These include indigenous practices, peaceful campaigns against repressive regimes, and marginalized individuals negotiating alternative life-organizing narratives.[4] By broadening the perspective of political discourse, the Western bias against religion can be challenged. This can bring us to a more compre-

hensive understanding of the intersection between religion and radical politics.[5]

In recent years, issues related to gender, race, class, native status, and the environment have gained prominence within the realm of identity politics.[6] This shift in social focus has come at the price of economic and class issues, as radicalism reduces ethical questions to questions of power and equates victimhood with moral superiority. The emphasis on equality of outcome with a willingness to use force, while relying solely on ideology as a moral guide comes across as judgmental and censorious. This reminds us of the imperfectability of human justice regardless of the social form in which it is pursued,[7] and that the core message of the gospel opposes any such idealism.

In the context mentioned above, radical politics asks probing questions. When it comes to answers, however, it cannot extricate itself from an idealism that is socially divisive and polarizing. Even more so, radical politics fails to realize or acknowledge the distinction between legitimate authority and corrupt uses of power. In the age of social media and digital communication, the challenges posed by echo chambers and filter bubbles enhance polarization and vindictiveness. The irony of this phenomena is that social media companies, by and large with leftist leanings, have amplified such issues while making enormous financial gains for the owners and shareholders.

> ***"In the age of social media and digital communication, the challenges posed by echo chambers and filter bubbles enhance polarization and vindictiveness."***

Having in mind the above, while it is true that radical politics has historically played a crucial role in driving societal change and confronting oppressive systems, Tom Holland's verdict on this phenomenon is sobering. He has shown that radicals carry Christian influences without knowing it. Feminism could not have found fertile ground to develop in a non-Christian environment.[8] Various Marxist theories envision the classless society as an atheist fulfillment of Christian eschatology, thus including Marx in the long list of Christian heretics. In such a context, atheist philosopher John Gray describes liberal atheism that believes in humanist progress as a 'late flower of the Jewish and Christian religion, and in the past most atheists have not been liberals'.[9]

In what follows we will address two group of questions related to radical politics. Our responses will draw from the rich experience of South Asia and the Middle East. Special focus will be on the Christian expressions of principles of radical politics in Palestine.

Radical Politics and the Great Commission

Having in mind the aforementioned unique features of the Christian worldview, it is important to notice that while certain social, anthropological, and political phenomena could not have emerged in a non-Christian setting, it is these same phenomena that are used as critical tools to address and redress abuse of power within Christian structures. This 'paradox' has deep biblical roots. The Bible in general, and the prophetic books in particular, keep alerting us about idolatry, that is, the discrepancy between the nominal acknowledgment of God's justice and the practical abuse of it.

In today's world, that discrepancy is manifested through lack of congruence between the operative values—even in Christianized cultures—and the established structures of governance. As the Guatemalan sociologist Bernardo Arevalo put it, 'We have the hardware of democracy, but the software of authoritarianism.' In former European colonies the cult of the *caudillo*, of the mythic strongman, persists, thus perpetuating a major feature of the patriarchy. Radical politics is acutely alert to such occurrences. As a result, today we see the increasing 'clash of civilizations' that Huntington foresaw, largely unnoticed until the rise of political religions like Islam, and in a smaller scale the Religious Right in the US, waging a culture war against secular liberalism that has now polarized America.

The millions displaced by conflicts in failed states has inevitably led to massive migration, which in turn is causing a split between the citizenship rights of host cultures and the human rights of migrants. Trans-local churches, mosques, and temples have emerged out of these people movements. They function not just as religious communities but also as social centers for their ethnic compatriots. They also pose a challenge to countries whose self-identity was built on the old idea of 'Christendom'.[10]

The Discipling of Nations

Now that we are face to face, coming from diverse cultures and political persuasions, how do we carry out the Great Commission?

First, we need reminding that the Great Commission is about discipling nations, not just individuals. The individualistic reading of Matthew 28 and many other parts of Scripture has meant that those of us who are recipients of theologies developed in the West have tended to gloss over the corporate nature of our witness.

'Discipling nations' means we engage the life systems—the structures and institutions by which we organize our societies' common life—and turn them towards Christ. The great missiologist-historian Andrew Walls, in tracing Christianity's leap from Judaism to inculturation into Greek thought forms, gives us a clue on how the Bible engages cultures and serves as a transforming element in the social fabric of nations:

> The Word is to pass into all those distinctive ways of thought, those networks of kinship, those special ways of doing things, that give a nation its commonality, its coherence, its identity. [The Word] has to travel through the shared mental and moral processes of a community.[11]

What we are talking about here is not Christian Nationalism. It is the nurturing of what is called a 'hermeneutical community', those who, like the tribe of Issachar, can discern the times and guide the community on how the Word can make an answer or at least bring light to the many complex issues in the public square.

Witness, according to Paul, requires making 'every thought captive to obey Christ' (2 Cor 10:5). The failure to engage the thought life of societies with roots in Christianity has led to secularization.[12] Such a failure is also the reason why Asian cultures continue to be resistant to the gospel, rooted as we are in rival religious traditions that are just as philosophically comprehensive as Christianity.

Although Peter Berger and his colleagues have written about the 'desecularization of the world', many of us still live in societies that have yet to secularize. The challenge for us is to engage our cultures outside of the usual meaning frames of theologies we have inherited from the West. In research done by scholars in the Philippines, it was found that while there has been a decline in such usual ritual indicators as church attendance among Catholics, who comprise about 82 percent of the population, many still pray—73.3 percent among those who are 18-24 years old, and 79.9 percent among those aged 25-39. What this tells us is that the younger generations remain religious, but not in the way institutional religion would have it.

The disillusionment lies in the lack of authenticity among adherents. Young people's attitudes are summarized by the researcher as, 'Right living is more important than right believing.' Hence the preference for humanitarian service, like volunteering to help poor communities build their houses or rescue disaster victims, rather than just going to mass or even entering politics, which is seen as corrupt and largely lacking in impact.

New Wineskins

This brings us to the second imperative—the need to innovate new wineskins that will hold the ever-new wine of the gospel. We live in a time when media and the market have replaced the church and even educational institutions in shaping what Jung calls the 'collective unconscious' of our peoples.

Note that the state and other such powerful institutions now have in their hands the technology to influence masses of people. It is not

an accident that the first thing despots do to consolidate power is to muzzle the media or use it to spread disinformation. Propaganda thrives when diverse viewpoints are limited, and biased opinions prevail, posing significant challenges to fostering an informed and constructive society.[13]

What Paul calls 'the prince of the power of the air' (Eph 2:2) is most likely the demonic power that is now lodged and has entrenched itself in technologies that have power to spread and massify lies. In the same way that behind an evil government may be 'principalities and powers', media can be one of these structures that could be taken over by what Scripture calls 'the powers'.

In the conflict of narratives, the church needs to insert itself into political space as a truth-telling presence. Artists and those in professions with power to communicate will need to be nurtured intentionally into biblical literacy so as to be able to create new icons—symbols that engage the public imagination creatively.14 Also, faith is now being practiced outside of the usual institutions. Virtual communities are being formed, driven by the need to connect somehow, especially in atomized societies. One research study tells us that young people are not so much looking for content—they can get that easily from the internet—but for connection.

> ***"In the conflict of narratives, the church needs to insert itself into political space as a truth-telling presence."***

Towards a Christian Radical Politics

Radical politics from a Christian perspective refers to an approach that seeks to apply Christian teachings and values to political and social issues in a transformative and often unconventional way. Such an approach towards policy making emphasizes the biblical call for justice and compassion towards the marginalized and oppressed. This includes addressing issues such as poverty, racism, gender-based discrimination and violence, systemic corruption, and other forms of social injustice. It often involves advocating for policies and practices that promote equality, fairness, and the dignity of all individuals.

Lessons from Palestine

As a Palestinian Christian, one author of this paper reflects on his own experience working with the Palestinian people in a context of conflict. Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians, experience various hardships and restrictions as a result of the conflict, such as movement restrictions, access to holy sites, and socio-economic challenges. The Palestinian church is caught in a hard intersection of radical politics, faith, and the Great Commission.

Within the Palestinian context, the Evangelical Church faces unique challenges and dynamics. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the complex political situation in the region have significant implications for the church and its members. In response, the Palestinian Evangelical Church seeks to serve its community by providing spiritual guidance, pastoral care, and support to its members. It also engages in various social and humanitarian activities, addressing the needs of Palestinians, regardless of their religious affiliation. This may include initiatives related to education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and peace-building efforts.

The church often promotes a message of justice, reconciliation, and peace, seeking to bridge divides and promote understanding among different communities. Some Palestinian Evangelicals engage in dialogue with Israeli Christians and international Christian organizations to address the conflict and advocate for a just and peaceful resolution. Many radical Christians adhere to the principle of nonviolence, drawing inspiration from Jesus' teachings on love, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek. As costly as this can be, Bonhoeffer's example and message still stands:

> Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear. [. . .] Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give

> more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now.[15]

Peaceful Resistance

This is never an easy calling. But according to Mubarak Awad,[16] for Christians, this is what following Christ means. He says,

> Many times, people will come to the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence and they would say, 'The Israeli soldiers, the Israeli settlers came and uprooted all our olive trees that are hundreds of years old.' And I said, 'Okay, so what do you want me to do? Is it to find those trees and bring them back?' They said, 'No, we don't know where they're at.' I said, 'Okay, let's get groups together. Let's get even Israelis with us and let's go.' And they took 100 trees, 1,000 trees. We'll plant 4,000 trees so that in years to come, we'll have more trees than the original. And that's how we start.'

Moubarak rejected the use of violence as a means to achieve political goals and instead promoted peaceful methods of resistance and change, to the point that he was called the 'Palestinian Ghandi'. The importance of nonviolent methods to oppose violence cannot be overstated.

Radical Christian politics views creation care as a moral imperative. Millions suffer because we have not obeyed the cultural mandate, which tells us to steward the earth in such a way that populations are governed according to God's purposes for society, and creation flourishes instead of becoming degraded. As in Biblical times, showing radical faith in God requires today's Christian believers to be prophetic voices challenging the dominant systems and structures of society. They must aim to speak truth to power and critique policies and practices that contradict their understanding of Christian values and teachings. As the poet T.S. Eliot once put it, preaching the Word must also mean it is 'the Church's business to interfere with the world'.

Kingdom Values

Radical politics often emphasize social justice, equality, and the well-being of marginalized communities. Some individuals and churches see these values as an integral part of their faith and the call to fulfill the Great Commission. They believe that addressing systemic injustices is an essential aspect of following Jesus and spreading the gospel.

As mentioned above, one key kingdom value is nonviolence. Different perspectives exist on how these aspects can align or conflict with each other. 'There is always an alternative. It doesn't matter what is the conflict, what is the problem, you have to create an alternative.'[17] This requires widespread—sometimes national or international—involvement without compromise on the truth of the gospel. It's an opportunity to show solidarity.

Many radical political movements emphasize nonviolent activism and civil disobedience as the means by which to bring about change. Some Christian individuals and groups align with these movements, believing that nonviolent action is consistent with Jesus' teachings on love, forgiveness, and turning the other cheek. They may see it as a way to advocate for justice while remaining faithful to the principles of their faith.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the intersection of radical politics, church, faith, and the Great Commission can be complex and nuanced. It depends on individual beliefs, interpretations of Scripture, and theological frameworks. Christians may hold diverse views on how their faith should inform their political engagement and the pursuit of social justice. Above all there should be a unifying body to gather all aspects and promote unity in the body of Christ. But if the church wants to be relevant to the world we are living in, she has to become a prophetic voice and take a stand against injustices committed against people everywhere, even inside the church. Admittedly this is not always done. But when it is, it shows love to the people around us, so they may experience the

love of Christ reflected in our passion and love for the nations.

Now more than ever, the church is being challenged to be truly herself, a community whose social behavior is such that it serves as a context in which the love and saving power of God is made visible. Like those of us who live in autocratic societies, the early church had no power to critique the authoritarian institutions that ruled over them. But their communities were transformed and adopted new patterns of culture, they eventually broke through barriers of class, race, and gender and inaugurated a new social ethic that contributed to the tearing down of Greco-Roman civilization. In this day and age, we can do the same as the Spirit leads us.

Endnotes

1 Cf. Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

2 Cf. Chantal Mouffe. *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

3 Astrid Bötticher. 'Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism,' *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11(4), 73-77. Accessed 9 June 2023. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297886.

4 Cf. Angela Davis. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

5 Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Anthony T. Fiscella. 'Religious Radicalism,' in *Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics*. Ed. Ruth Kinna and Uri Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2021), 492-509.

6 Cf. Bell Hooks. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, UK: South End Press, 2000).

7 Reinhold Niebuhr. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), xxxiv.

8 Tom Holland. *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Abacus, 2019), 516.

9 John Gray. *Seven Types of Atheism* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 1.

10 Cf. note 5 above.

11 Andrew F. Walls. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

12 Thus fanning the emergence of movements with a radical political agenda.

13 Cf. Timothy Snyder. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017).

14 Cf. Makoto Fujimura. *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English edition*. 13:402. A sermon Bonhoeffer gave in London on an unknown date in 1934.

16 Awad is a prominent Christian Palestinian leader who was involved in non-violent resistance of the occupation in Palestine.

17 Mubarak Awad.

18 Makoto Fujimura.

Authors

Dr Melba Maggay is a writer and a social anthropologist who holds a doctorate in Philippine Studies. A specialist in intercultural communication, she was Research Fellow on the subject at the University of Cambridge under the auspices of Tyndale House, applying it to the question of culture and theology. She is the founder and longtime director of Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, a voice for conscientiousness in politics and in church-and-culture issues.

Dr Kosta Milkov is the Founder and President of the Balkan Institute for Faith and Culture. Kosta has been involved in research work, including Postdoctoral Research Seminar organized by Langham International Partnership, the Balkan Strategy Report for the Global Scripture Impact of the American Bible Society, numerous newspaper and magazine articles for the Macedonian press, and a chapter in *Politicization of Religion, The Power of State, Nation, and Faith* entitled "Gospel and Politics: Transforming Grace for Transformed Society?"

Rev Dr Jack Sara is the President of Bethlehem Bible College. He has worked extensively in the area of peace and reconciliation and has played a pioneering role in several local and international ministries. Rev. Jack is an ordained minister with Evangelical Alliance Church in the Holy Land where he still maintains an overseeing role with the leadership of the churches. He currently serves at the board of several local and international ministries and organizations. Today, Rev. Jack travels the globe, speaking in conferences and teaching about Missions and Cross-Cultural work in the Middle East.

ISLAM

Seung-hyun (Nathan) Chung, Tharwat Wahba

Islam Today

The Pew Research Center predicted in 2011 that the Muslim population would increase by 35 percent from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030. With this increase, we would see 79 countries with a million or more Muslim inhabitants in 2030, up from 72 countries in 2010. At that rate of increase, we could expect to see Muslims comprise 26.4 percent of the world's projected population of 8.3 billion in 2030.[1] The Middle East-North Africa region is predominantly Muslim, but as of 2010, only one-in-five Muslims lived in that part of the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, the Muslim population is expected to reach nearly 1.5 billion by 2050, up from roughly 1 billion in 2010. The number of Muslims in the Middle East-North Africa region is expected to increase from about 300 million in 2010 to more than 550 million in 2050. The Muslim population in sub-Saharan Africa is forecast to more than double, growing from about 250 million in 2010 to nearly 670 million in 2050. The absolute number of Muslims is projected to increase in regions with smaller Muslim populations, including Europe and North America.[2]

Diverse and Evolving

In an earlier study involving more than 38,000 face-to-face interviews in over 80 languages, Pew reported that Muslims are unanimous that there is only one God, and that Muhammad is his prophet. At the same time, however, Muslims also have significant differences according to their levels of religious commitment, openness to multiple interpretations of their faith, and acceptance of various sects and movements.

Some of these differences are apparent at a regional level. For example, Muslims in every country surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa say that religion is vital in their lives. But religion plays a much less central role for some Muslims, particularly in nations that have only recently emerged from communism. No more than half of those surveyed in Russia, the Balkans, and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia say religion is vital in their lives.[3]

Islam is a diverse and multifaceted religion with followers spanning various cultures, countries, and historical contexts. As modernism enters traditional Islamic regions, many changes are taking place. These moves toward modernization ought not be oversimplified. Islam itself - from Indonesia to Morocco - is profoundly diverse, as are the changes it is undergoing.

On the Move

One noteworthy dynamic is the migration of Muslims. An estimated 3.7 million Muslims migrated to Europe between mid-2010 and mid-2016. Muslims are expected to make up maximum 14 percent of Europe's population in 2050.[4] As an example, from 2010 to 2016, Germany accepted an estimated 670,000 refugees, roughly 86 percent of whom were Muslims. In addition, 680,000 regular migrants from outside the EU came to Germany during the same period, although a smaller percentage of these migrants (40 percent) were Muslims. Altogether, Germany received a total of about 1.35 million migrants during this period, including an estimated 850,000 Muslims.[5]

As Muslims continue to migrate in the era of globalization, they come to interact with the culture and religion of new regions. Because of this, Islam and Muslims face many changes and challenges both internally and externally. Consequently, the diversity of Islam and Muslims is accelerating.

Islam's Global Influence

In the era of globalization, Muslims have migrated all over the world, and today they live in far greater numbers outside the Arab world. An estimated 61 percent of the world-

wide Muslim population lives in the Asia Pacific area, while 20 percent live in the Middle East and Northern Africa.[6] Muslim communities have migrated and established diasporic communities in various parts of the world. These communities have contributed to their host countries' cultural, economic, and social fabric, enriching diversity and fostering multicultural societies. In particular, Asia is home to an incredible 1 billion Muslims. Because of this, Asians can often meet Muslims in the immediate neighborhood. As such, in daily conversations about religious freedom, women's rights, terrorism, immigration, and interfaith dialogue are often intertwined with discussions about Islam and Muslims. These issues are complex and vary across contexts, requiring nuanced analysis and understanding.

In the Secular Realm

The growth of Islam requires the Christian church to understand it accurately. Some nations are secular; others enforce Sharia. Some protect Christian minorities; others discriminate against them. Also, among Muslims, there are some of the richest and poorest people in the world. In addition, Muslims occupy a genuinely diverse spectrum, from world-class scholars to terrorists. Wealthy Muslims greatly influence the global economy based on their enormous financial power.

A representative field for this phenomenon is sports. The 2022 FIFA World Cup was held in Qatar, reflecting the climate of the Middle East for the first time in World Cup history. Qatar will also host the AFC Asian Cup in February 2024. In addition, the wealthy in the Middle East own several teams in the English Premier League (EPL), and their enormous financial resources afford them strong influence. The most representative team is Manchester City, which has won the EPL four times in the last five seasons and is said to be the most competitive in the world. The club is owned by City Football Group (CFG), a company based in the United Arab Emirates. CFG is majority-owned by the Abu Dhabi United Group, which Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a member of the royal family of Abu Dhabi, controls.

However, it is estimated that a significant proportion of the world's poor population resides in Muslim-majority countries or communities with a significant Muslim population. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2010, nearly two-thirds of the world's Muslim population lived in countries where Muslims were either a majority or a significant minority.[7] Several Muslim-majority countries, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, are known to have high poverty rates and face significant development challenges.

"The growth of Islam requires the Christian church to understand it accurately."

On the Christian Church

This influence of Islam has inevitably spurred greater interest within the Christian church toward Islam and Muslims. However, Christian churches that have never experienced Muslims as neighbors often have a limited understanding or even a phobic perspective rather than understanding Islam and its diversity. Islamophobia is also common in Korea, and Jeeyun Kwon summarizes its main concerns as marriage, CIA reports, and the increase in the Muslim population. 'Muslims are planning to expand Islam in Korea by marrying Korean women, there is a CIA report explaining the 8-step world conquest strategy of Islam, and a propagation strategy to Islamize Korean society by infiltrating 150,000 Muslims in Korea (including violent methods). Or the Islamization of Europe will be reproduced in Korean society.'[8]

Therefore, the Lausanne Movement has emphasized the need to correctly understand Muslims and Islam since the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization. 'There should be a focus on overcoming fear and prejudice towards Muslims, motivating people to build positive relationships with Muslims, including information on how to live as neighbors with Muslims, providing accurate information on Islam and the diversity of Muslims.'[9]

Christian Mission and Islam

Amidst this diversity, Christian mission related to Islam differs from region to region. In certain areas, Christian mission work is progressing. For example, in Indonesia, a country with religious pluralism, Christians can enter the country with a pastor's visa. Accordingly, they can faithfully carry out missionary work with local denominations and seminary ministries. However, many countries still do not allow missionaries to enter the country, especially in the case of pastors. In those countries, the death penalty may occur if a native converts to Christianity.

In this situation, Christian missions would do well to apply two positions of the Lausanne Movement in their own work. First, the Lausanne Movement has consistently insisted that people of other religions, including Muslims, be respected, loved, and served as neighbors despite differences.

> It is vitally important that Christians maintain a presence as authentic Christ-like lives alongside Muslim neighbors, friends, colleagues, and contacts. Such a presence can assist to break down barriers and demonstrate the love of God for Muslims. Therefore we encourage Christians everywhere, wherever possible, to intentionally live out their faith alongside Muslims in neighborhoods and workplaces, and not to retreat from contact with Muslims.[10]

Second, Christianity must closely examine and understand the unique characteristics of Islam and Muslims in each context to fully convey the gospel of Christ.

> The church informs itself concerning the geo-political issues which impact missions to Muslims and engage in the task of understanding the geo-political world view of Muslim communities. The church must also keep itself informed of the political situation in nations where Muslims are found, and take steps to understand the way that this impacts existing Christian populations as well as on the practice of Christian mission to Muslims.[11]

Opportunities and Challenges for Achieving the Great Commission

It is difficult to predict what may happen in the future, as the world is undergoing rapid changes in all fields. Dramatic political changes are underway as regional and international alliances collapse, and conflicts accelerate between countries. Many countries also suffer from internal conflicts between tribes, ethnic groups, and religions. Rapid economic changes have caused forms of suffering in most countries. These rapid changes complicate the task of predicting the state of the Great Commission in 2050. However, we will try to discern a vision for the future in light of available information and recent developments. Above all the predictions for the future, we must look at God's sovereignty and the work of the Holy Spirit to create a new reality that may exceed our human expectations.

"Above all the predictions for the future, we must look at God's sovereignty and work of the Holy Spirit to create a new reality that may exceed our human expectations."

Challenges and Opportunities within Islam

Opportunities and challenges cannot be separated. Every challenge carries within it an opportunity, and likewise, every opportunity carries within it challenges. We will try to summarize some of the opportunities and challenges while leaving room for further in-depth and comprehensive studies.

The Islamic world is going and will go through many changes, whether in terms of religious thoughts or the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim minorities within the Islamic world. These changes directly impact the possibility of achieving the Great Commission among Muslims.

Islamic religious thoughts exist between two extremes. On the one hand, there is the fun-

damental Islamic approach of Salafi Jihadist ideology, which calls for returning to the early days of Islam and emulating the Prophet, his companions, and the early caliphs. Most probably, these ideologies will continue to impact the Muslim world and the rest of the world in many aspects.[12] Salafi jihadist adherents adopt a violent approach to spreading Islam and establishing an Islamic caliphate. The world has seen what such terrorist groups like ISIS, Boko Haram in West and Central Africa, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and other similar groups have done. Their ideology relies on the notion that Allah commands them to wage jihad through carrying arms against the infidel West and against Muslim rulers who, from their perspective, do not apply Sharia law.

> ***"Every challenge carries within it an opportunity, and likewise, every opportunity carries within it challenges."***

This religious challenge carries negative aspects that affect the Christian world and Christian witness. Salafists seek to expel minorities from Islamic countries, as we have seen in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Sudan, and other countries. This has manifested in acts of discrimination, persecution, and restrictions on having Christian service in Islamic communities.

Despite this negative influence, such violent practices have opened doors for Muslim youth who are exposed to global perspectives about freedom of thought and human rights, leading them to compare Salafi jihadist ideology and its violent practices with Christian thoughts that embrace peace, non-violence, and forgiveness. This contrast encourages young Muslims to search for Christian faith and follow it. It is likely that Islamic jihadist practices will continue in the East and expand in the West. All of this creates challenges but at the same time opens the door to opportunities for the Great Commission to present Christ as the Prince of Peace.

On the other end is the liberal Islamic ideology, which is influenced by Western intellectual trends that subject everything to scrutiny and criticism, including Islamic religious sources and practices. Its proponents appear in academic and media circles. Muslim liberals adopt principles of criticism and scientific interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, calling for purifying Islamic heritage from calls for violence and extremism and from ideas that contradict science and reason. These teachings may lead towards atheism or not necessarily adhere to Islamic religious obligations, while others may turn towards Christianity in search of answers to their questions.[13]

Between these two ideologies—the Salafi-jihadist and the liberal—exist many intellectual schools. Many Muslims around the world practice folk Islam and know little about the history and complexities of the faith. However, the intellectual movement in Islam creates challenges for Christians as well as opportunities. It will open the horizon for Christians who are involved in introducing the gospel to Muslims to study more about these developments. Workers among Muslims need to understand how Islamic thoughts develop in order to build bridges with Muslims in new ways, conveying the message of the gospel in a modern way that addresses Islamic minds and thoughts.

Challenges and Opportunities within the Church

As for the mission of the church towards Islam, Christians have taken many steps to achieve the Great Commission among Muslims. They have led an increasing number of converts from Muslim backgrounds towards Christianity. The methods of service and strategies have diversified to become more mature and impactful. Despite some encouraging results, however, challenges persist. The Western church that sent many missionaries and workers to the Islamic world during the past two centuries needs to realize the new changes in mission. It is expected that the direct role of Western missionaries to the Islamic world will shrink in the coming era. The presence of Western missionaries in many Islamic coun-

tries is complicated today due to political, religious, cultural, and security reasons. Nevertheless, opportunities exist for missionaries to achieve the Great Commission through their talents in education, technology, administration, fundraising, and networking between churches and mission organizations.[14]On the other hand, the church presence in the Islamic world is an important tool for achieving the Great Commission. Despite the persecution, discrimination, and migration to the West that the church in the Islamic world has faced, it is encouraging to see a growing awareness of its role in God's mission and a correction to negative past experiences.

The missionary awareness of the church in the Islamic world has increased, where educational opportunities about missionary work are available in theological colleges, national churches, and mission organizations. Moreover, the number of nationals interested in missionary work has increased, both those who serve outside their countries to reach new fields in the Middle East and those in the diaspora. The number of short- and long-term missionaries to Islamic countries has been increasing. Satellite channels and social media have played a significant role in reaching many Muslims with the message of the gospel. It is expected that the awakening of the church in the Islamic world towards achieving the Great Commission will continue through 2050. The number of national missionaries inside or outside their countries is expected to increase.

> ***"One of the most important factors in carrying the gospel to Muslims is the breaking down of the barrier of fear that has hindered Eastern Christians from delivering the message of the gospel to Muslims..."***

One of the most important factors in carrying the gospel to Muslims is the breaking down of the barrier of fear that has hindered Eastern Christians from delivering the message of the gospel to Muslims. For 14 centuries, Eastern Christians have suffered from persecution, discrimination, and rights deprivation, which created an unhealthy fear barrier towards Muslims. However, due to increased awareness of the missionary role and political and human rights developments, some Christians have broken this barrier and started seeking to achieve the Great Commission.[15] It is expected that the courage of the national church will increase to share their faith without fear in the coming years.

It is also expected that cooperation between Western churches and mission organizations and the church in the Islamic world will increase in an interactive way through equality, understanding, and partnership. Each part has potential and resources that can contribute to achieving the Great Commission.

If the voice of the church in the West calls for freedom of thought and choice of religion, and if the church in the East continues to present a living Christian testimony of its faith, and if the church in the West and East unite in a strategic partnership full of mutual trust, submission, prayer, Holy Spirit work, and resource-sharing, all of this will lead to a real awakening towards achieving the Great Commission among Muslims.[16]

The church in the Islamic world and in diaspora knows a lot about Islam and Muslims and how to deal with them and share the message of the gospel with awareness and enlightenment. The diaspora church can be an effective tool in leading the Western church towards delivering the message of the gospel to Muslims who live in countries where a climate of freedom enables establishing relationships, friendships, and providing Christian love service.[17] This will create opportunities to achieve the Great Commission until 2050.

Resources

- Gene Daniels, Pam Arlund, and Jim Haney, eds. *Fruit to Harvest: Witness of God's Great Work Among Muslims* (Littleton, Co: William Carey Press, 2019).
- Don Little. *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices.* (Downers Groves, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

Endnotes

1 'The Future of the Global Muslim Population.' Pew Research Center. 27 January 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/.

2 'Muslims.' Pew Research Center. 2 April 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/muslims/.

3 'The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity.' Pew Research Center. 9 August 2012. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/.

4 'Europe's Growing Muslim Population.' Pew Research Center. 29 November 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/.

5 'The Growth of Germany's Muslim Population.' Pew Research Center. 29 November 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/the-growth-of-germanys-muslim-population-2/.

6 'Islam: An Infographic.' The Lausanne Movement. https://lausanne.org/content/islam-an-infographic.

7 *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*. Pew Research Center. 27 January 2011. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/.

8 Jeeyun Kwon. 'The Korean Church's Missional Approach to Korean Islam.' *Muslim-Christian Encounter* 7 (2014/1), 9-57.

9 'Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 49: Understanding Muslims.' The Lausanne Movement (2004), 4.1. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/understanding-muslims-lop-49.

10 Ibid., 4.2.

11 Ibid., 4.3.

12 Colin Chapman. *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenges of Islam, 2nd ed*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 160.

13 S. Hassan. *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: the Century-long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 222.

14 Michael Kuhn. 'The Challenge and Promise of Christian Mission to Muslims in a Neocolonial Era.' *Missiology: An International Review* 49, no. 1 (2021): 54–68.

15 Tharwat Wahba. *The Practice of Mission in Egypt: A Historical Study of the Integration between the American Mission and the Evangelical Church of Egypt,* 1854–1970 (London: Langham Monographs, 2015), 128.

16 Robert D. Woodberry. 'The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy. *American Political Science Review* 106 (2012), 244–74.

17 Paul Borthwick. *Western Christians in Global Mission: What's the Role of the North American Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 41.

Authors

Dr Seung-Hyun (Nathan) Chung (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) has been a Professor of Missiology at Juan International University, Incheon, South Korea, since 2011. He ministered at Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi, Jakarta, Indonesia as a professor of Missiology from 2008 to 2010. He serves on the editorial staff at Mission and Theology, Korea Presbyterian Journal of Theology, and Muslim-Christian Encounter.

Dr Tharwat Wahba (PhD, London School of Theology) is the Middle East mission coordinator for Frontier Fellowship and an adjunct professor of mission and evangelism at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. He served on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ in Egypt and as a campus director for 12 years. He is interested in evangelism, church planting, and frontier missions in Egypt and the Middle East.

SECULARISM

David Brown, Rubin Pohor, Karen Swallow Prior

Rise of Secularism

The secularization of a society can be recognized by the weakening of religion in the mindsets of the citizens both in social mores and in public institutions. 'Secularization' expresses the tendency of individuals to dispense with an obligatory reference to any religious affiliation. Secularization begins as a sociological phenomenon. Then, increasingly, it manifests in legislation, translating the philosophical relationship between religion and the state into legal and political terms.

There is an urgency to address secularism and its impact particularly due to its increase, particularly in Europe, North America, and other 'Western' nations.

Secularization, often understood in the first instance simply in terms of data, is generally measured by the number of people or the percentage within a population who identify as being atheist, agnostic, or without religious affiliation, a category labeled as the 'nones' in the English-speaking world.

For example, a 2021 Pew survey found that about 3 in 10 Americans identify as 'nones'. According to the same poll, the share of Americans who identify as Christians dropped by 12 percent from the previous decade, while those who are religiously unaffiliated rose by 10 percent during the same period.[1]

In the UK, a religious survey has shown that the 'nones' are in fact now the fastest growing group, with 53 percent of Britons now identifying as non-religious.[2] Polls conducted in France in 2004 and 2011 found that 44 percent of respondents replied 'no' when asked if they personally believe in God. In a similar survey in 2021, 51 percent of those surveyed answered that they did not believe in God, revealing an apparent rise in the number of people who do not believe in God.[3]

A Call for Contextualization

'To contextualize' can be defined as 'to relate an action or a fact to the political, economic, historical, social, artistic and religious circumstances in which it occurred' (Larousse Dictionary). According to this definition, to contextualize the gospel is to place it in its original Hebrew and Greco-Roman context, *i.e.* the context of the New and Old Testaments. But theology and missiology have given it a wider meaning: to contextualize is to situate a fact or an action in any environment, not necessarily in its original context. This form of contextualization is necessary wherever and whenever the gospel and the Christian faith must be culturally and personally appropriated.

"There is an urgency to address secularism and its impact particularly due to its increase, particuarly in Europe, North America, and other 'Western' nations"

This effort to present the gospel clearly and live faithfully within each cultural context is a delicate undertaking. Without a rich understanding of both the message and the context, we risk subjugating the divine message to the sensibilities of a given culture or delivering an incomprehensible and therefore impotent message. In committing either error, we both dishonor God and subject his image-bearers to earthly and eternal harm. Done wisely, contextualization will proclaim the gospel in a way that takes into consideration the different concerns—whether economic, social, philosophical, ideological, or religious—of the target people group. The end result of contextualization should be a relevant Christian life with devotion to God and his Word.

Just as the Christian missionary endeavour has sought to contextualize the gospel for generations in local cultures around the

world, we need to learn how to interact with the different problems and needs of our secular environments—environments which, thanks to modern technology, are no longer only local but also global. Our challenge is to build Christian communities that praise God authentically and in a way which is profoundly plausible in a secular context by using suitable cultural expressions (words, concepts, images, and symbols). What is Secularism?

In his seminal work *A Secular Age,* Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor offers three definitions of 'secular', categories which can also be seen as describing three progressive stages of increasing secularity within a society. These three definitions, or stages, can be summed up this way:

- The withdrawal of religious practice from public life to the private realm
- The decreased participation in religious life or decline in religious belief by individuals
- Finally, the shift away from a society or cultural conditions 'in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others'[4]

It is this third condition—one in which religious belief can no longer be assumed by default on the part of the members of a society or culture—which constitutes 'a secular age', as Taylor conceives it.

> ***"Our hope lies in being a healthy church where Christians can learn to live out their authentic identity with each other and in society."***

Taylor further describes how in the pre-modern age, God's presence was seen (and assumed) in the natural, social, and supernatural (or enchanted) world. With the rejection of God from these places, the locus of meaning and purpose became situated within 'a new sense of the self', a self no longer 'porous and vulnerable' to the supernatural world of a deity or deities, but rather a 'buffered self' with 'confidence' in one's 'own powers of moral ordering'.[5] In other words, the individual replaced God as the source of authority—even in deciding whether or not to believe in and submit to God. It is this condition of secularity that now pervades the West.

By this definition, secularism is not measured by the prevalence (or lack) of religiosity within a society, but rather by the conditions within which religious belief and practice (or its absence) occur. Secularism is identified by the cultural conditions where a faith commitment in general, or to a particular religion, are but choices for an individual to make among other possibilities—including the culturally viable choice of rejecting religion all together.

Such options lead to (and grow out of) both self-determining freedom and the quest for authenticity.[6] While authenticity is often associated with complete relativism and utter subjectivity, particularly within the context of modernity, this is not the only—or even the best—understanding of the concept.

Authenticity, which Charles Taylor defines in *The Ethics of Authenticity* as the expression of 'self-determining freedom', has indeed emerged as an ideal within late modernity. This value has its roots in Enlightenment ideals[7] alongside the concept of the modern, autonomous self. The value of being shaped and directed less by external influences than internal ones is clearly aligned with the rise of secularity as Taylor defines it. Nevertheless, authenticity as a value offers both a challenge and an opportunity for Christian evangelization. When pursued within the context of authenticity, religious faith (of whatever stripe) is less likely to be merely nominal or simply assumed by family inheritance or cultural tradition.

Secularity as a cultural condition demands a choice. The task of evangelization within a secular age is to present Christianity not only as tenable, but as an authentic choice. We must present faith in Jesus not merely as a commitment that is assumed or inherited, but rather as a belief and practice that is essential to

one's very identity. In a secular age, conversion to Christianity will increasingly constitute not a conversion from one religion to another or from no faith to this faith but will rather be understood as an expression of one's authentic self. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Christianity, within an evangelical understanding, is a personal relationship with Jesus, even as conversion is also to enter into a faith community that is global, historic, and eternal. This is the epitome of ethical authenticity.

The Church Gathered and Scattered

In this context, how can churches prepare their members to live out their faith in an authentic way? And how can they help their members to bring the gospel to the increasing number of people who no longer have any contact with Christian belief, sometimes going back generations? These secularized people have very little knowledge about religion in general and often hold a negative attitude towards Christianity because of its perceived intolerance.

As we look back over the past few decades in the Western world, we can see how different approaches to church life and evangelism have been adopted, usually to reflect trends in society. Until the 1960s, churches were rather formal and 'sanctuary-based', and evangelism meant going out into the world in order to contact non-Christians. But a shift in the 1970s brought various factors together to make churches more relaxed in order to reduce the barriers for seekers. The 'attractional' side of the church's activities became central to evangelism.

However, in today's secularized society, few people are attracted to church, even churches that aim to be welcoming and culturally relevant. The pressing question then becomes: What kind of church should we aspire to be in a secular context? Our hope lies in being a healthy church where Christians can learn to live out their authentic identity with each other and in society. Two paths are being increasingly explored in this context:

- Refocusing on essentials
- Developing a correct relationship between the gathered church and the scattered church

The first challenge will be, quite simply, to refocus on essentials. In concrete terms, and seeking to remain faithful to essential Biblical teaching, a healthy church could be defined in this way: A community of redeemed believers, centred on the gospel, who are learning to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30) and who are learning to love others (Mark 12:31) in their cultural context.

In other words, these three dimensions of a healthy church need to be developed simultaneously:

- The spiritual aspect—loving God
- The social aspect—loving others
- The societal aspect—in the geographical and cultural context of the church.

The first two are what Jesus taught when he was asked to identify the most important commandment. The third was the ongoing challenge that Christians faced in each new cultural context as the church spread from Jerusalem throughout the pagan Roman Empire and then to the ends of the earth. As the history of the church has shown, this challenge of contextualisation has been not only geographical, but also chronological, as cultures developed over the centuries.

At the same time, in a secular context, the relationship between the gathered church and the scattered church becomes a key issue in a secular context. The term 'gathered church' describes when Christians meet together (including online), whereas the 'scattered church' consists of Christians going about their daily lives in society.

The gathered church equips and motivates Christians to live their daily lives authentically as the scattered church in their normal relational networks—their families (in the widest sense), their colleagues or fellow students, their local community (neighbours, local events, even local politics), and their leisure activities and friends.

WHERE DOES HOPE LIE?

The Scriptures make this clear: 'Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another' and 'let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24–25). We meet together as Christians for only 3 percent of our week at the most in order to help us live the other 97 percent of our lives. We want to respond to Jesus' call and live out Christ's teachings faithfully and attractively among our contemporaries, praying that God will open hearts and lead us to those who seek him.

Relationships are paramount in this endeavour. God is love and has lived in mutual love among the three persons of the Trinity for all eternity. We as humans bear the image of our eternally and essentially relational God. The development of loving relationships among Christians as well as with those around us is at the heart of God's plan for humanity and therefore forms the basis of both our church life and our evangelism.

Preparing the Messengers

It is important that our weekly worship services (which are the prime moments when church members are together), be adapted to our secular contexts. Beyond a warm welcome, a typical church service will need to include not only the traditional motivating ingredients of worship and Bible teaching, but also an intentional form of discipleship aimed at equipping Christians to be the scattered church.

This will involve teaching on contemporary cultural issues, which will foster wisdom and courage for life in a hostile environment. Such teaching ought to be deliberately apolitical since the objective is to help Christians to understand the issues with a biblical perspective rooted in church history. In addition, church leaders will communicate to the congregation that each Christian has an important role to play as *missionaries*—people sent out into their day-to-day environment. We can use the acronym AIMS to help us remember what we aim for when we gather.

- Adoration: Worship in amazement at God's grace towards us
- Issues: Training disciples to live in today's world
- Mission: Sending out the congregation as the scattered church
- Scriptures: Biblical teaching

Why is it so important to address current issues during the weekly gatherings of the church? Because the need for plausibility is the key factor when it comes to mission in a secular context. Despite the analysis that secularism means choice, this is theoretical when it comes to Biblical faith which, through its lack of plausibility, is not seen as a potential option. The 'plausibility structures' described by Peter Berger tend to exclude Christianity in contemporary secular society. So, for many today, biblical faith is not even on the horizon of what is conceivable. It is dismissed without examination. Christian apologetics in the 20th century has largely taken credibility as its starting point ('Is it true?'). But in today's secular society, people need visible, tangible evidence for the Christian faith, and in most secular contexts, the only place they will see this is in their day-by-day relationships with Christians. In concrete terms, the messenger precedes the message, which is why the gathered church has such an important role to play in preparing the messengers. We propose three areas in which this preparation is most critical.

- Understanding the issues: A recent survey in France found that 85 percent of Christians didn't know what to say when colleagues at work brought up current issues.[8] Church leaders must provide Christians with the tools to understand society, to live out their faith attractively, to know how to give reasonable answers.
- Bearing witness: In a world where people look to online reviews and influencer recommendations for guidance in everything from products, to relationships, to philosophies, Blaise Pascal's advice rings true: 'Make [Christianity] attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.' This approach to evangelism is particularly relevant given how people are influenced today. Users' recommendations play a central role in bringing people

to make decisions, and Christians are users and recommenders of faith in Jesus.

- Nurturing a new plausibility structure: Showing the plausibility of the Christian faith in every sector of life—arts, media, business, law, social services, science, and so on. The British missiologist Lesslie Newbiggin wrote these perspicacious words: 'The gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel. The Church, therefore, as a bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and which calls into question, those that govern all human cultures.'[9] By embodying a plausibility structure that conforms to reality as God has created it, Christians display meaning and belief and effect change in the world, a process which is inherently evangelistic.

In conclusion, this approach prepares Christians to live their authentic identity in today's world and also makes their faith plausible for non-Christians. In secular society, the gospel must remain central, rather than other identifying marks such as the type of music churches use. Relationships define the aspirations of people today, so churches need to find practical ways to encourage their members to put into practice the dozens of verses in the New Testament which include the words 'one another'. Especially in the context of evangelism in a secular climate, we ought to keep Jesus' words in mind: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35).

Resources

- Peter Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Anchor Books: New York, 1969).
- David Brown. *Reconnect Your Church: A Practical Handbook for Church Revitalization* (IVP: London, 2023).
- Andrew Fellows. *Smuggling Jesus Back into the Church: How the World Became Worldly and What to Do About It* (IVP: London, 2022).
- Neil Hudson. *Scattered and Gathered: Equipping Disciples for the Frontline* (IVP: London, 2019).
- Michel Kenmogne and Rubin Pohor. *Vivre l'Évangile en Contexte* (Conseil de Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone: Yaoundé, Cameroun, 2021).
- Alan Noble. *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World* (IVP: Downers Grove, IL, 2021).
- James K. A. Smith. *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Eerdmans: Cambridge, UK, 2014).

Endnotes

1 Gregory A. Smith. "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated." Pew Research Center. December 14, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.

2 Hannah Waite. "The Nones: Who are they and what do they believe?" *Theos*. November 11, 2022. https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2022/10/31/the-nones-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-believe.

3 Joanna York and Hannah Thompson. "Less than half of people believe in God in 2021, French poll finds." *The Connexion.* September 23, 2021. https://www.connexionfrance.com/article/French-news/Less-than-half-of-people-believe-in-God-in-2021-French-poll-finds-how-to-find-an-English-speaking-church-service-in-France.

4 Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Belknap: Cambridge, MA, 2007), 1-3.

5 Ibid., 25-27.

6 Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard UP: Cambridge, MA, 1992).

7 Ibid., 28-29.

8 "Vivre et dire l'Évangile au travail": survey organized by the CNEF (National Council of French Evangelicals) and presented publicly November 2021.

9 Lesslie Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1989).

Authors

David Brown is a pastor in France and the author of a dozen books (mainly in French) on the interface between the gospel and culture. For several years he led the GBU, the French student movement affiliated to IFES, and he continues to serve in the GBU publishing house and as coordinator of the Human Sciences network.

Dr Rubin Pohor is a professor at the Alassane Ouattara University, Bouaké, Ivory Coast. He is also Vice-President in charge of teaching methods, research, and publications at the Abidjan Christian Alliance University (UACA) and head of its Human Sciences Department. He is the coordinator of the Council of Theological Institutions in French-speaking Africa.

Dr Karen Swallow Prior earned her Ph.D. in English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She writes for Religion News Service. Her most recent book is The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis (Brazos, 2023).

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF TRUST?



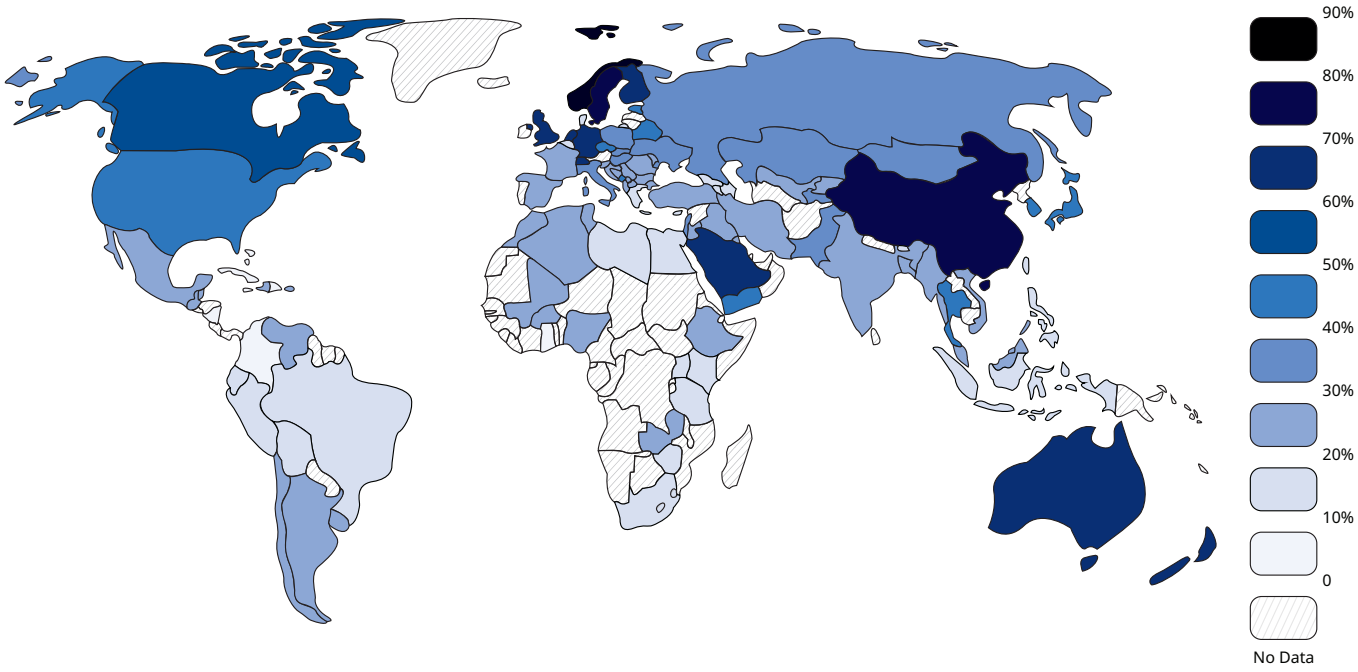
INTRODUCTION

The validity of the gospel message is independent of individuals or institutions; however, when those who share the good news are not trusted, the gospel is questioned. Globally, there is a perceived rise in distrust that is dynamically shaping cultures, as the world asks, 'What is the foundation of trust?'

The following section explores the context shifts in trust across a variety of institutions and generations.

TRUST

% OF PEOPLE THAT AGREE "MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED"



Source: Our World in Data; World Values Survey, 2022

GLOBAL CONFLICT

"In my country, there is more and more conflict between people who don't share the same values."



Source: Ipsos, "Global Trends," 2023; Surveyed 48,079 - 48,579 adults across 50 markets

TRUST DISPARITY RANKING

	Most Trusting Countries		Most Distrusting Countries	
1	China	83%		
2	UAE	76%		
3	Indonesia	75%		
4	India	74%		
5	Saudi Arabia	72%		
6	Malaysia	66%		
7	Singapore	66%		
8	Thailand	66%		
9	Kenya	60%		
10	Mexico	59%		
18			Colombia	48%
19			South Africa	48%
20			Germany	46%
21			Argentina	45%
22			Spain	45%
23			United Kingdom	44%
24			United States	43%
25			South Korea	42%
26			Japan	40%
27			Russia	32%

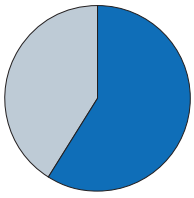
Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022; Surveyed 36,000 respondents in 28 countries

CIVIC TRUST DECLINE

Numerous studies show that civic trust is declining and polarization is increasing around the world. Relationships marked by trust are central both to a healthy society and to contexts conducive to boundary-crossing gospel witness.

GLOBAL DISTRUST

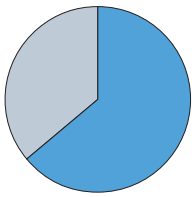
"**My tendency is to distrust** until I see evidence that something is trustworthy."



59%

Majority in **24** countries of the 28 surveyed

"People in this country **lack the ability to have constructive and civil debates** about issues they disagree on."



64%

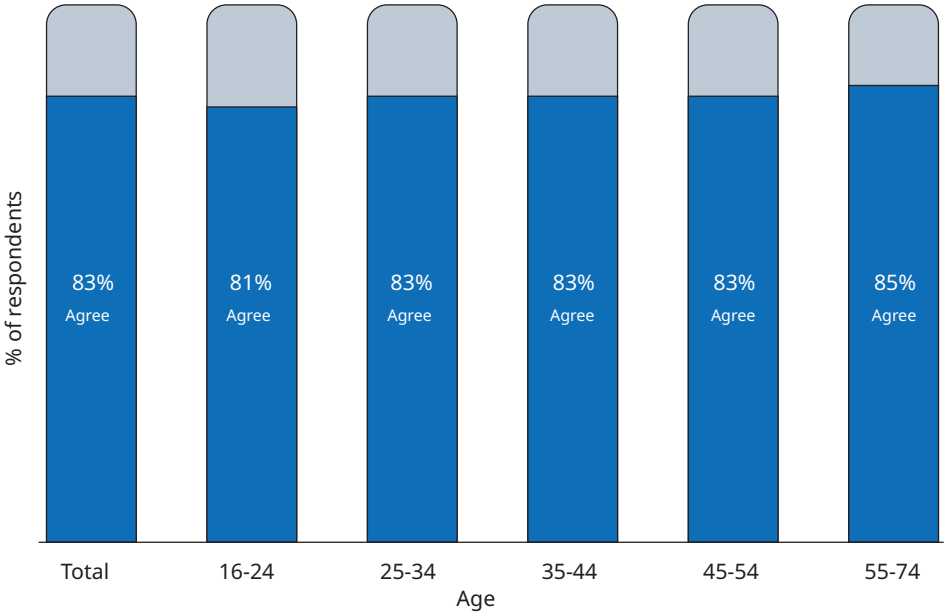
Majority in **27** countries of the 28 surveyed

Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

GLOBAL TRUST IN SELF

"It is up to everybody to work out their own set of principles to guide their decisions."



Source: Ipsos Global Trends, 2023

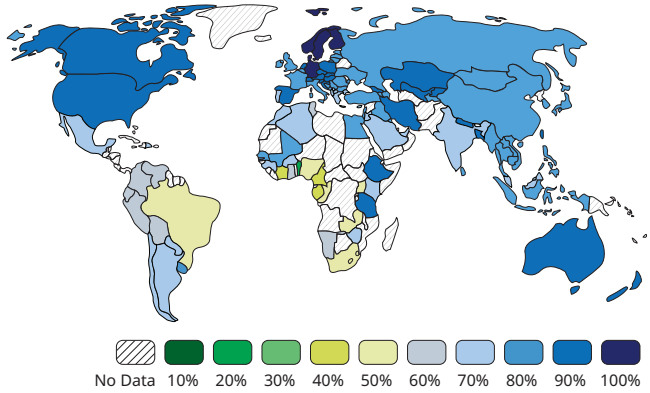
SELF CONFIDENCE

Especially among youth, trust in institutions to solve societal problems is waning as trust in the agency of individuals increases.

In most countries, people show greater trust toward their neighbors over larger organizations like governments. Trust in neighbors also often supersedes trust in experts.

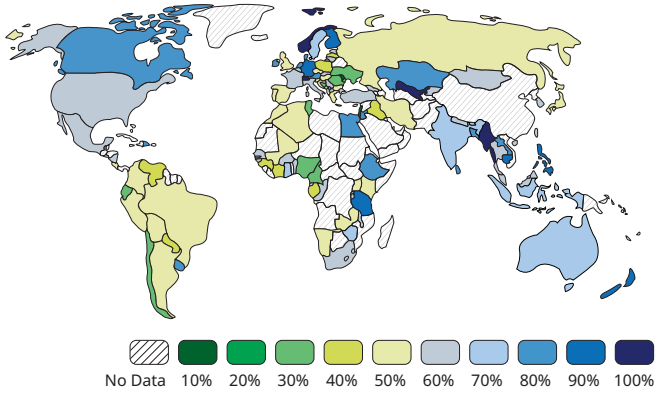
Rising wealth tends to erode the necessity of local social bonds and lead to narrower relational networks. The absence of social contact increases the likelihood of growing levels of mistrust. Trust of others, especially across difference, requires regular contact and collaboration for shared civic goals.

TRUST IN NEIGHBORHOODS



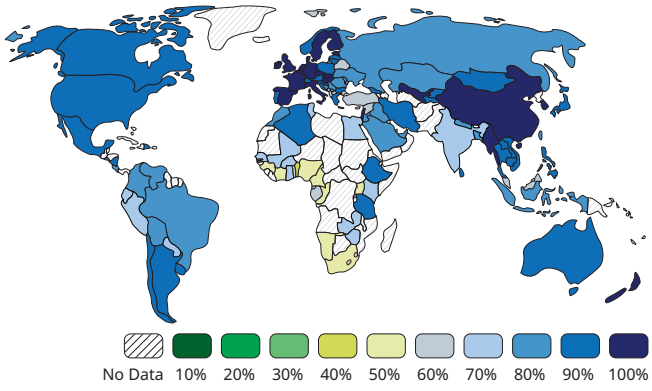
Source: Our World in Data, "Welcome Global Monitor," 2020

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT



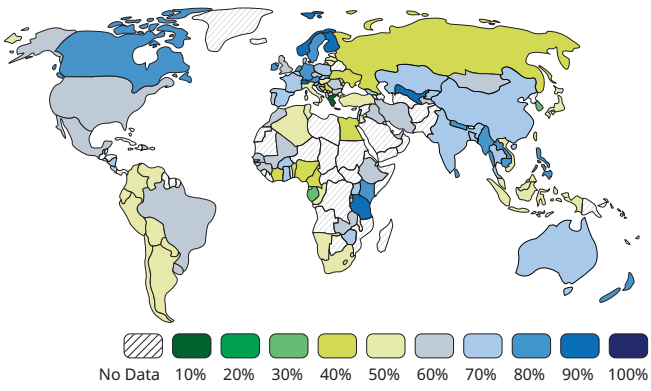
Source: Our World in Data, "Welcome Global Monitor," 2020

TRUST IN SCIENTISTS



Source: Our World in Data, "Welcome Global Monitor," 2020

TRUST IN JOURNALISTS



Source: Our World in Data, "Welcome Global Monitor," 2020

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

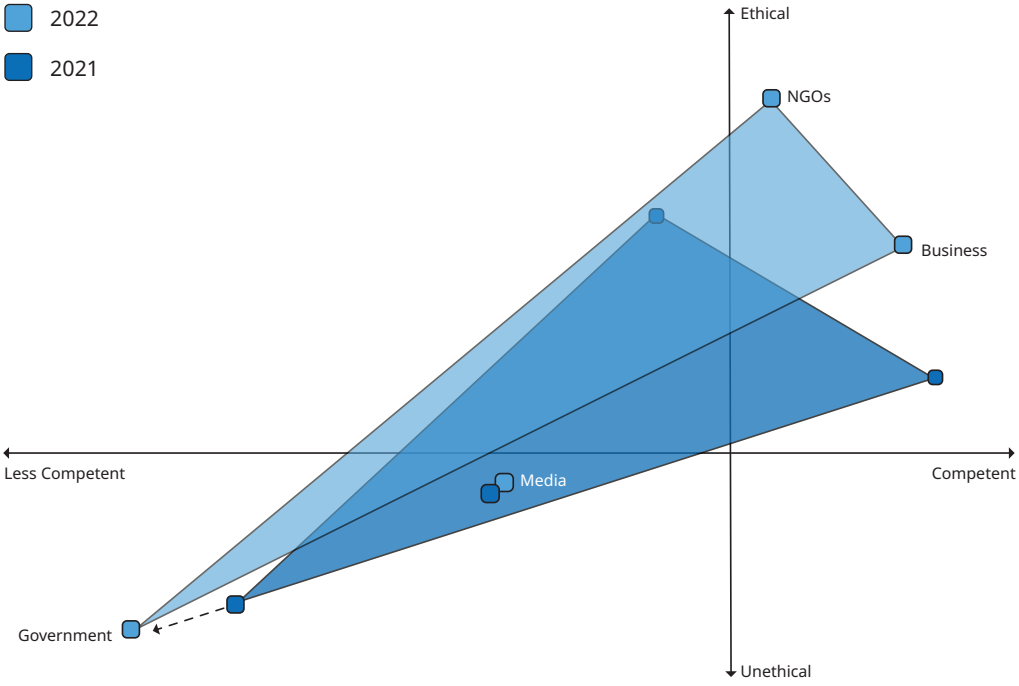
POLITICAL CRISIS

Institutional trust is declining across all sectors, with only businesses seen as both ethical and competent institutions. NGOs (which includes faith-based NGOs) are seen as ethical but less competent than businesses.

Growing income inequality and the 'echo chamber' effect of the internet are central causes of declining institutional trust and growing social polarization.

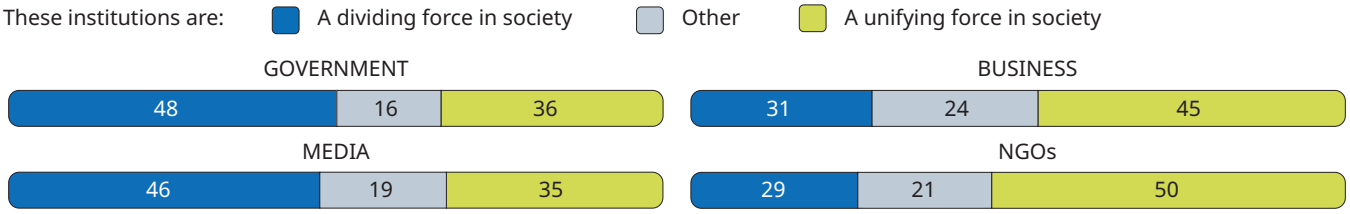
Global trust in political bodies is abysmal, as businesses are viewed as a stronger unifying force in society than governments.

GLOBAL PERCEPTION OF INSTITUTIONS



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022

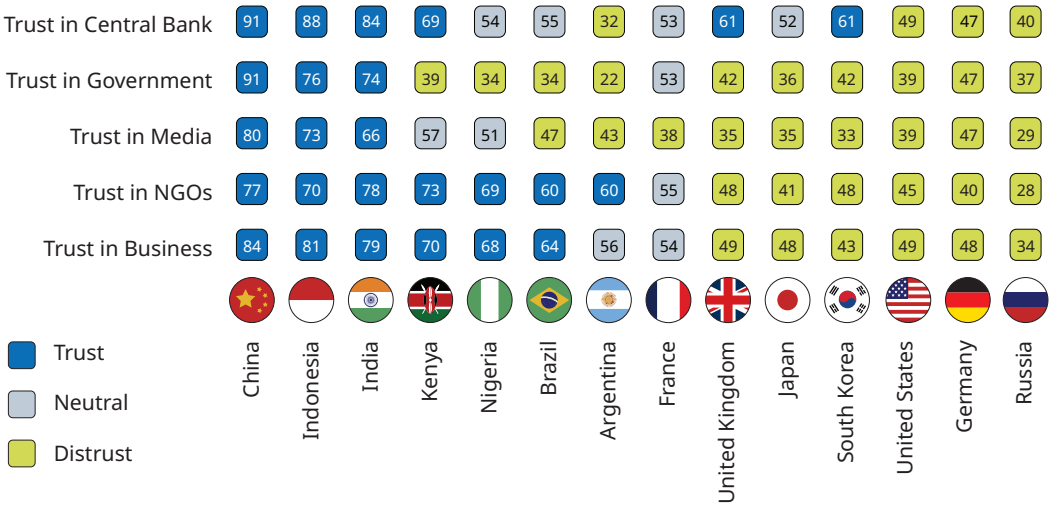
SOCIETAL DIVISION



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022

GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL DISTRUST

Numbers = Percent of population who trust the institution



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022

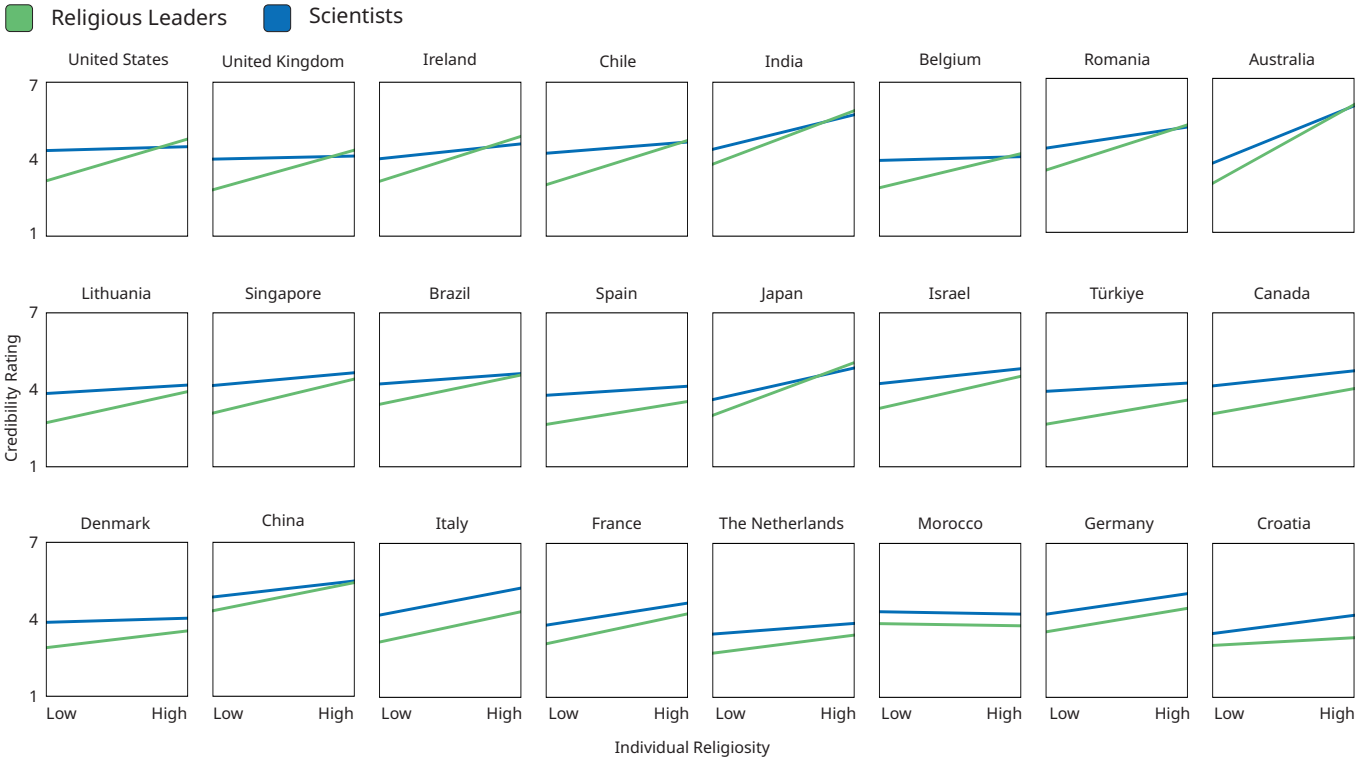
VARIED MISTRUST

Democracies around the world are facing a crisis of civic trust. By contrast, citizens in authoritarian governments display higher levels of confidence in all sectors of society. More urbanized societies – those most prevalent in the Global North – also display lower levels of trust. The process of urbanization typically severs broad social ties, creating smaller relational networks and thus less opportunity for sustained contact.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

AUTHORITY OF RELIGION VS SCIENCE

Level of perceived credibility between religious and scientific leaders giving the same statement.



Source: Hoogeveen et al, The Einstein Effect, Nature Human Behavior, 2022.

COMPETING AUTHORITIES

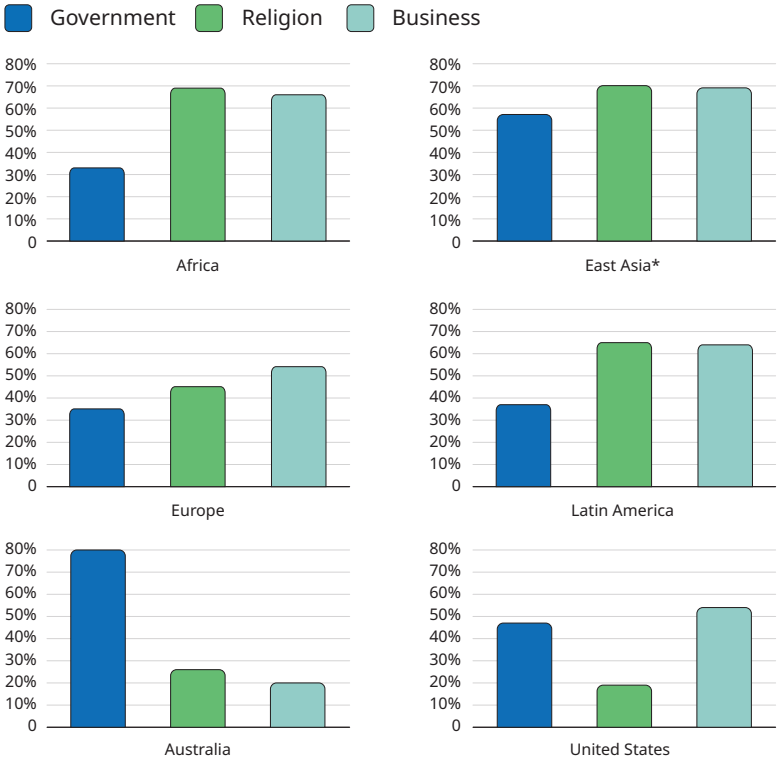
When global individuals were presented with a religious leader and a scientist giving the same message, the vast majority of the world found the scientist more credible than the religious leader. The above study is representative of the shift from religion to science as the cultural authority.

In the Global North, religious institutions are among the least trusted.

A sharp divide is seen between the Global South and Global North regarding trust in religious institutions. In Global South regions, religious institutions are trusted above government, media, and business.

Conversely, in the Global North, religious institutions are among the least trusted. Trust in government, however, was less among regions in the Global South in these surveys. Importantly, India and China are not represented in the graphics.

TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

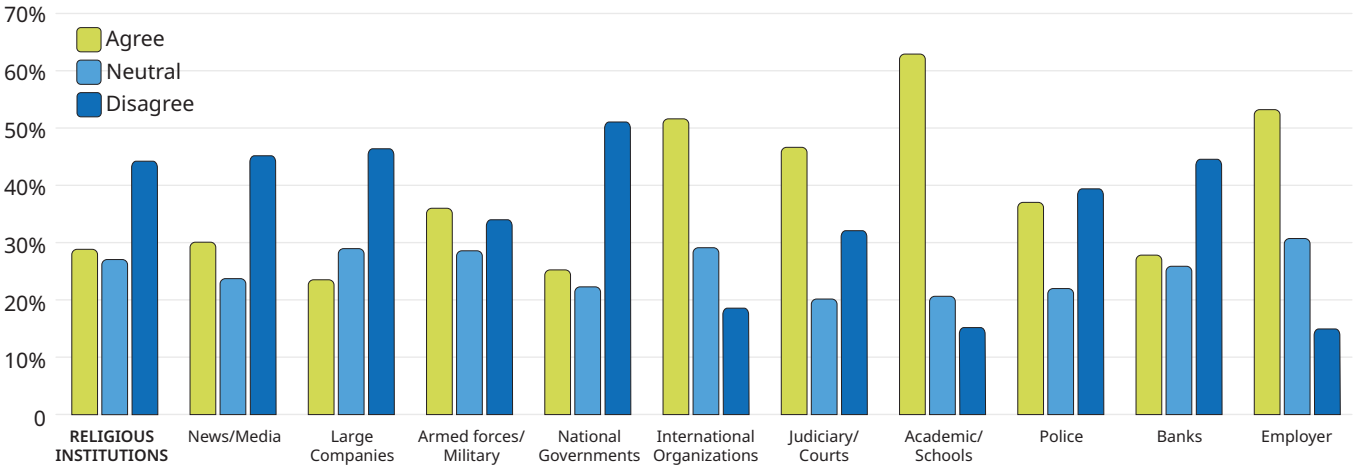


Sources: Africa: Afrobarometer 2021, East Asia: National Library of Medicine 2016 *Data does not include China, Europe: Gallup 2004, Latin America: Latinobarómetro 2017, Australia: ABC Australia Talks National Survey, United States: Gallup 2019

YOUTH SOURCES OF TRUST

YOUTH TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

"I trust the following institutions to be fair and honest:"



Source: World Economic Forum, "Global Shapers Survey," 2017; Global survey of 24,766 participants ages 18-35

THE POWER OF FAMILY

Globally, youth display high levels of trust in family members in regards to their spiritual formation.

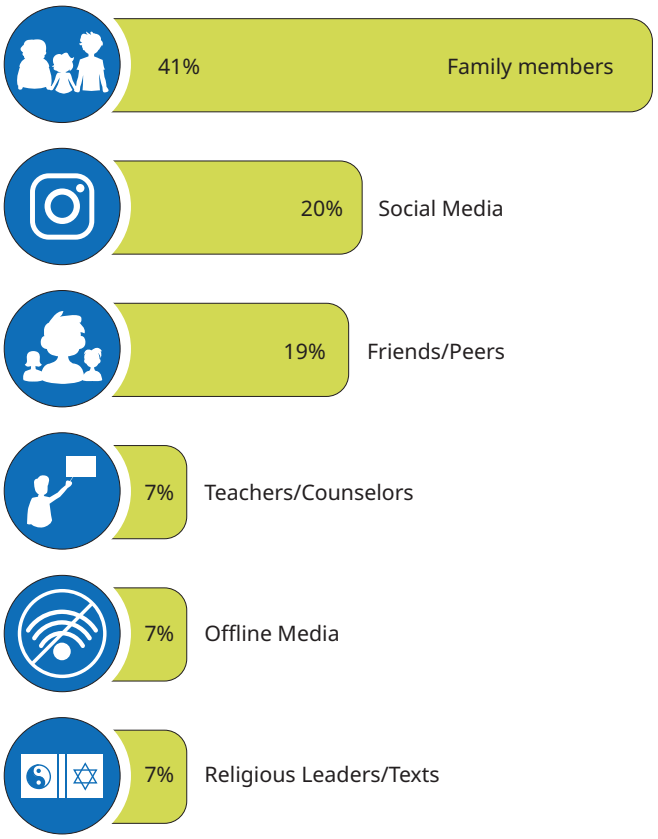
Conversely, youth do not frequently look to pastors or other religious leaders for faith formation. The same is true of the Bible, which ranks lower than family members as a source of religious influence.

CORRUPT LEADERS

Globally, youth see the corruption of leaders – especially those in government – as the greatest societal problem.

A lack of faith in leaders extends to religious institutions. Young people trust their military, their schools, and their employers over their churches.

MEANING OF LIFE CONVERSATIONS



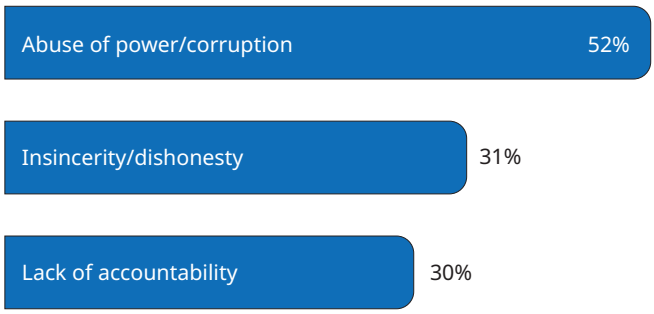
Source: One Hope, "Global Youth Cultures", 2020

TRUST IN LEADERSHIP

"Which of the below are most important to you in leaders of your country?"



"What frustrates you most about government leaders in your country?"



Source: World Economic Forum, "Global Shapers Survey," 2017

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

LACK OF INFLUENCE

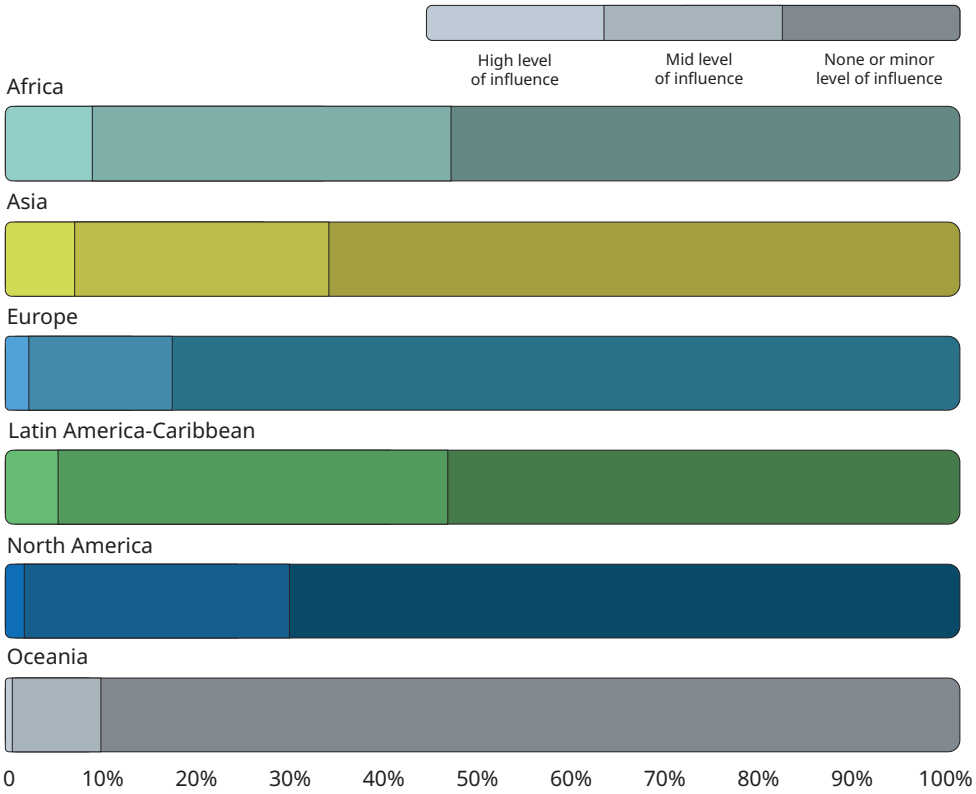
In a survey of 1,500 global Christian leaders asking about the influence of the church on their region, the results overwhelmingly point to the church's lack of influence on global culture.

Overall perception is the church's influence on culture is minimal.

Africa and Latin America-Caribbean were most optimistic about the church's influence on culture, but in both cases more than 50 percent of leaders believed the church to have only a minor level of influence. Globally, the majority of Christian leaders surveyed perceive that the church has at most a minor level of influence on broader culture.

PERCEIVED CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON CULTURE

"In your context, how much does the Christian church influence broader culture?"



Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

STEADY INFLUENCE

When the same leaders where asked whether the church's influence was growing or declining in their region, the results were more globally varied.

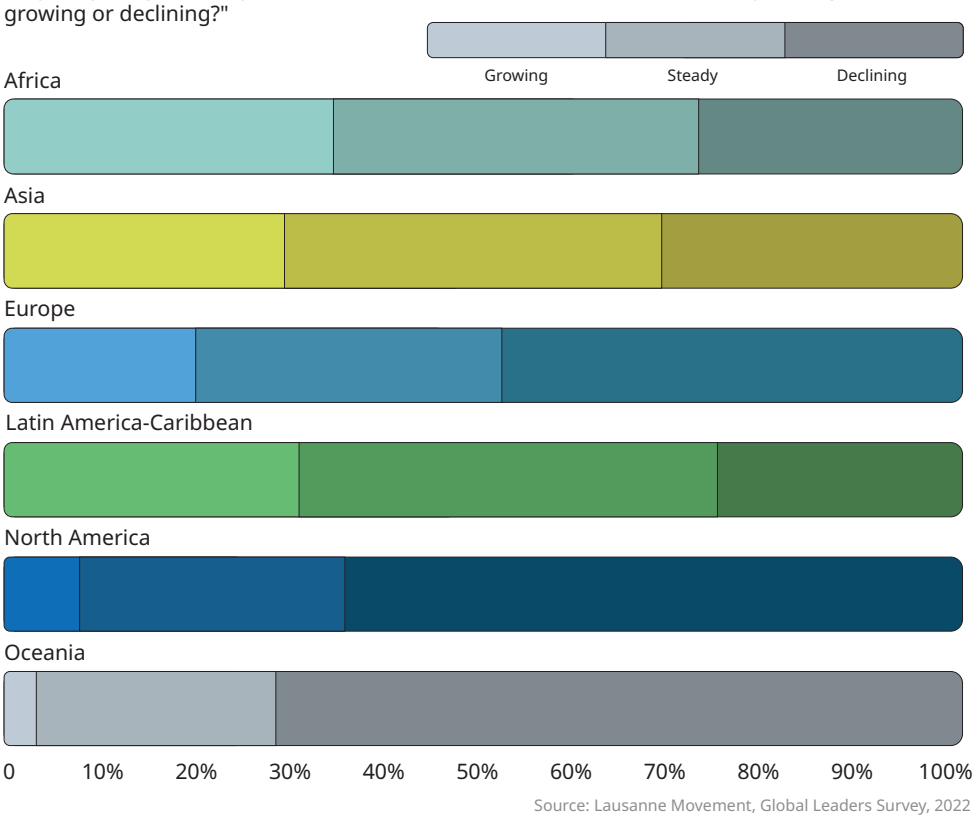
The perception of church's influence on culture is that it is either steady or in decline.

The results show two primary groupings. First, there is limited optimism for the church's influence in Europe, North America, and Oceania.

The second grouping of Africa, Asia, and Latin America-Caribbean, has more optimism with approximately 30 percent of Christian leaders believing the church's influence is growing in influence.

PERCEIVED CHANGE IN CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON CULTURE

"In your perception, do you believe the influence of the Christian church in your region is growing or declining?"



Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

SHAPING EDUCATION

A survey of 1,500 global Christian leaders asked how influential the church is across a variety of cultural sectors within their global region. The overall results showed that Europe, North America, and Oceania to have less perceived influence than leaders' perceptions of the church's influence in Africa, Asia, and Latin America-Caribbean.

The global church's perceived greatest influence is on education.

When examining influence on cultural sectors, the Christian leaders believe that the church is globally influencing one sector more than others: Education. In Africa and Asia, over 60 percent of leaders believe the church is influencing education, and other regions score education the highest at around 30-40 percent.

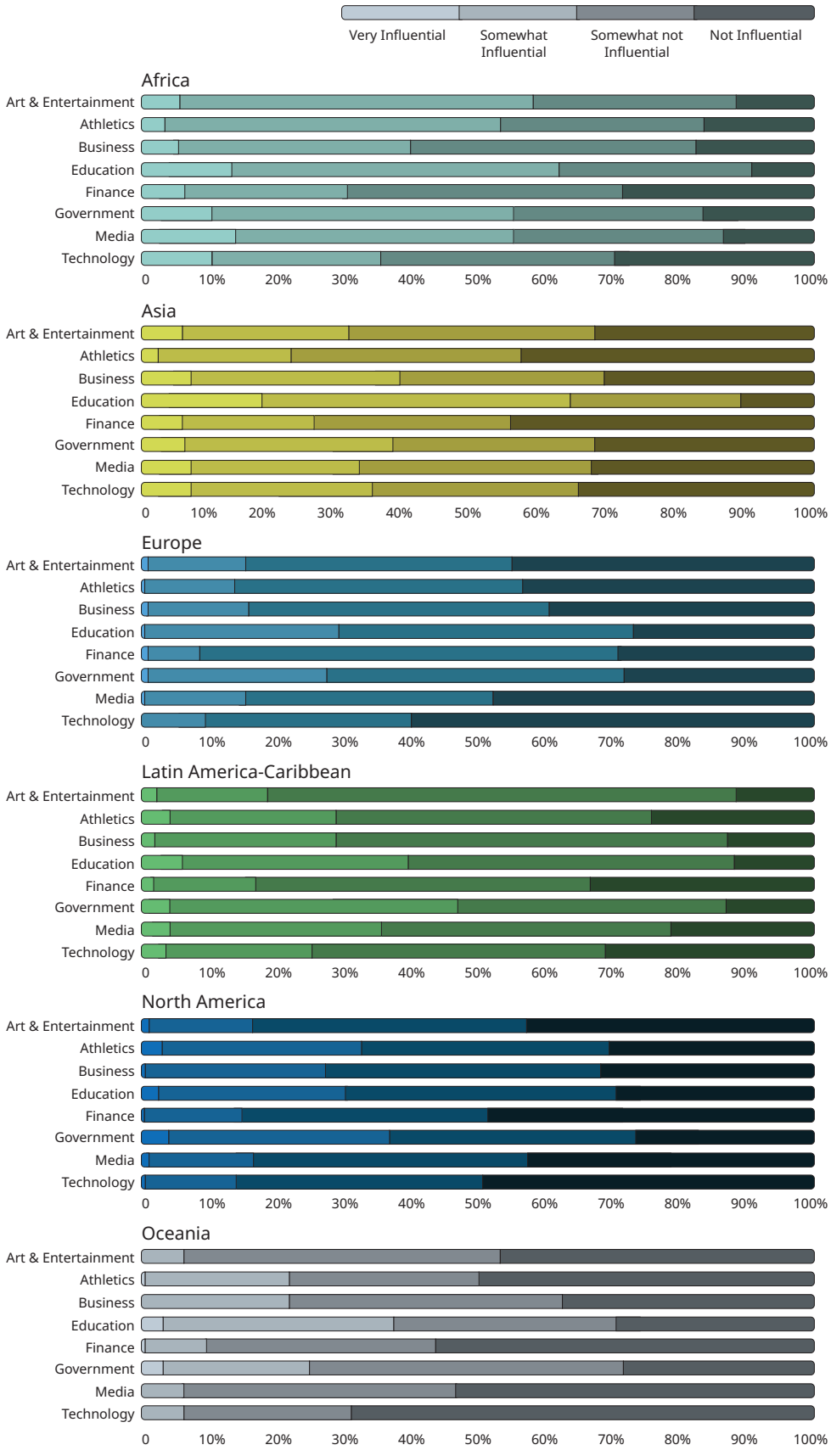
TECH AND FINANCE

On the other end of the spectrum, globally, the surveyed Christian leaders believe that the church has the least amount of influence on the finance and technology sectors.

The church is perceived to have the least influence on finance and technology.

Approximately 15 percent of global Christian leaders believe the church is having any influence on the financial sector, with 30 percent of Asian and African leaders seeing the church's influence. A similar pattern is observed with the church's influence on the technology sector.

PERCEIVED CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN CULTURE

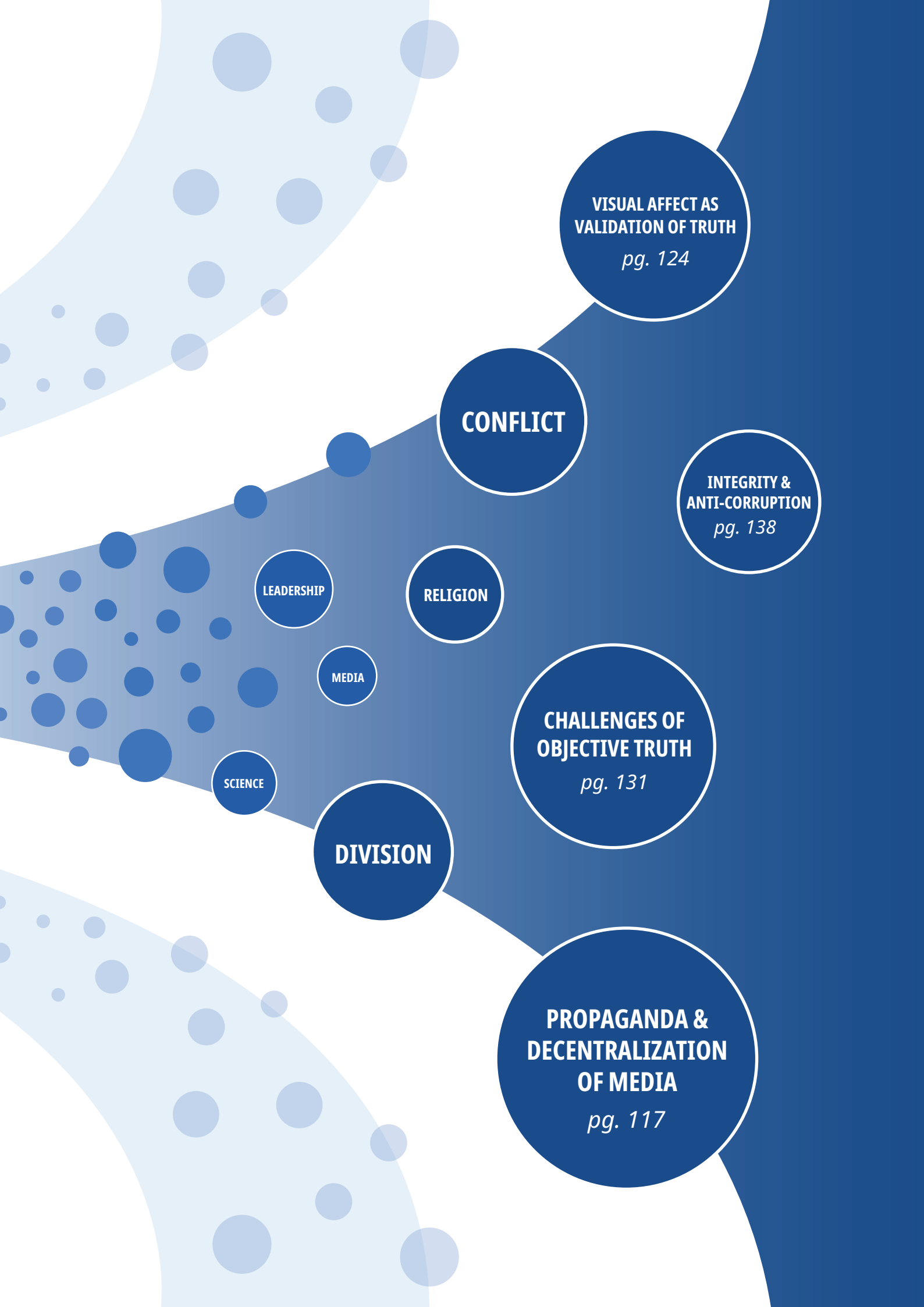


Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

UNDERSTANDING

TRUST




VISUAL AFFECT AS VALIDATION OF TRUTH
pg. 124
CONFLICT
INTEGRITY & ANTI-CORRUPTION
pg. 138
LEADERSHIP
RELIGION
MEDIA
CHALLENGES OF OBJECTIVE TRUTH
pg. 131
SCIENCE
DIVISION
PROPAGANDA & DECENTRALIZATION OF MEDIA
pg. 117

PROPAGANDA & DECENTRALIZATION OF MEDIA

Lars Dahle, Rudolf Kabutz, Gathuku Kibunga, Rita El-Mounayer

Missional Foundations for Engaging Media

Our everyday world is increasingly shaped by a wide spectrum of media technologies and media messages, wherever we live, work, and travel. We are constantly exposed to a plurality of messages, values, and worldviews through news, entertainment, and social media. This ever-changing media mosaic is a strong influence on how we experience meaning and fellowship, and on how we perceive truth and trust.

As followers of Christ, we need a holistic missional approach to these global media contexts and cultures. This is found in the media engagement paradigm[1] which has three key facets:

- *Media awareness:* We need competence in media literacy and media critique, to relate to media messages, media technologies, and media usages in a meaningful and relevant way and with Christian integrity. This includes engaging in key missional tasks such as personal formation, faith education, pre-evangelism, and evangelism.
- *Media presence:* We need to be present as salt and light in the whole spectrum of mainstream media, affirming truth, human dignity, and meaningful relationships, and modeling professionalism, authenticity, and relevance. We also need to equip talented Christian communicators to live out, share, and defend biblical truth in such shared public arenas with conviction and grace.
- *Media ministries:* We need to develop holistic media approaches for communicating the gospel through personal, church, and mission platforms and initiatives. This includes interacting with people around the biblical gospel, in authentic and relevant ways, both within and beyond the church. A key aim is to equip existing and new disciples to communicate biblical truth in convincing and compelling ways within their own spheres of society.

This holistic media engagement paradigm needs to be applied to two increasingly influential phenomena in today's global media world:

- *Propaganda:* Many media messages are being communicated with the primary intention of influencing people in terms of their thinking, acting, feeling, or believing. If such persuasive media messages are being shaped intentionally by leaving out essential information or by over-emphasizing other information, we are faced with propaganda. Cambridge Dictionary defines propaganda as 'information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intent of influencing people's opinions'.[2] Even though many have become more sensitive to propaganda, it is often difficult to identify such propaganda-style communication.
- *Decentralisation of media:* With the increasing availability of a variety of media platforms, more individuals and groups have created their own media channels. This has resulted in an increasing global decentralisation of media. Even though such democratisation of the media has its benefits, it often results in echo-chambers, exemplified by much communication through social media. Thus, most ideas do not travel very far, but remain within media silos.

Due to the pervasiveness of propaganda and echo-chambers, there is an urgent need for skillful media analysis and critique. We need

to be able to discern our current media contexts locally and globally, and to engage and influence media meaningfully as we move forward towards 2050.

In this article we explore the role that followers of Jesus may play within the complex media spaces of propaganda and decentralised media. We build on the foundational premise of desiring to communicate factual, holistic, and meaningful truth that can be trusted. God is the truth. His written Word is fully reliable, and his truth is fully embodied in his Son Jesus Christ. These theological ws inspire us to communicate 'trustable truths.'

> ***"Due to the pervasiveness of propaganda and echo-chambers, there is an urgent need for skillful media analysis and critique."***

Communicating 'trustable truth' through the media goes much deeper than simply truthful information or accurate data. Propaganda may communicate partial and fragmented truths, whereas decentralised media may communicate anything by everyone without careful and insightful critique.

Contrary to all of this, the communication of 'trustable truth' embraces all of life in understandable, relatable, and integrated ways. Communication by God's people is based on a care for all of life, being a blessing to all nations, and making disciples amongst all people groups through wholesome messages.[3] Such biblical authenticity is what we want to encourage and nurture in local and global communities, with a view towards equipping for the future.

Challenges and Opportunities in Relation to Propaganda and Decentralised Media

Being media users and consumers, we are flooded with information and entertainment with a plurality of voices, values, and worldviews. As a global humanity living and working together in the world across deep differences, we need to reflect together on the impact of propaganda and decentralisation of media.

With such large amounts of media content easily available, most people do not have the time, capacity, or competence to check the validity of all the information they receive. People trust information most significantly when this originates from sources they have relationships with. Yet, even within such closer relationships, people do not have all the information correct. A high number of virtual connections may lead towards many superficial relationships. When we process information amidst media overload, we easily become overwhelmed and are not able to uncover propaganda messages. How should we respond to this missionally?

In terms of media *awareness*, we need to develop a culture of media literacy among Christians and beyond, equipping and resourcing for constructive analysis and critique of potential propaganda messages.

Whereas, in terms of media *presence*, we need to encourage Christians to become journalists, documentarians, and opinion leaders, who can affirm truth and human dignity with integrity in the shared public media spaces.

Furthermore, in terms of media *ministries*, we need to be aware of the danger in church and missions of reducing biblical truths to propaganda-style communication, whether in terms of content, style, or attitude.

Whereas propaganda messages often tend to endorse the views of powerful leadership groups, decentralised media emphasise the views of many individuals and groups. The decentralisation of media relates to the increased plurality of media arenas and media messages across the world. Various cultural, ethnic, political, and ideological groups have their own media spaces, sustained, and supported by their own social media activities. How should we respond to this missionally?

- In terms of media *awareness*, we need to develop a balanced view of the decentralised media contexts where we both affirm the new media opportunities and reject the inherent tendencies towards

fragmentation and isolation. We need a holistic view of the value of meaningful human fellowship across deep differences, deeply motivated by our Christian faith.

- Whereas, in terms of media *presence*, we need to foster and embody an attitude of trusted personal relationship across beliefs and worldviews. We need to model a deep respect for others, regardless of the personal worldview commitments. This includes a willingness to listen and to learn, as well as the mutual right to debate and critique, across existing echo-chambers.
- Furthermore, in terms of media *ministries*, the media communication shaped by Christian faith communities would take an alternative approach: influential leaders intentionally communicating holistic messages for the good of people, while individual messages by people would complement one another with wholesome truthful messages.

One of the key strengths of the Christian church is developing strong cohesive communities of Jesus-followers where many relationships can be nurtured simultaneously. Such communities can enable better processing of information, whether this information is received through local, national or global media channels and platforms.

A Case Study from the Middle East and North Africa

Evangelical practitioners of Christian media in the Middle East and North Africa, such as SAT-7, believe in media which proclaims, demonstrates, and encourages God's grace and builds trust, as opposed to propaganda, which brings lies and, half-truths, and then produces breakdown and mistrust. This begins by demonstrating that one is doing more than just engaging in mechanical transmissions of information or messages. So rather than merely presenting viewers with information, media is used to:

- Enable and foster genuine conversation, interaction, and engagement in real time
- Assist the church in facing oppositional claims or propaganda
- Provide a way for the church to publicly explain and demonstrate its message and its life.

Crucial to becoming trusted, in a growing climate of media mistrust, is showing in the content that one not only understands the good news of the gospel and its implications for life, but that one shares and understands the felt needs, questions, and lived experience of the actual audience as one seeks to bring a genuine relational encounter with Christ himself.

In a decentralised media environment, it means creating content *with* the people in society as much as *for* them, leaving the studios and meeting the audience where they live. It means equipping and providing locally based audience relations teams to engage with the individual viewers who contact the organisation in response to the broadcasts and other media content. It also means shaping the future media content to align with what one learns from the audience conversations and interactions. Furthermore, this may require the media organisation to equip and resource people in the communities of the local churches to also become capable of communicating effectively in a compelling way.

New digital media platforms and the decentralisation of media are providing better and more cost-effective opportunities to do this. This includes creating purpose-built video content and downloadable materials for these platforms. The future success and effectiveness of the traditional centralised linear broadcasts is increasingly being linked with the ability to engage audiences on digital media in spontaneous and interactive ways.

The digital streaming and video-on-demand services are now fully integrated with a global reach. However, while one now can physically reach anywhere those who speak the languages of the Middle East and North Africa, it is important to remain focused on meeting the unique and specific needs of the cultures and people living in the region. It would be a huge and unrealistic challenge to try to produce content that would effectively communicate

the Christian message, in the way described above, simultaneously to a global audience.

Thus, the aim is to provide content that is distinctive in its beauty, sensitivity, and creativity, that is just right for a particular situation and audience, thereby demonstrating the qualitative concept of *kairos*[4] with relevant messages at the right time to the various people.

A Case Study from Sub-Saharan Africa

The region of Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing a renaissance of tribal worship that is largely championed by the propaganda that 'Christianity is another person's religion.' How should African Christians respond to such propaganda emanating from those who counter the gospel? How do we honestly acknowledge the failures, limitations, and brokenness of prior kingdom workers, while undoing the misunderstandings of the gospel and missions amidst the recipients of the message?

Current followers of Jesus in Africa want to correct a wrong rendering of recent historical perspectives of global missions by themselves communicating an accurate portrayal of the relevance of the gospel within African contexts. Such messaging involved telling the current stories of how God is working uniquely through Africans in healing, restoring, and rejuvenating African communities through the gospel in the present days.

With the decentralisation of new media, the church is being called to learn the skills of providing factual, truthful, and timely responses to the many propaganda messages being distributed in society. How do individuals become courageous to embrace this important task?

Unlike the recent modern era of 19th century missions, where the bearer of the news also had the advantage of taking literacy to the recipients of the gospel, the new era decentralises not only the messaging, but also the media. The bearer of the message no longer has neither an upper hand nor a monopoly. A decentralised media denies the messenger the power that previous communicators of the gospel relished. On the other hand, decentralisation could be a blessing in disguise, since it not only takes away the authority from the owner of the medium and distributes it, but it also gives power to the first-hand witnesses. Referrals by 'authenticated users' (or 'witnesses' of the gospel influence), are now considered more authoritative in the market than commercial adverts themselves. We are returning to trusting the witness! We now build relationships of trust with a 'verified user' faster than any other source of information.

How have the stories we have heard about missions changed over time? The perspectives that the global church has about missions in Africa may be based on very old data. That data was largely narrated from the perspective of the foreign gospel worker then and therefore risked representing their story as the entire story. Secondly, the Western missionary was a 'trustworthy source' because of the relationships they enjoyed with the church or publishers back home. Even when locals would tell a different story of the missional experience, the global north church may not believe them, since they would rather believe one of their own. Decentralised media now avails more platforms for locals to tell their own stories to a more global audience.

> ***"Decentralised media now avails more platforms for locals to tell their own stories to a more global audience."***

We want to encourage that 'the missional story' is communicated meaningfully. When people encounter and experience a missional lifestyle, they themselves can tell the stories of how they are seeing God working in society. And when they live within missional communities, they can together shape their messaging towards meaningful contributions about how God is shaping the lives of people around them.

Envisioning the Future in Relation to Propaganda and Decentralised Media

With the increased use of technology, such as artificial intelligence, we can anticipate that aspects of propaganda may be advanced even more through media algorithms and that decentralised media may continue to

expand with even more people contributing their perspectives via media.

Various contexts of how information will be communicated can be envisioned for the future. On the one hand, increasing national controls in certain regions can limit communication of certain ideas, so that people will struggle to obtain balanced perspectives. On the other hand, strong pressures from communities to have everyone's voice heard, can also lead towards unbalanced information being shared to the extent that even truthful information is no longer tolerated.

Quite alternative perspectives of futures can also be envisaged in which people openly listen to one another, respect each other's perspectives, and are willing to engage with the truth they discern with one another. Amidst such open listening, the role of God's Word is critical in shaping the perception of truth.

What approaches could help us along the road? Followers of Jesus do well in building a strong foundation by being grounded in the Word of God to shape all facets of life. This includes being nurtured within active faith communities, where holistic thinking may be developed for engaging critically and constructively with various media technologies and messages.

Such an equipping begins with becoming informed and understanding core ideas that are being communicated, even when from biased perspectives. The primary motivation of love would be to engage with others through holistic messages and with a holistic lifestyle. If God's people communicate biblical truth with clarity, integrity and sensitivity, people may be drawn to the gospel.

Concluding Reflections

As Jesus-followers in the 21st century, we live within cultural contexts where media messages often are unbalanced and biased, and many media platforms have become echo-chambers. In order to reach out missionally in such contexts, we need to be grounded in the biblical gospel and a holistic Christian worldview:

- We can be encouraged by John's emphatic emphasis on Jesus himself as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (John 14:6), who is 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).
- We can be inspired by Luke's strong commitment to report truthfully about the origin and spread of the Gospel, with a responsible relationship to his sources (Luke 1:1-4).
- We can be guided by Paul's communication motto: 'We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.' (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Such biblical principles constitute a basis for our media engagement, including how we relate to propaganda and decentralised media:

- As disciples and witnesses of Christ, we need to be equipped for media literacy and analysis, in order to understand and uncover propaganda messages, and to discern superficiality and biases within decentralised media (*media awareness*).
- We also want to encourage and equip talented Christian communicators to be salt and light in shared public media spaces, thus being counter-cultural in relation to propaganda and decentralised media (*media presence*).
- There is also a need to mobilise the whole people of God to share the gospel meaningfully and impactfully through personal, church, and mission media spaces, within and across both the major centralised media as well as the decentralised media (*media ministries*).

As followers of Jesus, we want our personal and collective lives to be in unison with our communication of the gospel, so that people who hear us may see our media messages being endorsed by our everyday lives. Thus, we need to pray that God may grant each one of us humility, courage, wisdom, and integrity to listen carefully to God and to voices in society in order for us to competently and lovingly contribute media messages of meaning and hope.

Resources

- Ascott, Terence. *Dare to Believe! Stories of Faith From the Middle East*. Eugene: Resource Publications, 2021.
- Bilbro, Jeffrey. *Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021.
- Cosper, Mike. *The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth.* Cultural Renewal. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014.
- Dahle, Lars. "Media engagement. A Global Missiological Task." Lausanne Global Analysis 3, no. 1. (January 2014). https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2014-01/media-engagement-a-global-missiological-task.
- Crain, Natasha. *Faithfully Different. Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture.* Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2022.
- Guinness, Os. *The Global Public Square: Religious Freedom and the Making of a World Safe for Diversity.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Jowett, Garth S. & Victoria O'Donnell. *Propaganda & Persuasion.* 7th Edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- Kabutz, Rudolf & Lars Dahle. "Media Engagement Beyond the Coronavirus." *Global Missiology* 18, no. 2 (April 2021). http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/2430/5766.
- Samples, Kenneth R. *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.
- Schultze, Quentin. *Communicating with Grace and Virtue: Learning to Listen, Speak, Text, and Interact as a Christian.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020.
- Simmons, Annette. *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact.* New York: Amacom, 2007.
- Strange, Daniel. *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About… And How to Connect Them to Christ*. Turkey: The Good Book Company, 2021.
- Taylor, Jenny J. "The Holy Responsibility of Journalism. Restoring Public Truth in a Media-Dominated World." *Lausanne Global Analysis* 10, no. 2 (March 2021). https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2021-03/the-holy-responsibility-of-journalism.
- Taylor, Jenny J. *A Good Story: How Journalism Really Began and Why It Matters Now*. Lion Publishing, 2023.
- Watkins, Tony. "Contending for the Truth Amidst the Fake News Epidemic. Christian Witness in Today's Post-Truth Society." *Lausanne Global Analysis* 6, no. 4 (July 2017). https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-07/contending-truth-amidst-fake-news-epidemic.

Endnotes

1 Lausanne Media Engagement Network. "Media Engagement as a Lausanne Theme." Accessed August 2023. https://engagingmedia.info/media-engagement-as-a-lausanne-theme/.

2 Cambridge Dictionary. "Propaganda." Accessed August 2023. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda.

3 Lausanne Media Engagement Network. "Theological and Missiological Framework for Media Engagement." Accessed August 2023. https://engagingmedia.info/theological-and-missiological-framework-for-media-engagement/.

4 In the New Testament *kairos* means 'the appointed time in the purpose of God', the time when God acts (e.g., Mark 1.15, the kairos is fulfilled).

Authors

Dr Lars Dahle is an educator and communicator. He works as Associate Professor in Theology at NLA University College (Norway), with special emphasis on apologetics, missiology, and media theology. Since 2013, he has been Lausanne Catalyst for Media Engagement. Lars was the lead editor of The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives (Oxford: Regnum, 2014). In addition, he co-leads the European Leadership Forum Media Communicators Network, and is executive director of Damaris Norway.

Rudolf Kabutz is a media communicator and foresight strategist. He serves as a Media Research Strategist for TWR Africa, focusing on understanding future media user communities. Rudolf is driven by the global media network collaboration to reach people with hope. Utilizes tools to connect and equip individuals, he enables them for equipping others. As Catalyst for the Lausanne Media Engagement Network, he fosters intentional media engagement to transform society. His work, shaped by Master's studies in nuclear physics and strategic foresight, influences future media communication paradigms.

Gathuku Kibunga serves as the Executive Secretary of Africa Speaks. He is the co-founder and Chairman of Timazi Africa, a Kenya-based high-school students' ministry established in 2007, with a special focus on publishing discipleship resources for youth in English-speaking Africa. Their flagship publication Timazi magazine is distributed to Christian Unions in over 400 high schools in Kenya. He started the Annual Readership Challenge that brings together over 3,000 teenagers as part of developing a culture of reading Christian literature among youth. He holds a Master's in ministry leadership and is a DMin student at Biola University.

Rita El-Mounayer was born in Lebanon and became a committed Christian in 1987. She joined FEBA Radio in 1992. Then in 1996, Rita joined SAT-7 as a full-time employee to produce, write and present children's programs. She earned a Master's Degree in Communication Practice from University of Wales, England in 2004. Rita was appointed as Executive Director of Arabic Channels in 2005 then held several managerial roles in SAT-7 managing the Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish Channels before being named Deputy CEO in 2017. In 2018 Rita completed the Aspiring Chief Executives Program at CASS Business School, London and was appointed CEO of SAT-7 International in April 2019.

VISUAL AFFECT AS VALIDATION OF TRUTH

Robin Harris, Héber Negrão, Roch Ntankeh

At the beginning of the 21st century, William Dyrness observed:

> There is surely a fundamental agreement on all sides that we have entered a visual era. Moreover—although here there is probably less agreement—there is no going back. [. . .] And if we are convinced that Christ continues to be Lord of history, that he is working out his purposes in and through human history, and that he calls us to a glorious future kingdom, we do not want to return to the past.[1]

As the Lausanne Movement examines the state of the Great Commission, pondering how we might communicate and live in light of the gospel in the next quarter century, we cannot ignore the key role of the visual in producing affect (emotion leading to a physical or mental response) that results in either distrust or validation of truth.

This crucial topic continues the conversation on the arts outlined in *The Cape Town Commitment*[2], challenging us to take more seriously the principles put forward there, because if we continue to underestimate the role of the visual—which in itself connects to many other kinds of artistic expression—we fail to understand God's design for powerful forms of motivation and truth-telling.

Visuality, Materiality, and Artistic Communication for the Great Commission

In *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach*, missiologist Scott Moreau emphasizes the breadth of this topic and its deep relevance to the Great Commission. He writes,

> By the artistic, or material, dimension I refer to the multitude of ways people symbolically capture and express ideas, values, and themes of their religion or of their personal approach to their religion [. . .]. This dimension includes architecture, art (sculptures, paintings), objects (crosses), locations (cemeteries, holy sites), religious fashion and decoration, and so on. It also includes art as performance, from singing to sermonizing to creating music and drama.[3]

This short list is only meant to point in the direction of artistic communication and doesn't begin to exhaustively cover the ubiquitous presence of visuality as it intersects with the expression of truth expressed both by God and by humans created in his image.

". . . we cannot ignore the key role of the visual in producing affect (emotion leading to a physical or mental response) that results in either distrust or validation of truth."

Moreau points out that our theology of the arts should start at the very beginning of God's interactions with us: 'After the unimaginable act of creating the universe itself, with all its beauty and functionality, the first mundane act of art found in the Bible is when God makes garments out of skins for Adam and Eve after the fall (Gen 3:21). God is infinitely creative (from the universe to garments), and part of being an image-bearer for us is that we, too, are creative.[4]' But many see the arts as only meant for those specially gifted as 'artists'. If we could see the arts as 'any heightened form of communication'[5], we'd understand their importance as more than self-expression or entertainment, since art also 'challenges, cajoles, pacifies, preaches, warns, and admonishes—and can do all of that at the same time'.[6]

Far from the Romantic ideals we've inherited and continue to propagate of the arts being only for specially gifted people, 'all the arts come from God, the supreme Artist and supreme beauty, as a gift to believers and unbelievers; art is a manifestation of "common grace," and serves the glory of God apart from the economy of salvation.'[7] Furthermore, a biblical theology of the visual flows from the incarnation of Christ (*kenosis*), exemplifying God's plan for materiality and visuality as key to validation of truth. The *kenosis* was the ultimate visual validation of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.[8]

> ***". . . a biblical theology of the visual flows from the incarnation of Christ (kenosis), exemplifying God's plan for materiality and visuality as key to validation of truth."***

Gesa Theissen observes, 'With the beginning of Christianity, the notion of a trinitarian God and faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnated were to be momentous in the development of the relationship between faith and art in a Christian context. The incarnation was vital in developing a positive attitude toward the image and in the idea of seeing the divine, the logos made flesh.[9]' Attitudes toward visual and artistic expressions of faith varied widely throughout the history of the church, however, so as we look toward 2050, it is worth examining the role of the visual as it produces affective responses and impinges on validation.

Emotion and affect

Research in adult learning and emotion reveals that 'dominant Western culture prizes rational-cognitive ways of knowing. In a milieu where logic rules and reason prevails, emotional and embodied ways of knowing are often dismissed and ignored.'[10] This view of cognition, however, contrasts with the role of emotion in decision-making documented in the study of affect, which can be defined as 'a physical or mental response to artistic and cultural productions that are themselves manifestations of personal, social, and communal experiences.'[11]

Rizvi explains the connection between emotion and affect in this way: '[I] employ the term emotion as interchangeable with "feeling," and consider affect to be a discernible trace or residue of emotion. This is distinct from the way the term is used by key figures in what has come to be known as affect theory, but arguably a use that makes discussion across fields more productive.[12]' So while the two concepts (emotion and affect) are linked, affect is important in the process of validation because it is more than a feeling—it is connected to motivation, moving a person toward action and new ways of seeing the world, a crucial part of what happens as we participate in the Great Commission, both as hearers of the gospel message and as those who are moved to go and tell.

Discoveries in neurology and adult learning over the last several decades have turned upside down much of what we thought we knew about human learning and decision making. We now know that 'cognitive and affective domains of knowing are intertwined and inseparable.'[13]

The role of affect in validation, trust, and truth

The field of judgement and decision making (JDM) is also benefiting from new understandings of how the brain works. In the last several decades, JDM researchers looking at affect and emotion have focused increasing attention on 'how affective feelings influence judgments and decisions[14]'. Their studies have shown that 'affective rationality assists decision makers to integrate disparate information and to make sense out of a complex world'[15]. This complex relationship between emotion and affect—moving us to make decisions about what we can trust and what we understand to be true—is influenced at an even more basic level by what our brains choose to focus on and remember. As it turns out, even getting the attention of the brain involves emotion.

Discoveries in neurology as it relates to human memory and attention show that 'the vast majority of sensory data bombarding our brains are not encoded because the brain does not pay attention to information that, in terms of

its existing neural networks, is meaningless'[16]. It turns out that two factors influencing both attention-getting as well as recall (both important in decision-making and the process of validation) are related to 'whether or not the information has meaning and whether or not it has an emotional hook'[17]. 'It is almost as if the brain has two memory systems, one for ordinary facts and one for those that are emotionally charged.' [18]

The implications of these insights on how our brains work in relation to validation of truth and trust cannot be ignored. In our service of the Great Commission, our reliance on propositional, word-focused communication (while marginalizing visual and artistic forms of gospel communication) is another example of our failure to contextualize the gospel for a world that is ready to hear, if we will just speak the language of their hearts—the visual and other artistic languages that connect to their emotions.

> ***"As it turns out, even getting the attention of the brain involves emotion."***

Arts and Validation of the Gospel

A groundswell of engagement in arts and mission

On one hand, there is a steadily growing engagement in arts and mission, fed by a grassroots movement of people wanting to serve God through the arts and who are motivated by a passion for the Great Commission. Many of these people are engaging with networks such as the Lausanne Arts Issue Network[19], Arts+[20], Crescendo[21], Initiative Francophone[22], Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN)[23] and its related affiliates such as Asociación Latinoamericana De Etno Artes (ALDEA)[24], European Community of Christian Artists (ECCA)[25], and Arts in Mission Korea[26], among others[27]. These networks are hosting conferences and tracks within others' conferences in a manner that reflects their distinctives.[28]

Certainly the number of networks, conferences, and resources has expanded in the last few decades, and a slowly-growing list of mission agencies are creating positions for missionaries who focus on fostering the creation of local, contextualized arts (sometimes called 'ethnodoxologists')[29]. But overall, mission strategies do not incorporate a robust engagement of the arts into their core values and methods, leaving it largely to the arts networks to support and encourage. Believing that arts are not integral to mission, many para-church mission agencies rely on 'para-mission' networks to encourage, train, and resource those focused on arts and mission.

A growing understanding of the value of the arts is nonetheless making itself felt in a myriad of large and small ways. In a 2021 statement of core values for engaging the arts in mission, the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN) affirmed the arts as potent [. . . and] indispensable to human thriving. The arts are integral to personal and individual expression, and in initiating, transmitting, and reinforcing interpersonal and group communication. They permeate communities, marking messages as important, embedded in, and separate from everyday activities, drawing not only on cognitive, but also experiential, bodily, multimodal, and emotional ways of knowing. Arts instill solidarity, reinforce identity and serve as a memory aid. They inspire people to action, provide socially acceptable frameworks for expressing difficult or new ideas, and open spaces for people to imagine and dream.[30]

GEN and other related networks are motivated by the fact that the Bible itself recounts multiple ways that God communicates with us through the arts: vast collections of artistic forms such as proverbs, songs, stories, poetry, parables, as well as examples of drama (for prophecies), visual art to engender repentance (Num 21:1–8), and vivid descriptions of visual imagery and dancing.

These burgeoning networks are asking a key question: If God chose these methods of communication with us, why do we minimalize them in our own engagement with the Great Commission? They believe it's not just the arts that are neglected. Artists are marginalized as well. There is a growing emphasis on local arts in mission, as well, because 'local artistic communication exists and is owned locally; there's no need to translate foreign materials,

and local artists are empowered to contribute to the expansion of the kingdom of God.'[31]

Alongside the emergence of thinking that would lead to statements like the GEN Core Values, Lausanne's Cape Town Commitment's statement on 'Truth and the Arts in Mission' was published in 2011, providing an impassioned plea affirming the crucial role of the arts and artists in the Great Commission:

> We possess the gift of creativity because we bear the image of God. Art in its many forms is an integral part of what we do as humans and can reflect something of the beauty and truth of God. Artists at their best are truth-tellers and so the arts constitute one important way in which we can speak the truth of the gospel. Drama, dance, story, music and visual image can be expressions both of the reality of our brokenness, and of the hope that is centred in the gospel that all things will be made new. In the world of mission, the arts are an untapped resource. We actively encourage greater Christian involvement in the arts.'

A. We long to see the church in all cultures energetically engaging the arts as a context for mission by:

- Bringing the arts back into the life of the faith community as a valid and valuable component of our call to discipleship;
- Supporting those with artistic gifts, especially sisters and brothers in Christ, so that they may flourish in their work;
- Letting the arts serve as an hospitable environment in which we can acknowledge and come to know the neighbour and the stranger;
- Respecting cultural differences and celebrating indigenous artistic expression.[32]

This 'Truth and Arts in Mission' statement articulated a clarion call for the kind of arts-informed gospel engagement that has been thoroughly validated by the aforementioned studies in emotion and affect, neurology, human learning, and judgement and decision-making.

In its section on orality, The Cape Town Commitment reflects this commitment to the arts as a method of localization and contextualization, encouraging mission agencies 'to develop oral strategies, including: [. . .] appropriate orality training for pioneer evangelists and church planters [to] use fruitful oral and visual communication methods for communicating the whole biblical story of salvation, including storytelling, dances, arts, poetry, chants and dramas'[33]. Yet twelve years after the publication of The Cape Town Commitment, we see only slow progress in overall mission strategies for fostering robust engagement with the arts.

The Global South and Indigenous artistic communication

Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, Christianity worldwide experienced a slight contraction—from 'the statistical high point of Christianity [in] 1900, when 34.5 percent of the world's population was one form of Christian or another' to a low of 32.2 percent by 2015[34]. Not until 2020 did we see projections for 'a slight increase, with a larger increase by 2050 to 35.0 percent of the world's population. This increase has a simple explanation. The decline of Christianity in the Global North is now being outpaced by the rise of Christianity in the Global South (ie Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania)'[35].

While mission approaches in the Global South have also been influenced by the propositional truth-telling approaches of the North, in many cultures of the Global South, people are seen as fully creative human beings (rather than divided into 'artists' and 'non-artists') and rely on visual, oral, relational, and artistic forms of communication rather than abstract, propositional, and apologetic-based approaches. Jay Matenga, in a presentation on 'The Indigenous Future of Missions' proposed that 'the future of missions will be significantly influenced by centring the local and allowing indigenous values to guide the practice of missions forward into a healthier intercultural experience'[36].

For example, the design of buildings is an art form that speaks and affects us perhaps more than we think. In addition to a religious

building's external architectural form, even the arrangement of space in the interior may communicate unintended messages. Across the continent of Africa, for example, Western forms of church architecture evoke a courtroom setting for Africans—a place of accusation rather than a place of conviviality. In contrast, most contextualized gathering spaces in sub-Saharan Africa (even in the presence of the local authority), arrange people in a circle, demonstrating that we're all subject to the same things—we're equal[37].

Effect on the world, the church, and the Great Commission

First, and most importantly, in this postmodern and 'post-truth' period, we need a shift in evangelistic strategy toward engaging artistic communication to validate and defend truth rather than relying primarily on apologetics and propositional truth-telling. Visual and other artistic languages generate powerful affect, motivation, and response to truth, so appropriately contextualized artistic forms of communication will be central to our witness and worship as we participate in the Great Commission.

At the same time, we can expect a growing distrust of visual and artistic forms of knowing due to the impact of rapidly expanding Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies on the artistic landscape. The use of AI in all kinds of communicative modes increases the sharp need for critical visual literacy, since even 'visuality' is also subject to 'this historical moment of viral untruth'[38].

Opportunities and Challenges for Great Commission Efforts in the Arts

An underestimated challenge for engaging the arts in mission is the urgent need for contextualization. It is vitally important to understand both the role of cultural specifics as well as globalization in visual affect and the arts. 'The goal of contextualization remains the same, namely faithful communication of, reflection upon, and living out the Christian faith in ways appropriate to specific contexts[39].' It is vitally important to remember that arts and music are not a 'universal language' that can be easily understood across cultural divides[40]. Contextualization and localization will be required, just as they are in all missional activities.

Another challenge is our own penchant for relegating the arts to a lower priority in the communication of the gospel. If we can begin to see arts and ministry as part of an integrated, holistic approach to communicating the gospel in local contexts, local artists will thrive, and so will deep, powerful communication of the gospel in all its beauty. But since The Cape Town Commitment was published in 2011, continued marginalization of visual and related forms of artistic communication has allowed a tragic barrier to remain in the way we live out the Great Commission.

"It is vitally important to understand both the role of cultural specifics as well as globalization in visual affect and the arts."

Despite the challenges of re-thinking our propositional approaches to the validation of truth, the opportunities for powerful artistic gospel communication in the Great Commission unfold before us in unprecedented ways. As we look toward 2050, contextualized expressions of artistic communication will enrich our efforts to validate the truth of the gospel and serve the Great Commission. Just as the incarnation of Christ brought Truth to live among us, 'using local artistic traditions to present new biblical concepts that are unknown to the people is like "serving Scriptures in local dishes[41]"'.

We believe The Cape Town Commitment's statement on Truth and Arts in Mission is still a forward-looking challenge but that it has not been adequately engaged for the gospel and the Great Commission. As we set our eyes on the state of the gospel in 2050, let us act on the sure knowledge that 'artists at their best are truth-tellers and so the arts constitute one important way in which we can speak the truth of the gospel'[42].

Resources

- Arts for a Better Future workshop
- Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith
- Sparkling Creativity, Ethno Arts Podcast
- Lausanne Movement Consultation on Arts in Mission
- Lausanne Global Classroom: Arts
- Global Ethnodoxology Network

Endnotes

1 William A. Dyrness. *Visual Faith (Engaging Culture): Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 132.

2 The Lausanne Movement. *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action.* 2011. https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment.

3 A. Scott Moreau. *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 8.

4 Moreau, 141.

5 Brian Schrag. *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals.* ed. James R Krabill (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 51.

6 Moreau, 44.

7 Richard Viladesau. 'Aesthetics and Religion' in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Art.* ed. Frank Burch Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34.

8 Leon Morris, in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, notes that 'truth is closely linked with Jesus. He could even say, "I am [. . .] the truth" (14:6). [. . .] It is plain that for John truth is many-sided and many-splendored. When he speaks of the incarnate Word as full of grace and truth he is pointing us to the fact that truth and the complete reliability of God are bound up with one another.'

9 Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen. 'Artistic Imagination and Religious Faith' in T*he Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*. ed. Frank Burch Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 79.

10 Randee Lipson Laurence. 'Powerful Feelings: Exploring the Affective Domain of Informal and Arts-Based Learning.' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2008 no. 120 (2008): 65–66, https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.317.

11 Kishwar Rizvi, ed. *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 4–5.

12 Rizvi, 186.

13 Laurence, 70.

14 Ellen Peters et al. 'Affect and Decision Making: A 'Hot' Topic.' *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 19 (2006), 79. https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.528.

15 Peters et al., 83.

16 Pat Wolfe. 'The Role of Meaning and Emotion in Learning.' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2006, no. 110 (2006): 36. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1002/ace.217.

17 Wolfe, 37

18 Wolfe, 39.

19 Lausanne Arts Network (https://lausanne.org/networks/issues/arts - https://www.facebook.com/groups/1159275907469264).

20 Arts+ (https://www.artsplus.info).

21 Crescendo (https://www.crescendo.org/).

22 Initiative Francophone (initiative_franc@wycliffe.net) is a network of missionary organizations in French-speaking Africa that regularly organizes conferences and publications on subjects relating to African culture and the arts in particular. The theme of their 2023 consultation was 'Rites and symbols, songs and dances at the examination of the Gospel.'

23 Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN) (https://www.worldofworship.org/).

24 Asociación Latinoamericana De Etno Artes (ALDEA) (https://www.facebook.com/ALDEA.EtnoArtes)

25 European Community of Christian Artists (ECCA) (https://www.facebook.com/groups/651449075271467/)

26 Arts in Mission Korea (https://www.facebook.com/ArtsInMissionKorea)

27 Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) successfully networked visual artists for 45 years but ceased operations in 2023 (https://www.civa.org/faq).

28 The Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS) has hosted an Arts Track every year since 2015, and several conferences have focused on arts in mission as their theme: OMSC's Mission Leaders Forum (2022), American Society of Missiology (2023); Moody Missions Conference (2024), and so on.

29 A list of some of the organizations with arts workers supporting a contextualized approach to arts can be found here: https://www.worldofworship.org/organizations/#agencies.

30 'Core Values.' Global Ethnodoxology Network. https://www.worldofworship.org/core-values/.

31 Schrag, vxi.

32 The Lausanne Movement. *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, IIA.5.

33 The Lausanne Movement. *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, IID.2.C.

34 Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing. 'World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South.' *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 9, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939319880074.

35 Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, 9.

36 Jay Matenga. 'Indigenous Future of Mission: Authority, Indigeneity, and Hybridity.' Seminar presented to Global Connections UK. 14 February 2022. https://jaymatenga.com/pdfs/MatengaJ_IndigenousFutureMissions.pdf.

37 Roch Ntankeh. personal correspondence. 15 July 2023.

38 Robin Redmond Wright, Jennifer A. Sandlin, and Jake Burdick. 'What Is Critical Media Literacy in an Age of Disinformation?' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* Special Issue: Critical Media Literacy in a Pandemic of Disinformation and Conspiracy, no. 178 (2023): 12, https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20485.

39 Craig Ott. 'Globalization and Contextualization; Reframing the Task of Contextualization in the Twenty-First Century.' *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 1 (2015): 43–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829614552026.

40 Héber Negrão. 'The Arts Are Not a Universal Language: Ethnodoxology and Integrating Local Arts in Worship.' *Lausanne Global Analysis* 11, no. 5 (2022), https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2022-09/the-arts-are-not-a-universal-language; Robin P. Harris. 'The Great Misconception: Why Music Is Not a Universal Language' in *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 82–89. https://www.worldofworship.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Robin-Handbook-Article.pdf.

41 Michelle Petersen. 'Serving Scripture in Local Dishes: Seven Analytic Lenses.' Presented at the International Bible Translation Conference, Dallas, TX. 14 October 2013.

42 The Lausanne Movement. *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, IIA.5.

Authors

Dr Robin Harris hold M.A.s in Intercultural Studies and Ethnomusicology and a Ph.D. in Music/Ethnomusicology. She served for decades in cross-cultural contexts, including 10 years in Russia, and now speaks at colleges and conferences about topics such as ethnodoxology and ethnomusicology. Her publications include co-editing *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (William Carey Library, 2013) and *Storytelling in Siberia: The Olonkho Epic in a Changing World* (University of Illinois Press, 2017). She currently serves as Director of the Center for Excellence in World Arts at Dallas International University (formerly GIAL) and as an Arts Consultant for SIL Int'l.

Héber Negrão holds a MA in ethnomusicology and is a PhD Candidate in world arts at Dallas International University. He is a missionary ethnomusicologist serving as Coordinator for Anthropology and Ethnoarts at the Evangelical Missionary Linguistic Association (Brazil). He as been involved in the ethnoarts ministry in Brazil since 2006, when he joined the Global Ethnodoxology Network and the Arts Task Force of the WEA Mission Commission. He has worked with oral Bible translation for six years among indigenous people in northern Brazil. . Héber serves as a Lausanne Movement language coordinator.

Dr Roch Ntankeh holds a PhD in Theology and Intercultural Studies with an emphasis in Ethnomusicology from the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique du Cameroun, where he is currently assistant director of the masters program. He teaches missiology, ethnodoxology, and scientific research methodology. He is also a member of the Global Ethnodoxology Network (GEN), where he sits on the Global Advisory Council. He serves as an ethnodoxology consultant for several missionary organizations, conducting local music composition workshops in Cameroon and French-speaking countries in Africa.

CHALLENGES TO OBJECTIVE TRUTH

Andrew Loke, Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, Mary Jo Sharp

Objective truth has been widely regarded as a cornerstone of rational thought and scientific inquiry. It is the idea that there are facts and principles that exist independently of our personal beliefs, biases, and opinions. Many philosophers would further explain that the notion of objective truth is related to the existence of 'objective reality,' which refers 'to anything that exists as it is independent of any conscious awareness of it (via perception, thought, etc.).'[1]

The Christian Scriptures affirm that there is an objective reality that can be known by humans:

- The objective and knowable nature of God's existence (Romans 1:18–20)
- The objective and knowable nature of God's moral laws (Romans 2:14–15)
- The objective nature of Scripture (Psalm 19:7–9)
- The objective nature of Jesus and His words (John 14:6, John 18:37)

While the Scriptures teach that truth is the pathway to freedom, they also focus on the reality of truth as a person – Jesus Christ (John 8:32, 14:6). The foundation of trust for the Christian faith is the objective truth that 'Christ died for our sins… he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–5). For if Christ has not been raised, the Christian faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:17).

While the Scriptures affirm an objective reality that is accessible to the human being, the regard for objective truth has sustained a long-term erosion, with some questioning its very existence. The truth claims of Christianity in particular have been challenged by various developments which will likely affect the Great Commission and the church between now and 2050. In this article, we will explore six of the challenges that have emerged in various parts of the world.

"The truth claims of Christianity in particular have been challenged by various developments which will likely affect the Great Commission and the church between now and 2050."

Subjectivity and Relativism

One of the main challenges to objective truth comes from the idea of subjectivity and relativism. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'Relativism, roughly put, is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them.'[2] Simply stated, this means that what is true for one person or group may not be true for another. On this view, the world offers many 'truths', which is complicated by the postmodern sensibilities of 'my truth is my truth, and your truth is your truth.' Given the emerging realities of loss of trust among institutions of authority including the church, the state and the family, the next generations in many parts of the world explore questions of truth through social media influencers and platforms, many of which challenge the concept of objective truth.[3]

The problematic rejection of objective truth as a meaningful part of reality is made worse by a heightened ill-regard of philosophy, which traditionally has provided the intellectual tools

which demonstrate the self-defeating nature of relativism. This ill-regard is illustrated by the statement made by the world-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, '. . . philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics.'[4] This attitude towards philosophy and logic in the broader Western culture, which is based on an ignorance of the foundational importance of philosophy and logic for all academic disciplines including physics,[5] has affected society's overall ability to consider what is objectively true and how we can know it.

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionary's word of the year was 'post-truth.' The article describes, 'Post-truth is an adjective defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief".'[6] The American comedian Stephen Colbert popularized a related word, truthiness, as 'the quality of seeming or being felt to be true, even if not necessarily true.'[7] This idea of 'truthiness' precludes a thoughtful investigation of the logic of one's beliefs, and damages the ability to recognize a good argument. The gospel of Jesus Christ is, indeed, a good argument on the problem of humankind.

Without basic philosophical principles, Christian witness can be flawed in multiple ways. Lack of knowledge about truth and reality can result in misguided beliefs. People may not realize their reasoning is flawed and hold onto their views as absolute truths. When poor reasoning is combined with the current biblical illiteracy, the witness to the gospel is negatively affected.[8]

To combat poor reasoning, it is essential for pastors, teachers, and other ministry leaders to teach their congregations sound philosophical concepts that will help them understand, interpret, and engage scripture more thoughtfully. C.S. Lewis proclaimed, 'Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy must be answered.'[9] When Christians are not good thinkers, they can be 'tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes' (Ephesians 4:14).

Expressive Individualism

Another challenge to objective truth is the emergence of expressive individualism in the West. Expressive individualism suggests, 'The highest good is individual freedom, happiness, self-definition, and self-expression. Traditions, religions, received wisdom, regulations, and social ties that restrict individual freedom, happiness, self-definition, and self-expression must be reshaped, deconstructed, or destroyed.'[10] This has contributed to moral relativism which is premised on moral autonomy, whereby, following R.C. Sproul's analysis of Jean Sartre's (1905-1980) thinking, human beings determine their own ethics and freedoms.[11] In such a world where human freedom and expression is the end goal, chaos and collapse ensues in the areas of sexuality, family life, and societal fabric, just to name a few.[12]

The existence of an objective reality external to an individual would pose a perceived threat to personal authenticity and individual freedom since the ability to fashion reality as one pleases is vital to ultimate autonomy. However, when wisdom or external authority is no longer valued, one becomes enslaved to their individual views. As Jesus said, 'then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free' (John 8:32). His proclamation was, in part, to free us from ourselves.

Confirmation Bias

'Confirmation bias is the tendency of people's minds to seek out information that supports the views they already hold. It also leads people to interpret evidence in ways that support their pre-existing beliefs, expectations, or hypotheses.'[13] In other words, people tend to see what they want to see and interpret information in a way that supports their preconceptions. Living in a world that has been affected by the fall, we find that all of our human experience is affected by sin. Our aspirations, affections and reasoning are thus hampered from knowing the truth and living in light of the truth. As lovers of truth, Christians need to let themselves be scrutinized and examined for any such bias, learn to overcome them, and promote the intellectual virtues of

justice, fair-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and humility.[14]

Left unacknowledged, confirmation bias hinders one's ability to consider evidence and reason in conflict with their views. When desire conflicts with belief in God, the ability to reason about God is hindered. As confirmation bias mixes with the expressive individualism prevalent in the West, the environment developed is one of intellectual and emotional fragmentation. This circumstance can be especially difficult when a person has suffered from religious trauma.

Rapid Spread of Misinformation

The rise of deceptive news and misinformation is another challenge to objective truth. With the proliferation of social media and the internet, it has become easier than ever to spread false information and propaganda. Christians are called to imitate the Bereans in Acts [17] who checked out the truth of Paul's teaching. We need to be more vigilant in this current and forthcoming era with checking sources and then reasoning what is true. Otherwise, we can unintentionally add to confusion and mistrust among the public, making it difficult to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Conflict Narrative of Science and Christianity

While religion plays a prominent role in African societies, the younger generations are increasingly questioning religious claims. There are growing humanist, skeptic, and atheistic communities that are littered in various cities in the African continent in places like Lagos, Cape Town, and Nairobi. This general skepticism towards Christian truth claims is advanced by the next generations who are connected to other parts of the world because of new media,[15] and is fueled by the viewpoint of scientific materialism. Within a closed-system that naturalism births, discussions of meaning, purpose and rationality are greatly hampered.16 Scientific materialism undergirds the claim that faith and science are incompatible, thereby contributing to non-religious and atheist identities among urban African youth.[17]

The conflict narrative of science and Christianity is also promoted in China, where it is strongly associated with Marxist ideology. The widespread perception of this conflict is further contributed by Christian leaders in Asia who have more influence on believers' opinions about science than in the West, and who often foster a negative attitude towards mainstream science. The key to correcting the situation is through the education of future Christian leaders. Many Christian scholars have argued for the harmony of their beliefs with mainstream science, distinguishing it from scientific materialism and demonstrating the fallacy of the latter, while younger Christian leaders often recognize the importance of science and would welcome scholars who respectfully engage their beliefs and questions. Given the sheer numbers of Asian populations, training future Christian leaders in Asia is key to impacting the future global public opinion on science and Christianity.

> ***"The rise of religious 'nones' has been shown to be associated with widespread scientific education and a related agnostic way of thinking, which has led to a 'crisis of beliefs'..."***

The rise of religious 'nones' has been shown to be associated with widespread scientific education and a related agnostic way of thinking, which has led to a 'crisis of beliefs' that is of 'epic proportions' in Western European countries such as the UK.[18] This is also affecting Asian education hubs such as Hong Kong and Singapore where the top universities in the region are located. In a forum organized by The Bible Society of Singapore titled 'Census 2020, Religions and Youth' the panelists note a significant drop in the number of Christian adherents in the age groups of 25–44, that Christianity seems to be losing the intellectuals, and that many youths are wrestling with doubts. Meanwhile, many outspoken atheists are raising sharp objections against Christian Theism on the internet, and many youths who frequently access the internet could not

find the answers to these objections in their churches. This is a pity because there are numerous high quality academic publications in which these objections are answered.[19] The problem is that, while many religious 'nones' are well educated in science, they are not well-informed about academic philosophy of religion and theology publications which are so important for understanding how science relates to Christianity.

A deeper problem is with theological education, where there is still a widely held misconception that the arguments for the existence of God have been dealt a death blow by philosophers David Hume and Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. Neo-Orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth and many postmodernist theologians agree with this assessment. They are unaware that the objections by Hume and Kant have been shown to be fallacious by other philosophers.[20] Contrary to popular misconceptions, Hume and Kant did not successfully rebut the arguments for the existence of God, such as the Cosmological Argument, Teleological Argument, Moral Argument, and the Argument from Miracles. These arguments have been around for millennia and, even in our present scientific period, are still being defended today in journals and monographs published by world leading academic peer-reviewed publishers such as Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, Springer Nature, and Routledge.

While presenting the challenges, the internet also offers great potential and opportunities for disseminating the contents of these high-quality resources. Seminaries, churches, and university student ministries need to be made aware of these high academic quality resources which present the evidence and rigorous arguments (as well as detailed replies to the objections to these arguments) for the existence of God, the resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ, etc., and to be taught how to use them.

Religious Pluralism

In India, Hinduism is particularly averse to the exclusivist truth claims of Christianity. There has been a longstanding tradition of the idea of incarnation within the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism, and many Hindus would have no problem seeing Jesus along with Krishna, Buddha, and Gandhi as avatars of Vishnu (Godhead). Nevertheless, the unique and once-and-for-all character of the incarnation of Christ in Christianity is contrary to the Hindu idea of multiplicity of incarnations.[21] A defense of the Ancient Jewish Monotheistic background and the historical evidence concerning the origin of divine and resurrection Christology[22] is important for helping people understand the uniqueness of the Christian position.

Meanwhile, there has been a movement calling for the inculturation of the gospel in Asian terms, symbols, and spiritualities. The view of the other as a partner in inter-religious dialogue became a leading mode of encounter, and some Asian theologians have gone further and argued for viewing the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and/or Shintoist ancient writings as the 'Old Testament' for Asian Christians.[23] The danger of such approaches is that it can result in confusion (since the terms, symbols and practices are closely associated with a web of pagan beliefs) and compromise. Heresies have been on the rise in Korea, China (famously illustrated by the female Christ of the Eastern Lightning Cult), and other countries in Asia.

While the Scripture affirms that some truths can be found in other religions and philosophies as a result of general revelation (Acts 14:17, 17:28), the Scripture also warns of the distortion and suppression of truth resulting in the sin of idolatry (Romans 1:18–25). 'What is needed therefore is the development of a fully satisfactory theology of cultural and religious plurality, as opposed to one of religious pluralism, which takes seriously Christian and biblical distinctiveness on the one hand, and recognizes both evil and goodness in human cultures and religious pursuits on the other.'[24] It is anticipated that apologetics will continue to play an important role for Christian communities as they seek to discern truth from error and to fulfill the Great Commission.

Within African contexts, truth is not necessarily analyzed but rather experienced through oral traditions and narratives of the community. This means, that because of close kinship

ties, questioning accepted norms would bring shame to an individual. Additionally, African worldviews already have a substructure of the divine and spirit world. In such a context, many would claim belief in 'God' and critical engagements of some of the assumptions within African traditional religions in light of Christian trinitarianism may be uncommon, because the existence of God is taken for granted.[25] The philosopher of religion John Mbiti, for instance, notes that while many convert to Christianity and Islam, they 'come out of African religion but they don't take off their traditional religiosity.'[26] This means that the mode of Christian apologetics among African traditionalists must engage not just the intellectual ideas but be contextualized to the kinship ties that hold African societies together. However, conceptions of 'God' in African traditional religions as well as some cultural practices present a challenge of syncretism when it comes to the topic of objective truth.[27]

The majority of African contexts are founded on oral traditions whereby truth is explored and experienced through proverbs, songs, myths, and stories. This means that more analytical frameworks for testing truth claims seem foreign to a majority of Africans whose worldviews are influenced by oral traditions, respect for authority, potency of the spirit world, as well as shame and honor in the context of communality. The topic of objective truth will, therefore, be important for the church that seeks to effectively engage the rising generations of Africans who navigate the globalizing realities and challenges to the Christian faith.

With young people comprising 60 percent of the African population and with population tripling by 2050 according to the World Economic Forum, gospel clarity is vital.[28] Responding to the complicated intellectual challenges within the African continent will require a strong grounding in apologetics. Such a grounding will help Christians to compassionately and truthfully critique arguments raised against Christian faith, retrieve the historical evidence for Christian faith as innate to the continent and solidly embed new Christians within a biblical worldview and framework, that protects and empowers them within the volatile supernatural and spiritual realities in the great war of the cosmos. The Great Commission is needed both among the varieties of Least Reached People (LRPs) Groups, but also the growing population of young people who are identifying as non-religious. After all, the church is the pillar of truth, in a truth-denying world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, objective truth is facing several challenges in the modern world, such as subjectivity and relativism, expressive individualism, confirmation bias, the rapid spread of misinformation, the conflict narrative of science and Christianity, and religious pluralism. While these challenges may make it difficult to arrive at a shared understanding of truth, it is important to continue to strive for objectivity and rationality in our thinking and discourse. By acknowledging these challenges and working to overcome them, we can maintain a commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge.

Resources

- Loke, Andrew. *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A New Transdisciplinary Approach*. (London: Routledge, 2022).
- Loke, Andrew. *The Teleological and Kalām Cosmological Arguments Revisited*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022).
- Moreland, James Porter, and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2017).
- Walls, Jerry and Trent Dougherty, *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Endnotes

1 Dwayne H. Mulder, 'Objectivity,' The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed May 30, 2023. iep.utm.edu.

2 Maria Baghramian and J. Adam Carter, 'Relativism,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Accessed May 30, 2023. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/.

3 Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, 'Apologetics in a Digital Age: Incarnating the Gospel for African Next Gens,' *Global Missiology*, Vol 18, No 4 (2021): 24-32.

4 Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5.

5 Andrew Loke, *The Teleological and Kalam Cosmological Arguments Revisited* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022), chapter 1.

6 'Word of the Year,' Oxford Languages. Accessed May 30, 2023. https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/.

7 'Word of the Year,' Oxford Languages, 2023.

8 Some recent statistics on discipleship and doubt:

32 percent of Protestants said they read the Bible every day.

12 percent of Protestants reported that they rarely or never read the Bible.
'Discipleship Pathway Assessment-Engaging the Bible: National Survey of Protestant Churchgoers.' LifeWay Research. Online survey conducted January 14-19, 2019 of 2500 Protestant churchgoers. Accessed May 31, 2023. Available from: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Discipleship-Pathway-2019-Engaging-the-Bible-Release.pdf.

40 percent of Christians are not engaged in discipleship at all. 'Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship.' Barna. January 26, 2022. Accessed May 31, 2023. https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/. The statistic was converted from original study '2 in 5' to a percentage, '40 percent' for continuity.

65 percent of American adults who self-identify as Christian (all generations) have doubted what they believe about God or religion.

The Millennial generation currently experiences about twice as much doubt as any of the previous generations. 'Two-Thirds of Christians Face Doubt.' Barna. Published July 25, 2017. Accessed May 31, 2023. https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/ .

9 C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 59.

10 Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church* (Chicago, Moody Press, 2016), 17. As quoted in Trevin Wax, 'Expressive Individualism: What Is It?' Accessed May 30, 2023. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/expressive-individualism-what-is-it/.

11 R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 179.

12 In the Kenyan context, there have been various appeals to the conservative sexual ethics that undergird Kenya's constitution. The appeals have been targeted towards Article 162 of the constitution, and fueled by LGBTIQAA+ rights and advocacy groups with significant funding from Western organisations. Within the church context, several African Church communions have distanced themselves from their global counterparts in terms of progressive sexual ethics on the basis of biblical sexual ethics.

13 'Confirmation Bias,' *Ethics Unwrapped*. Accessed May 30, 2023. https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/confirmation-bias.

14 Ray Yeo, forthcoming, 'Christian Higher Education in a Healthy Secularism: Repositioning Secularism, Faith, and Christian Education for Mutual Flourishing,' in *Who Is My Neighbour? Christian Higher Education in a Secular Age*, edited by Joy Demoskoff and Matthew Zantingh (unpublished).

15 Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, 'Emerging Apologetics Themes in Contemporary African Youth Ministry: A Kenyan Perspective,' *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* vol. 8, no. 2 (2022): 1-18.

16 Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories that Shape our Lives* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 111-116.

17 Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, 'Faith, Science, and Nonreligious Identity Formation Among Male Kenyan Youth,' *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 58, no. 1 (2023): 45-63.

18 Shaun Henson, 'What makes a quantum physics belief believable? Many-worlds among six impossible things before breakfast,' *Zygon* (2023) https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12872, page 19.

19 See, for example, David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Lewis, Geraint and Luke Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.); Andrew Loke, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A New Transdisciplinary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2020). Open access, free download here: https://www.academia.edu/42985421/Investigating_the_Resurrection_of_Jesus_Christ; Andrew Loke, *The Teleological and Kalam Cosmological Arguments Revisited* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022); Andrew Loke, *The Origin of Humanity and Evolution: Science and Scripture in Conversation* (London: T & T Clark, 2022); Richard Swinburne, The Existence of God, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.); Walls, Jerry and Trent Dougherty, *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

20 See, for example, Richard Swinburne, 'Why Hume and Kant were mistaken in rejecting natural theology,' in T. Bucheim et al ed., *Gottesbeweise als Herausforderung fur die Moderne Vernunft*, Mohr Siebeck, 2012: https://users.ox.ac.uk/~orie0087/pdf_files/Papers%20from%20Philosophical%20Journals/Swinburne_2012-hume-kant.pdf) and William Lane Craig, 'Kant's First Antinomy and the Beginning of the Universe,' *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 33 (1979): 553–567.

21 M. Thangaraj, "Religious Pluralism, Dialogue and Asian Christian Responses," in S. Kim (Ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171-172.

22 Andrew Loke, *The Origins of Divine Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Loke, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

23 Thangaraj, 2008, 161-165.

24 H. Yung, "Mission and evangelism: Evangelical and Pentecostal theologies in Asia," in S. Kim (Ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 267.

25 Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, "Analysing African Traditional Gods Through a Trinitarian Apologetic," *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* 3, no. 2 (2022): 72-89.

26 Cited in Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa), 17.

27 Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, "The Supremacy of Jesus Christ: A Theological response to the Resurgence of Mbũri cia Kiama," *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* 2, no. 2 (2021): 40-57.

28 World Economic Forum, "The Children's Continent: Keeping up with Africa's Growth," Jan 13, 2020. Accessed on June 2, 2023. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/the-children-s-continent/?DAG=3&gclid=CjwKCAjwpuajBhBpEiwA_ZtfhbrDnB-2AC9ytRhFifhnXxywM3xVNmzD_SCxnjpMcMBop_tyT3tzQxoCec4QAvD_BwE.

Authors

Dr Andrew Loke is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Hong Kong Baptist University. He has authored multiple books published by world-leading academic publishers in the fields of theology, philosophy, Biblical studies, and science and religion, and leads the Hong Kong Centre for Christian Apologetics.

Dr Kevin Muriithi Ndereba is Lecturer and Head of Department, Department of History, Mission, Religion and Practical Theology at St. Paul's University, Kenya and is Research Fellow in Practical Theology and Missiology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. He speaks and has published widely on apologetics, youth ministry and practical theology. He leads Apologetics Kenya.

Mary Jo Sharp is an Assistant Professor of Apologetics at Houston Christian University in Texas, focusing on philosophy of religion, the problem of evil, and apologetics and evangelism. She is an international speaker and author on apologetics, published with Kregel Publications, B&H Publications, LifeWay, and Zondervan. Her ministry is Confident Christianity Apologetics Ministry.

INTEGRITY AND ANTI-CORRUPTION

Manfred Kohl, Lazarus Phiri, Efraim Tendero

Unbelievers often justify their refusal to take the Christian faith seriously by pointing to instances of hypocrisy in the church. We Christians know that God does not choose to make believers sinless on this side of heaven, and that the imperfections of believers do not contradict the truth of the gospel. However, our failures to exhibit integrity—or consistency between our whole life and the teachings of Jesus—do make the gospel seem less credible, because they suggest that giving our lives to Christ does not have the transformative impact that we claim.

In this article, three of us, all members of the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance's Global Integrity Network, address complementary aspects of the call to integrity and resisting corruption. First, Efraim Tendero presents an overview of the topic and stresses the need to incorporate the message of integrity in our disciple-making activities. Lazarus Phiri proposes making the Great Commission a central life principle, not just a program to carry out, as a means of fostering integrity. Finally, Manfred Kohl pinpoints a key source of the problem: Christians who live in a me-centered rather than Christ-centered fashion.

Integrity as a Component of Discipleship

I am frequently bothered by projections regarding the future of Christianity. The Pew Research Center predicts that by the year 2050, there will be almost as many Muslims as Christians globally. According to Pew, 31.4 percent of the world's population was affiliated with Christianity in 2010, and trends indicate that in 2050 the percentage will be . . . 31.4. In other words, on the global level we are stuck in neutral gear.[1]

Why is this so? One important contributor to this is that many professing Christians do not serve Jesus with integrity. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and the Joshua Project,[2] although nearly one-third of the world's people are nominal Christians, only about 12 percent are committed followers of Christ.

> ***"...our failures to exhibit integrity- or consistency between our whole life and the teachings of Jesus- do make the gospel seem less credible."***

And even those 12 percent frequently fail in glaring and public ways. In recent years, we have endured major sexual abuse scandals in Catholic and Protestant settings alike. We have all been embarrassed by revelations about famed apologist Ravi Zacharias following his death. In many countries, the political involvement of Christians has caused us to appear more self-serving than servant-like.

As a global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance, I have encountered the impact of these failures for many years. The world does not expect us to be perfect, but neither do they expect us to so obviously contradict what we claim to stand for. We are justifiably criticized by the comment often attributed (though perhaps falsely) to Mahatma Gandhi: 'I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.'

This is why I joined the Global Integrity Network (GIN), co-sponsored by the Lausanne Movement and the WEA. The GIN has established this standard of integrity, applicable to all Christians: 'A person of integrity and anti-corruption is moral in character, ethical in

action, truthful in dealings, accountable at all times, and engages in transforming the society.'

We intend to develop Christians of integrity through four main strategies:

- Identify and advance good governance, accountability structures, and anti- corruption advocacies.
- Pursue and engage in the promotion of ethical life discipleship.
- Educate and teach the principles and practice of integrity.
- Promote models, studies, initiatives, and best practices of integrity and anti-corruption at both the individual and institutional levels.

I am also a leader in the Galilean Movement, which is a global disciple-making initiative that seeks to multiply disciple-makers in every region of the world and every sector of society. I hope, as an important part of my legacy as a world Christian leader, to make the fostering of integrity a central commitment of the discipling process everywhere.

In the Galilean Movement, we frequently say that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 must function alongside the Great Commandment of Mark 12:29–31 and the Great Collaboration of John 17. In other words, we cannot carry out the Great Commission if we are not selflessly loving our neighbor as ourselves and seeking to work humbly and in unity with fellow believers. It is not enough for us to act this way when we are in church. We must also be servants of good moral character, deep concern for others, and clear thinking in the rest of the world, where 95 percent of Christians live and work: business, education, the arts, and community life.

We envision a partnership between GIN and the Galilean Movement to introduce principles of integrity and anti-corruption as part of disciple-making in countries all over the world.

One of the best ways we can love our neighbor is to live free from corruption and to expose corruption where we see it. Here is an example of what we have in mind from my home country of the Philippines. We have a strong discipling movement reaching out to government officials, police, and members of the military. Along with leading people to Jesus and into spiritual growth, this movement calls on public service to fight corruption in their sector and to stand for ethical living. Some of the disciples trained in this movement, as they have been promoted within Philippine police and military departments, have instituted training programs aiming at values transformation.

The Great Commission: Program or principle?

In pursuit of fulfilling God's mandate to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the church looks to what is known popularly as the Great Commission, based on Matthew 28:18–20:

> And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

This is not the only passage, however, that offers Christians a commission. In addition, passages in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, and in the book of Acts also give Christians similar directives. In all of these passages that refer to the task of proclaiming and sharing the message of salvation, the key is the transmission of the gospel by word and life.

When asked why one passage is referred to as the Great Commission, most Christians will state that they are the last words Jesus gave to his disciples. These words were certainly significant. However, they are not the only words that should guide the church in the task of sharing the message of salvation. Elevating one passage of Scripture to the exclusion or neglect of others, as has been traditionally done in this case, robs Christians of opportunities and impetus to live in light of the full teachings of Christ and to imitate his example

of self-giving love. Calling a single passage 'the Great Commission' has the tendency to narrow our attention, leaving equally critical commands seeming peripheral. This misunderstands and misrepresents God's intention for our mission.

As already mentioned, other passages of Scripture that communicate the principle of sharing the message of salvation include the following:

> 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.' (Matt 24:14, ESV)
>
> And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.' (Mark 16:15–16, NKJV)
>
> Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' (John 20:21, ESV)
>
> 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' (Acts 1:8, ESV)
>
> '[. . .] repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.' (Luke 24:47, ESV)

The church desperately needs integrity of interpretation and understanding of the so-called Great Commission. The key word in all the passages above is 'witness'. The best source of the description and demonstration of being witnesses of the message of salvation is the book of Acts. In it, we find the disciples understanding and undertaking the task of being witnesses to what Christ had done for them and how it had changed their lives.

One of the major temptations the church has succumbed to is turning a principle into a program. In general, a principle is a guiding foundation of belief or behaviour, whereas a program may be a series of steps or activities one follows. When the command of Matthew 28:18–20 is understood as a principle, believers are perceived to be witnesses. When it is understood as a program of activities, the church loses touch with the need to practice a lifestyle of sharing the message of salvation. It becomes a task to be accomplished. In recent history, some parts of the global church have sought to determine when the 'Great Commission' task will be accomplished. Shifting predictions of this timeline have drawn the attention of Christians worldwide, to the displeasure and frustration of others seeking faithfulness in interpreting and understanding God's word holistically.

Reassessing Our Evangelism Paradigm

Another consequence of this Great Commission misnomer is that many Christians have misunderstood the concept and turned a lifestyle into a profession. A few select believers claim a special call, turning a lifestyle into a career. In the end, the church is left with a mission enterprise of men and women responding to a special call as a unique group of workers called 'missionaries'. One pending and impending result is the shortage of such workers around the world, leaving the global church in want of gospel witnesses.

This compels us to reassess our paradigm for evangelization. The task was never meant to be entrusted only to 'professional' witnesses, i.e. 'missionaries'. Is there a place for lifelong dedication to sharing the message of salvation for the glory of God as He accomplishes his mission of redeeming the world? The resounding response is yes! Over the years, believers have left the comfort of their homelands to take the gospel to people with less opportunity to hear the gospel. This is commendable and a worthy call for the cause of sharing the message of salvation. And yet, the task of sharing the gospel needs to be part of the life and work of very believer. While not all Christians are called to leave their home country or culture for the sake of sharing the gospel, all Christians are called to bear witness to God's work of salvation through Christ. In that sense, we must all be on 'mission' as carriers of the message of the salvation.

It is essential and urgent that the church reflect on how we understand the task of gospel life and sharing. One way of doing so is to re-educate the church on its identity in Christ and his bidding of all his followers to know

him and make him known. Every believer is and should be a witness of Christ. When every believer is regarded as a witness, the task of sharing the message of salvation becomes a lifestyle rather than a program.

Rejecting the Prosperity Gospel

Another agonising reality of misunderstanding our commission has been the omission and misappropriation of the gospel. In the recent past, some have established and imposed a message of material prosperity linked to believing in Christ. This approach teaches people that when they believe in God, God will provide all their physical needs and comforts of life. With this teaching comes the misleading belief that whoever believes is guaranteed wealth and health in this life. This approach of preaching and teaching is sometimes referred to as the 'prosperity gospel'.

The prosperity gospel, which is not the biblical gospel at all, is a scourge and scandal of God's gracious promise of salvation. This approach of evangelising tends to be man-centred rather Christ-centred. It sometimes seeks the fulfilment of carnal needs of man rather than the deep-seated need of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. The proponents of such an approach tend to omit or downplay the sinfulness of man and our dire need for the saviour. Instead, it concentrates on promising physical and material relief and sustenance. Preachers who promote this message adulterate the gospel to yield results for their own personal gratification. Instead of preaching a message characterised by the gracious offer of salvation, they proclaim a message that demands payment for blessings.

The church urgently needs to be committed to the principle and not merely the program of our commission. Every believer's goal should be total commitment to the glory of God in his mission to save lost sinners—faithful interpretation of and obedience to Christ in his mission of saving sinners. The message and the messenger must be Christlike both in their identity and service. To carry the message of salvation in the so-called Great Commission, believers must be genuinely saved from sin, pointing others to the saviour, Christ Jesus.

The Problem of 'Me'

The last instruction Jesus gave before ascending into Heaven was given to his followers.[3] Millions of sermons were preached on the subject and countless books have been published on the topic of the Great Commission.[4] It would seem impossible to find something new to say or write on the subject. The challenge for the last 2,000 years and for the next 30 years and beyond is simply to practice—to 'make disciples'. We must shift from knowing to doing.

As a catalyst of the Integrity Network,[5] the opening statement and the closing phrase of the Great Commission catches my attention. Jesus said, 'All authority is mine.' There is no need to fight over it. Scripture is clear in stating that whoever wishes to be great should be a servant.[6] We are under his authority. We are servants, workers, and managers within his kingdom work. Expressions like, 'my church', 'my ministry', 'my mission', 'my board', or 'my organization' give the false impression that we are in control and are under our own authority. All leaders must operate and serve under the authority of Jesus always. Judging by the scandalous power struggles within the Evangelical Church and its parachurch organizations and missions, we have a long way to go in living out this principle.[7]

The call for 'Humility, Integrity, Simplicity' was for me the key of the entire Cape Town 2010 Congress. In his presentation on 'Calling the Church of Christ Back to Humility, Integrity, and Simplicity', Christopher Wright said:

> What hurts God the most is not the sin of the world but the failure, the disobedience, and the rebellion of those whom God has redeemed and called to be his people. There are three idols that can have particular appeal to God's people: power and pride, popularity and success, and wealth and greed. Many Evangelical leaders have become obsessed about status and power in the Christian church and have become disobedient to Christ in the process. They worship popularity and therefore exaggerate or report dishonest statistics to make themselves look more successful than they are. Similar to the

> false prophets of old, these leaders claim to speak the word of God but really act in their own self-interest. We cannot build the Kingdom of God on foundations of dishonesty.[8]

Even Paul the Apostle—unquestionably one of the greatest church leaders, pastors, missionaries, and theologians in Christian history—called himself a servant and slave of the Lord.[9] What the church of today and of tomorrow needs are women and men who demonstrate humility, integrity, and simplicity under the full authority of Christ. Only then can the ministry of disciple-making be authentic and trustworthy, bearing fruit through generations.

The closing part of Christ's Great Commission states simply, 'I am with you always'. Nothing can be more comforting for Christ followers. We are never, never alone. Jesus Christ himself, the risen and reigning son of God, is always with in every circumstance. However, we have to realize that there is another important aspect to that exciting and comforting statement. Christ is light, and in his presence is no darkness. If he is with us as he promised, there is no space for shady business or corruption.[10] Disciple-makers, who are always in the presence of Christ, must abstain from any dishonesty, bribery, and corruption. Hwa Yung, the former Methodist bishop of Malaysia, wrote, 'We cannot separate complete submission to the Lord and our service with him and for him.'[11] The Integrity and Anti-Corruption Network has dealt with this topic at several public conferences and has established a long list of valuable materials on the subject.

Although the text of the Great Commission is very clear, a reminder might be helpful. Jesus said, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." The divine instruction is indeed awesome. As a follower of Jesus, and therefore a person of integrity, we must be very serious and precise with our Lord's in struction to, "teach to obey everything I have commanded."

As the Lausanne Movement is developing a vision for the next decades in fulfilling the Great Commission, we must take Christ's first statement of his authority and the last statement of his presence as essential and fundamental and focus on our Lord's specific instruction to obey everything he commanded. Ultimately, all our efforts must be poured out for 'his harvest'.[12]

Endnotes

1 "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center. April 2, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

2 "Status of World Evangelization 2022." Joshua Project. n.d. https://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/handouts/status-of-world-evangelization.pdf.

3 Matthew 28:18–20

4 The latest publication on the topic is: Steven Loots, *Disciple Makers* (to be published in late 2023).

5 The Integrity and Anti-Corruption Network was founded in 2010 after the Cape Town 2010 Congress. The Network is co-sponsored by the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance. It has an Executive Team of 15 individuals and is led by three co-catalysts.

6 Mark 10:43–45

7 Reuben van Rensburg of Re-Forma circulated a paper in June 2021, 'The Titles Pastors give themselves: A strain on the Church' in which he listed the titles that he came across like: Chief apostle, Senior Apostle, Head Apostle, Lead Apostle, Senior Prophet, Head Prophet, Visionary and Prophet, Visionary Pastor, Lead Visionary, Visionary Apostle, and the list goes on. Apart from these terms being unbiblical, they reflect an underlying evil, namely the desire for position and power.

8 Christopher Wright. "Calling the Church Back to Humility, Integrity, Simplicity." *in Christ Our Reconciler: Gospel, Church, World: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization.* Julia E.M. Cameron (Ed.). (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 149-158. Rose Dowsett. *The Cape Town Commitment: Confession of Faith and Call to Action,* study edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 119-131.

9 Philippians 2:5–8; Ephesians 3:8a

10 John 3:19–21; John 8:12

11 Hwa Young. *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021), 47-61.

12 Matthew 9:38

Authors

Dr Manfred Kohl has served in many senior roles in theological education and has personally visited a total of 495 theological institutions. In his academic capacity, he has published over 120 books and articles. During the course of his ministry he established the Christian humanitarian organisation World Vision in several European countries and founded Re-Forma, an institution that has set a global standard for non-formal theological education. He also founded the Galilean Movement, which calls for an additional one million women and men for biblical ministry each year. Kohl is catalyst for the Global Integrity Network (GIN), an issue network of the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance.

Dr Lazarus Phiri currently serves as missiologist-at-large with Pioneers, a mission organization, and is the acting president (vice chancellor) of the Evangelical University (formerly Theological College of Central Africa) in Ndola, Zambia. He attended the Second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Manila in 1989 as a young leader, and later attended the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town in 2010 as one of the senior leaders. Phiri is a Catalyst of the Integrity & Anti-Corruption network of the Lausanne Movement.

Bishop Efraim Tendero was born in the Philippines, is an Evangelical leader, an ambassador of the World Evangelical Alliance, former Secretary-General of World Evangelical Alliance. Prior to this position, he was National Director of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches for 22 years. He was also executive director of the Philippine Relief and Development Services (PHILRADS) and executive editor of the periodical “Evangelicals Today”. Tendero is a Catalyst of the Integrity & Anti-Corruption network of the Lausanne Movement.

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING DEMOGRAPHICS?



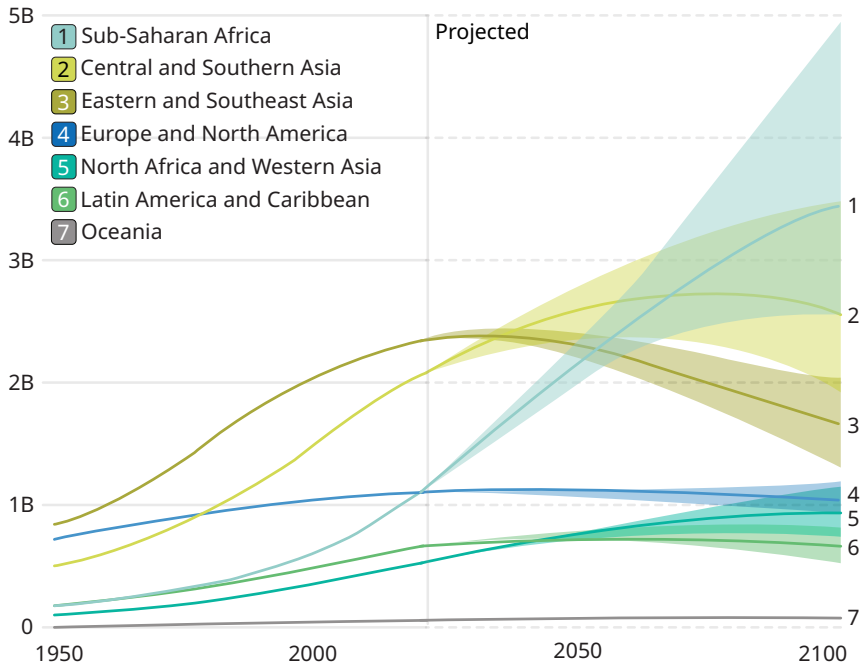
INTRODUCTION

Looking forward to 2050, major economic and population demographic changes promise to shape global culture. As the church faithfully lives out the great commission in a contextualized way, it must ask, 'What are the effects of the new emerging demographics?'

The following section explores the context shifts in global demographics highlighting aging, middle class, and youth.

GLOBAL POPULATION

POPULATION GROWTH BY REGION



Source: United Nations Department Of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022

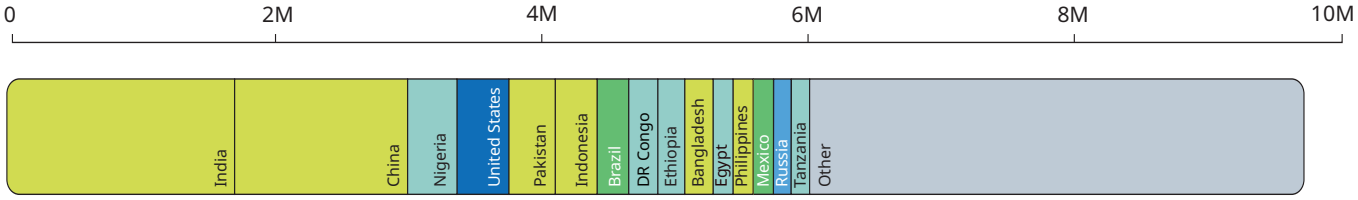
ASIA, THEN AFRICA

Population growth in East and Southeast Asia – notably in China – has peaked and will decline in the coming decades. The trend will be delayed, but similar, in Central and South Asia.

Sub-Saharan Africa will become the world's most populous region.

With sustained high birth rates due to medical advances, Sub-Saharan Africa will become the world's most populous region by the end of the century. The African population will likely continue growing even as all other regions decline. The Global North is marked by declining birth rates and aging populations. The trend is similar, although slightly delayed, in Latin America.

PROJECTED GLOBAL POPULATION BY COUNTRY 2050



Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023; M = Million

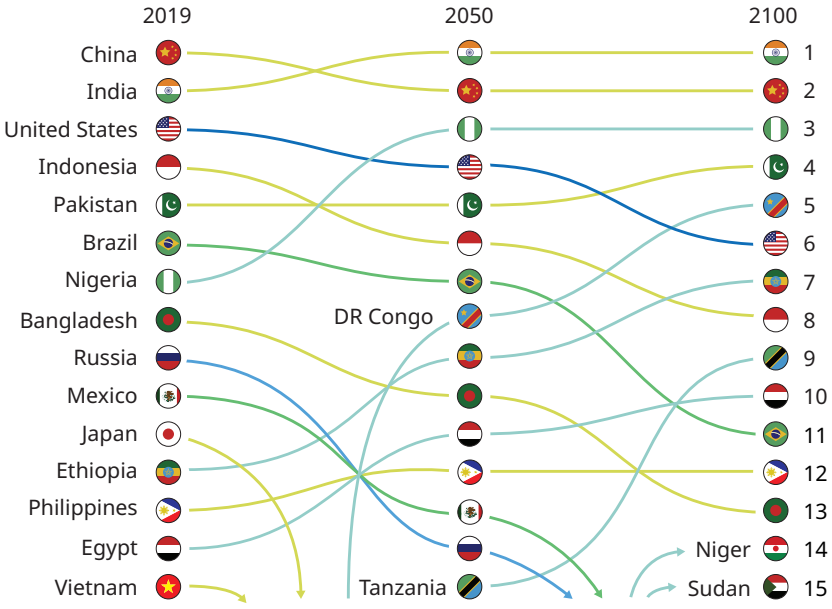
NIGERIA

By 2050, Nigeria will surpass the United States as the third most populous nation in the world, even as Nigeria's landmass is one-tenth that of the U.S. Sub-Saharan nations like Nigeria, DR Congo, and Tanzania will witness the most rapid population swings in the world.

Brazil and Mexico will exit from the world's ten most populous nations. With an expanding middle class and attendant declining birth rates, Latin America will occupy a smaller and smaller percentage of the global population.

Germany was the final Western European nation to remain in the top ten, falling out of the list in the 1980s. Sustained by immigration, the United States will be the only nation in the Global North, and the Western Hemisphere, to remain in the world's ten most populous nations in 2050.

MOST POPULOUS COUNTRIES

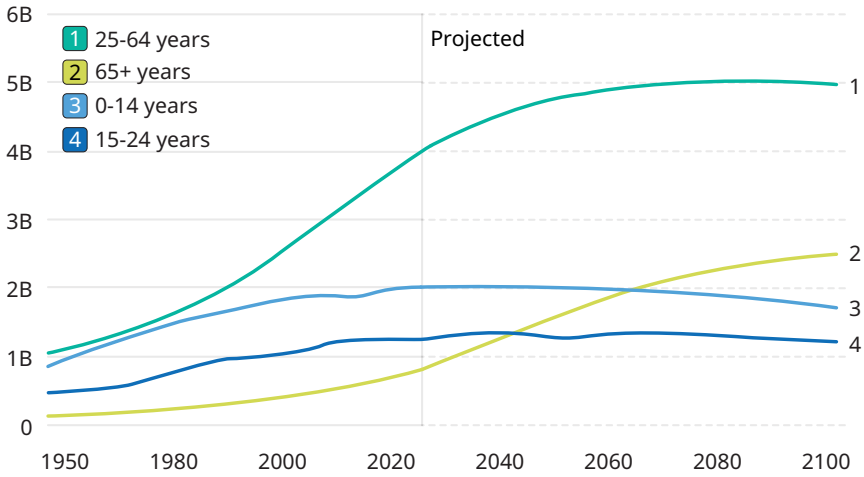


Source: World Christian Database, Accessed March 2023

DEMOGRAPHICS

GLOBAL AGING

PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH



Source: United Nations, Population Division, 2022; B = Billion

AN AGING WORLD

Despite important calls to emphasize the equipping of young leaders, one of the most transformational demographic trends of our time is global aging. Due to advances in medicine and health care, more and more of the global population will live well beyond their seventies.

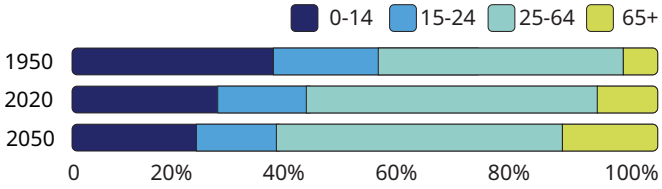
A growing segment of the global population – including Christians – will have an entire season of life after working age. This generation is an untapped agent of gospel witness and in many contexts will increasingly represent those lacking gospel access.

CHANGING ASIA

Asian nations will soon become the center of our aging world. The transformation will place increasing strains on governments to provide resources for the aged.

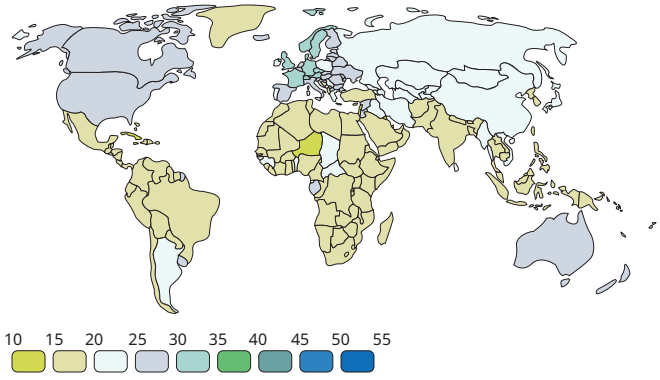
Latin America is already reflecting demographic trends common to older Western nations.

GLOBAL AGE DISTRIBUTION



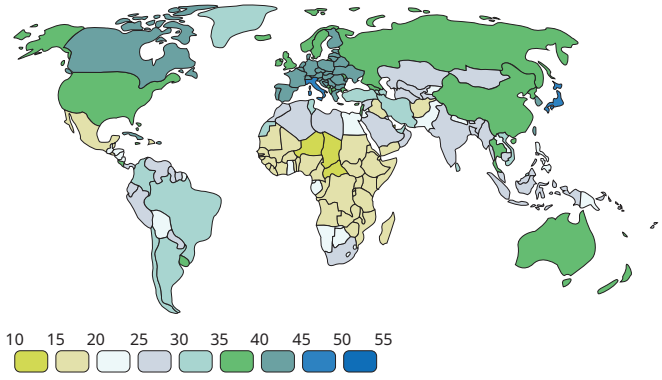
Source: Signals, pg. 6; United Nations, 2022

MEDIAN AGE BY COUNTRY 1950



Source: OurWorldinData, United Nations, "World Population Prospects," 2022

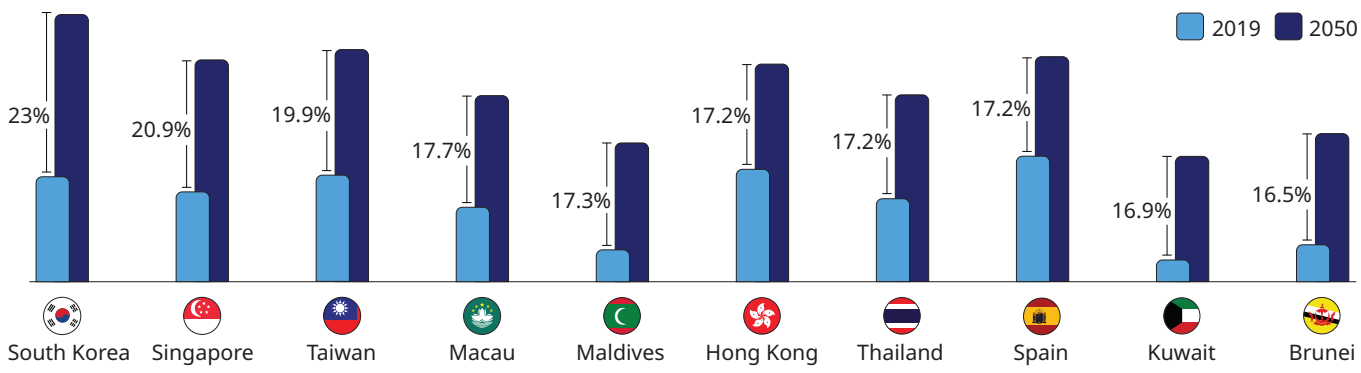
MEDIAN AGE BY COUNTRY 2020



Source: OurWorldinData, United Nations, "World Population Prospects," 2022

COUNTRIES WITH GROWING AGING POPULATIONS

% of population aged 65+

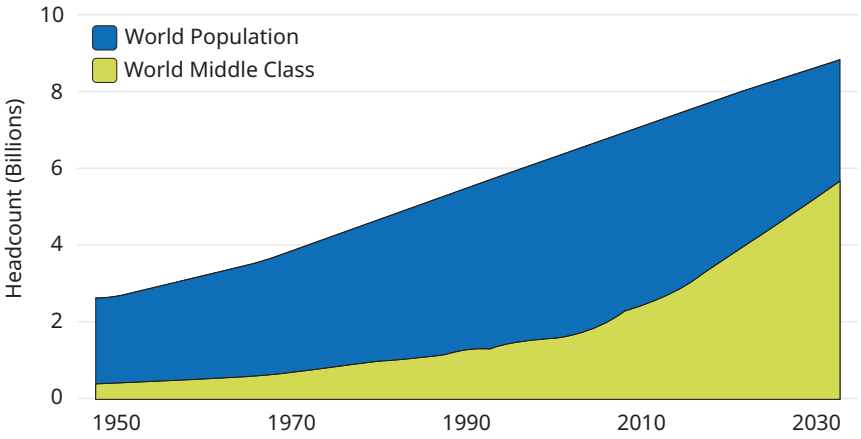


Source: Signals, pg. 5; United Nations, 2019

NEW MIDDLE CLASS

GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASS 1950-2030

Middle Class = <$11-$110/day



Source: Brookings Institute, "An Unprecedented Expansion of Middle Class," 2017

A TIPPING POINT

In 2018, for the first time in history, half of the global population was middle class or higher. Income inequality remains a challenge, and many continue in poverty, but the last half century has witnessed a transformation in the distribution of global wealth.

Half of the world is now middle class or wealthier.

While the decline of poverty is to be celebrated, a growing middle class increases rates of human consumption and shifts cultural priorities.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

88% of the next billion entrants into the middle class are projected to be in Asia.



Source: Signals, pg. 23; Brookings, 2017

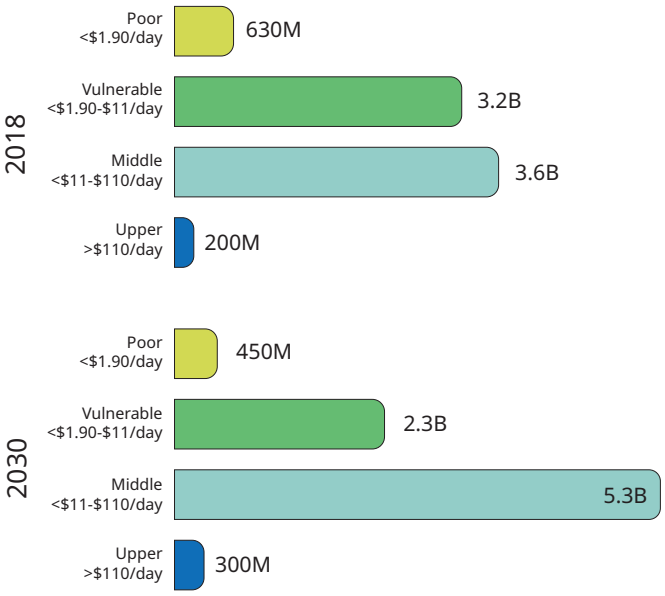
CENTERED IN ASIA

India, China, and other Asian nations form the center of middle-class expansion. The majority of Asia's new middle-class are concentrated in urban contexts. Geographies increasingly divide the rich and the poor.

GLOBAL REALIGNMENT

In the past, wealth was concentrated in the West. Wealth and global power is now multipolar, no longer associated with former colonial powers. Global mission is shifting as power relationships are transformed.

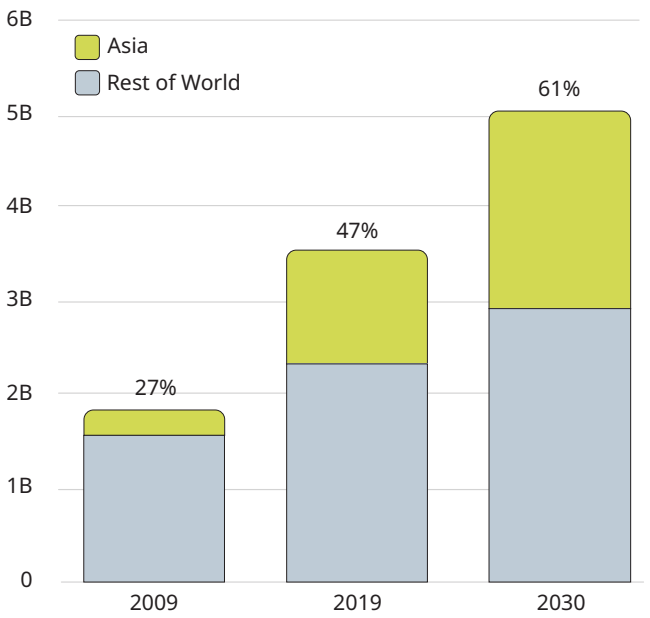
POPULATION BY DAILY COSTS



Source: Signals, pg. 22; Brookings, 2018; B = Billion; M = Million

ASIAN GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASS

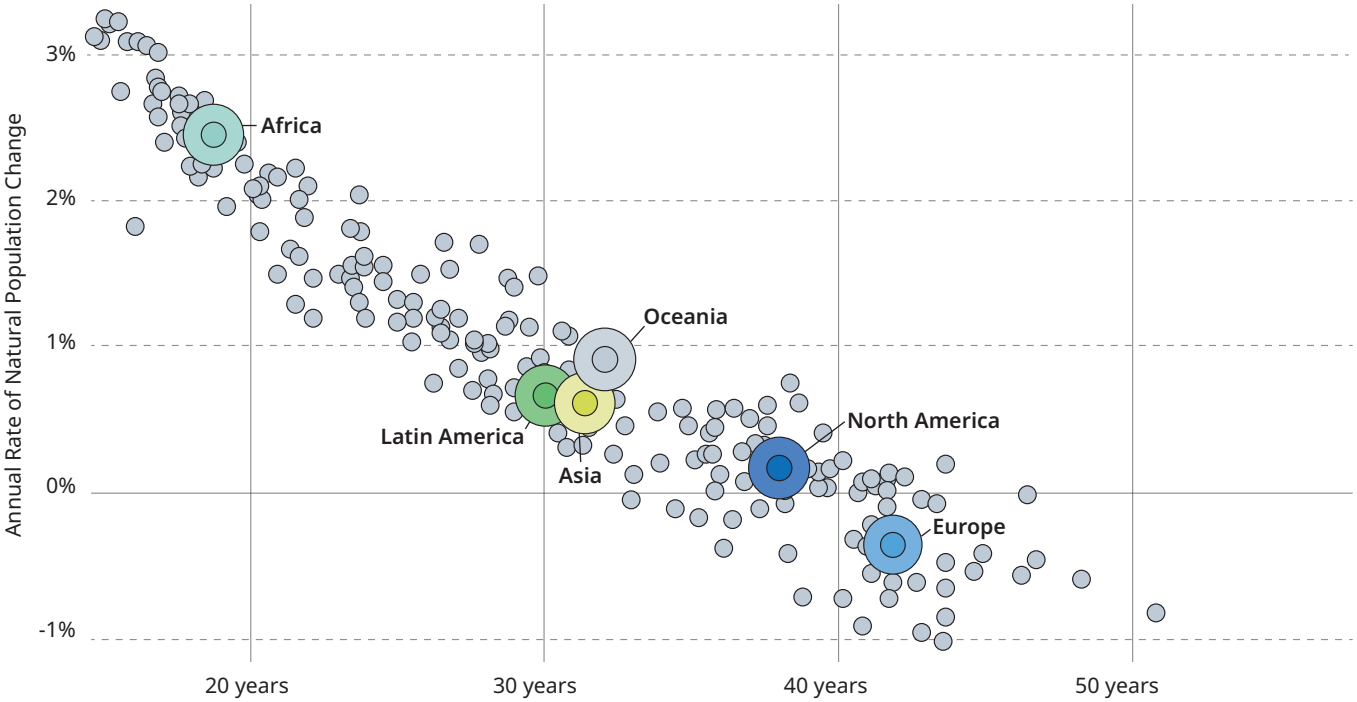
% of total population



Source: Signals, pg. 23; Canals, 2019

YOUTH

GLOBAL MEDIAN AGE 2021



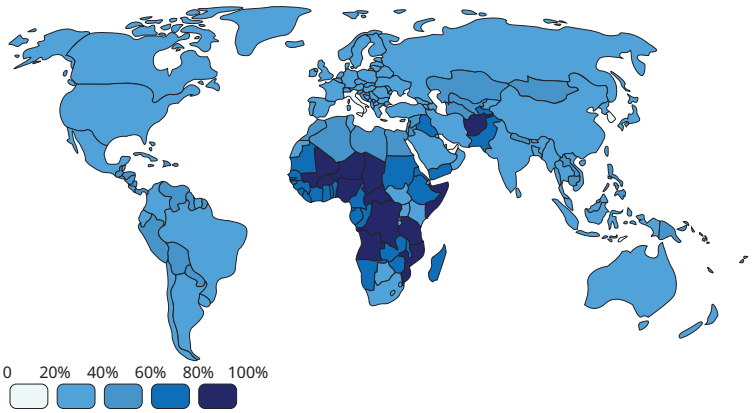
Source: United Nations, Population Division, 2022

YOUNG GLOBAL SOUTH

90 percent of young people in the world live in the Global South. Youthful populations are most prominent in Sub-Saharan Africa, the very place where Christianity has grown most in the past century. Islam in Africa also benefits from Africa's high birth rates.

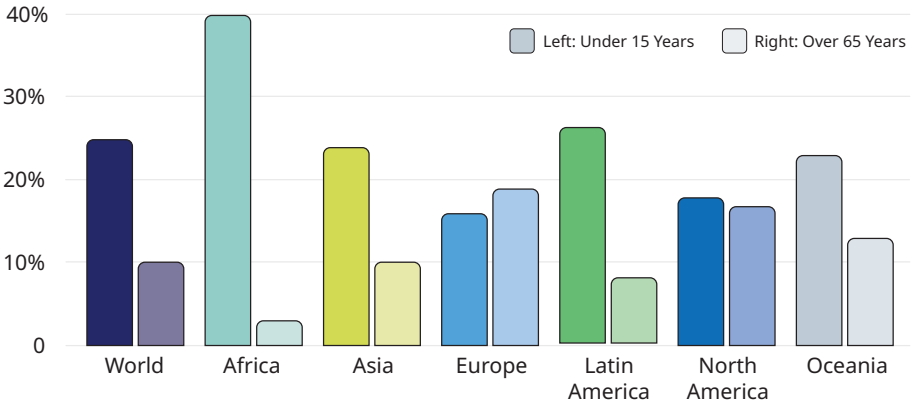
Although their populations will age in the coming decades, in 2022 Latin America, Asia, and Oceania also possess far greater number of people under 15 than those over 65 years old. North America and Europe, by contrast, possess a smaller share of youth. These aged contexts are the very places where Christianity is experiencing its greatest rate of decline.

GLOBAL YOUTH DEPENDENCY



Source: United Nations, Population Division, 2022

PROPORTION OF REGIONAL POPULATION



Source: Population Reference Bureau, 2022

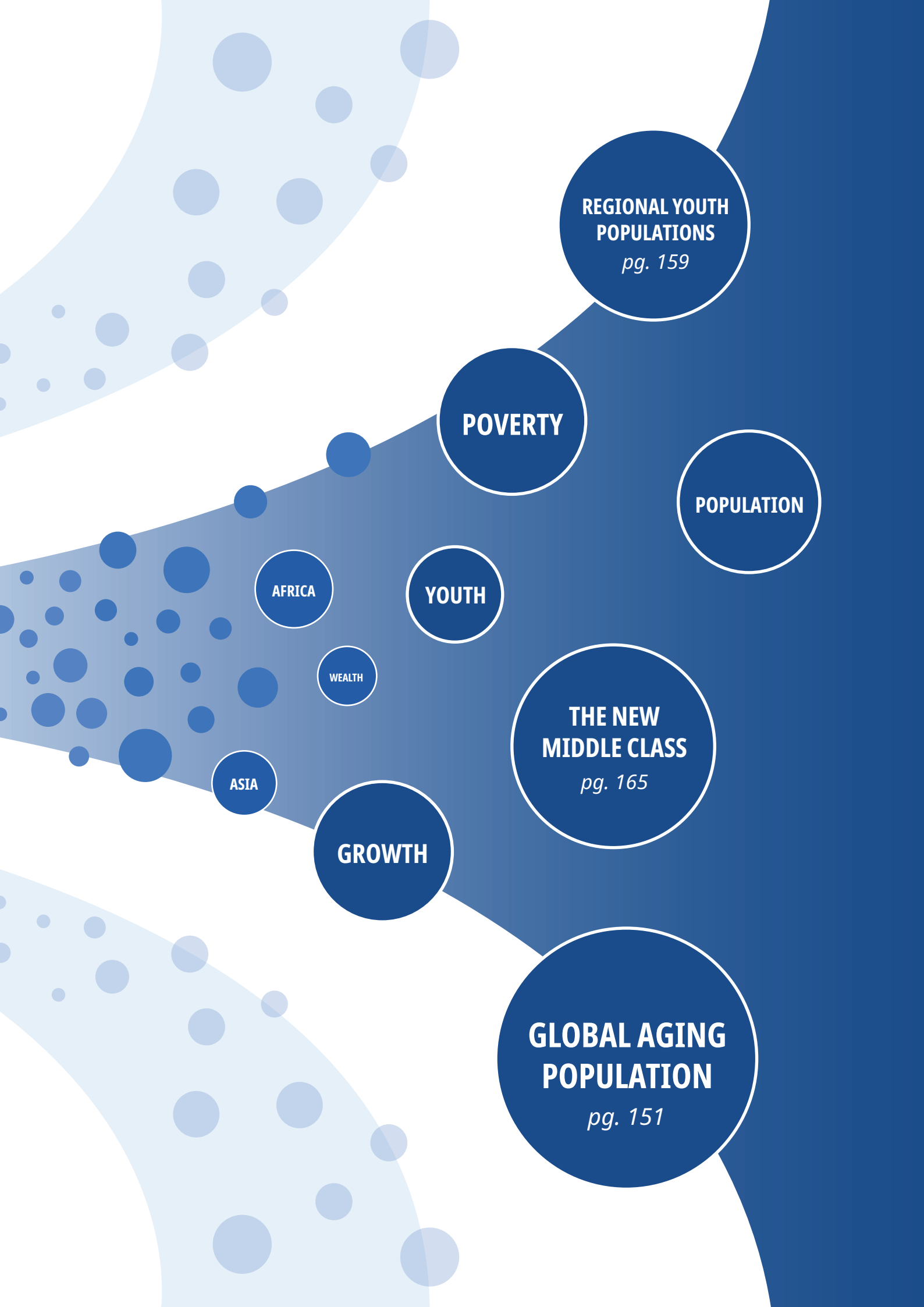
YOUTH DEPENDENCY

Young dependency ratio is the ratio of the number of young people at an age when they are generally economically inactive, (i.e. under 15 years of age), compared to the number of people of working age (i.e. 15-64). The data shows the number of dependents per 100 working age people.

UNDERSTANDING

DEMOGRAPHICS




REGIONAL YOUTH POPULATIONS
pg. 159
POVERTY
POPULATION
AFRICA
YOUTH
WEALTH
THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS
pg. 165
ASIA
GROWTH
GLOBAL AGING POPULATION
pg. 151

GLOBAL AGING POPULATION

Tom McCormick with Jason Mandryk and Adriana Saldiba

Current and Future State of Global Aging

James Hillman writes, 'The twenty-first century may or may not be greened by ecological awareness, but it will certainly be grayed by its aging population.'[1] Global aging is occurring rapidly and will undeniably be a shaping force in our future world.[2] The United Nations Population Division estimates that the number of persons aged 65+ is expected to double over the next three decades, such that by 2050 of the global population 65+ will be 16-22 percent.

Regionally global aging will vary, yet remain a consistent reality.[3] Even in the most demographically-youthful region, Africa, the ratio of those 65+ / < 15 will increase faster (x3) than in either Europe (x2) or North America (x2).[4]

In short, as summarized by the UN Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs:

- Population aging is unprecedented — It is without parallel in the history of humanity, with more & faster aging to come.
- Population aging is pervasive – It is a global phenomenon affecting every man, woman and child...though differently.
- Population aging is profound — It will have major consequences and implications for every region of the world, every socio-economic strata, and all facets of human life.
- Population aging will be enduring — We will not return to the young populations as before.[5]

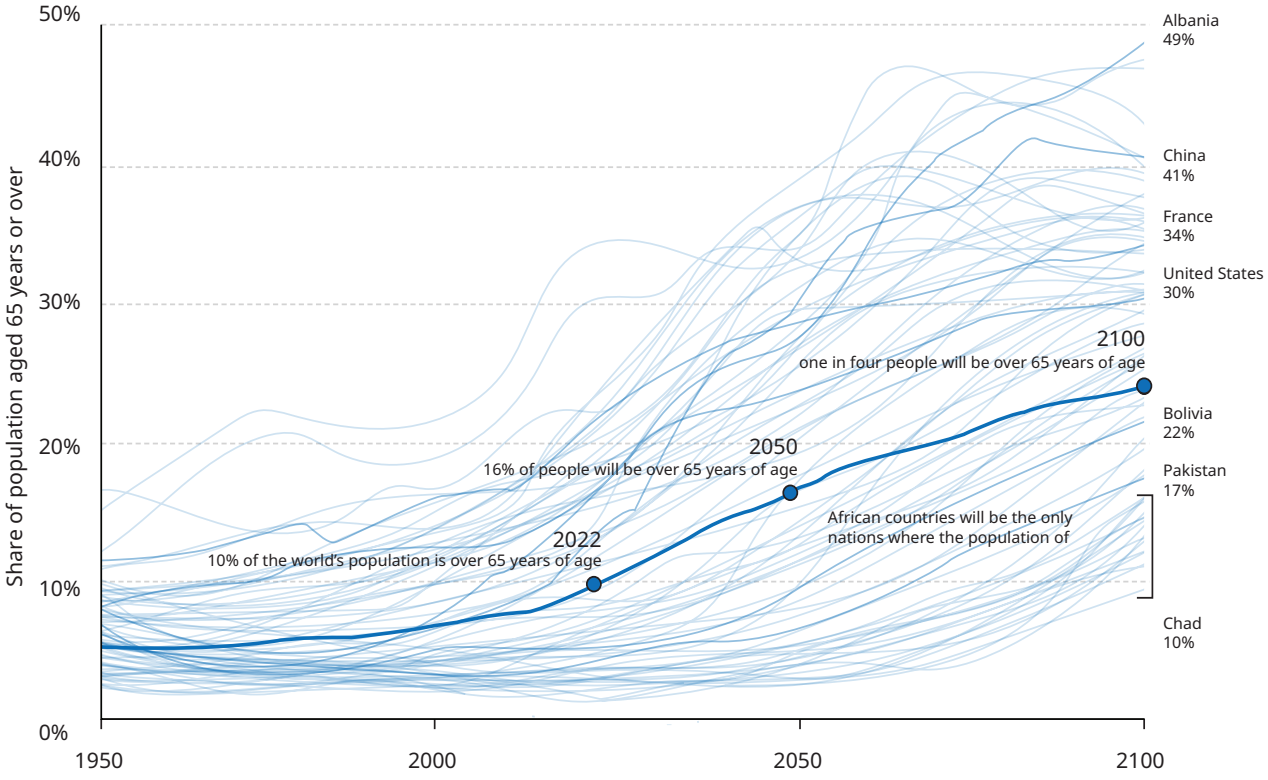


Figure 1: The World's Population is Aging

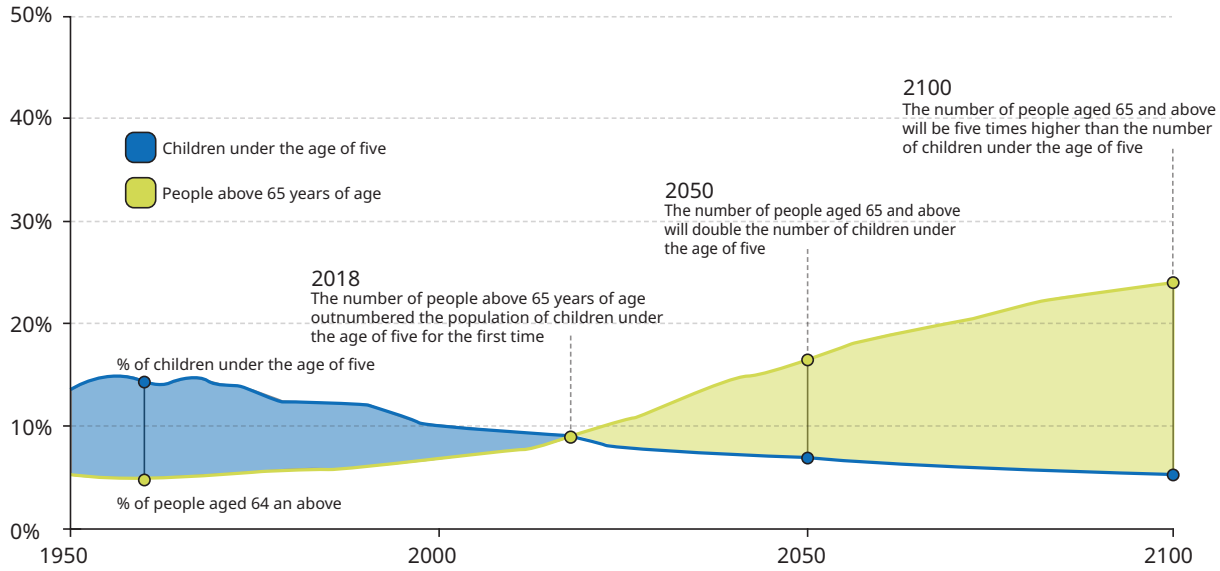


Figure 2: Global Youth vs Global

The effect of this massive demographic trend will be pervasive, including economics, socio-cultural norms, moral-ethical frameworks, health care infrastructure, geographical migrations, and inter-generational relations. Global aging will also impact the church, discipleship, and the great commission. Thus, global aging is a demographic reality presenting the imperative of a corresponding theological and missiological response. Yet, a general review of evangelical initiatives across media, conferences, and training reveals that global aging has not been a high priority beyond worthy small-scale initiatives. Can the church afford to wait for global aging to have momentous impact? This report informs the church about the reality, the opportunities and the challenges of global aging with the hope that she will be faithful to her Lord and our Great Commission.

Effects of Global Aging

Economic and societal effects

Global aging brings an accumulation of societal burdens, increasing economically non-productive populations, draining pension funds, and increasing health care needs.'[6]

Medical concerns combined with social isolation compound the economic challenges. In the U.S. there is an estimated USD 6.7 billion in additional Medicare (for seniors) spending annually. In China, because of the long-term care requirements of those 85+, some conclude that long-term care is a threat to the country's economic growth.[7] Of those 85+ projected to be living in 2050, those in China will be 1.4x more than the total number living in the entire world in 2000 and by 2050, 26 percent of the 85+ age in the entire world will live in China, with 8 percent in the U.S.[8] Already China is 1st in the world in the total number of dementia cases with 20 percent of global cases, and 1,000,000 new diagnoses/year with an estimated 90 percent not diagnosed. By 2050, about 50 percent of the global dementia cases will be in China; 30 percent in the Americas; 16 percent in Africa; 19 percent in Europe. Through Church history, Christians have cared for those in special need, founding hospitals for physical and mental care, leprosariums, ministries for the blind, deaf, disabled, etc. Dementia care is growing area of special need amongst older adults. There are approximately 9,900,000 new cases globally / year, or a new case every 3.3 seconds.

The Old Age Dependency Ratios compounds this challenge; that is, the percentages of the working-age population compared with those needing costly health care costs threatens every region of the world.[9] Coupled with this challenge is the related challenge to those family members responsible for parental support. Typically, the children of the older population are both in the work force and responsible for caring for their parents. The Par-

ent Support Ratio indicates the gravity of the demographic changes: there are fewer adult children caregivers compared with number of the parents needing support.

The Old Age Dependency Ratio and Parent Support Ratio exacerbate economic pressure on families, but likewise encourage multi-generational households that are better equipped to support one another. Communities able to engage in healthy interdependent relationships between generations will prove more resilient to the challenges ahead.

The physical infrastructure of communities — urban and rural — must adapt to accommodate the needs of the rising proportion of those 65+. Accessibility, mobility, public/private transportation, technological changes, health care, and visual and auditory safety are all need addressing. Maternity wards, nursery schools, and kindergartens are giving way to care homes and hospices.

Ageism

WHO's 2021 *Global report on ageism* states, 'Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age. It can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed' and 'Globally,

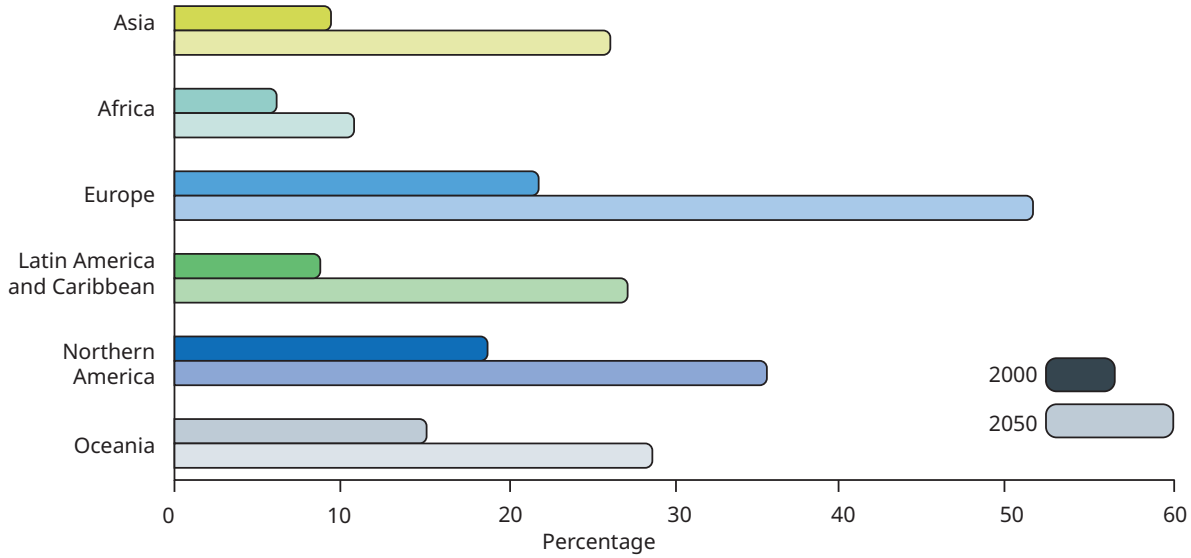


Figure 3: Old-age Dependency Ratio 2000-2050

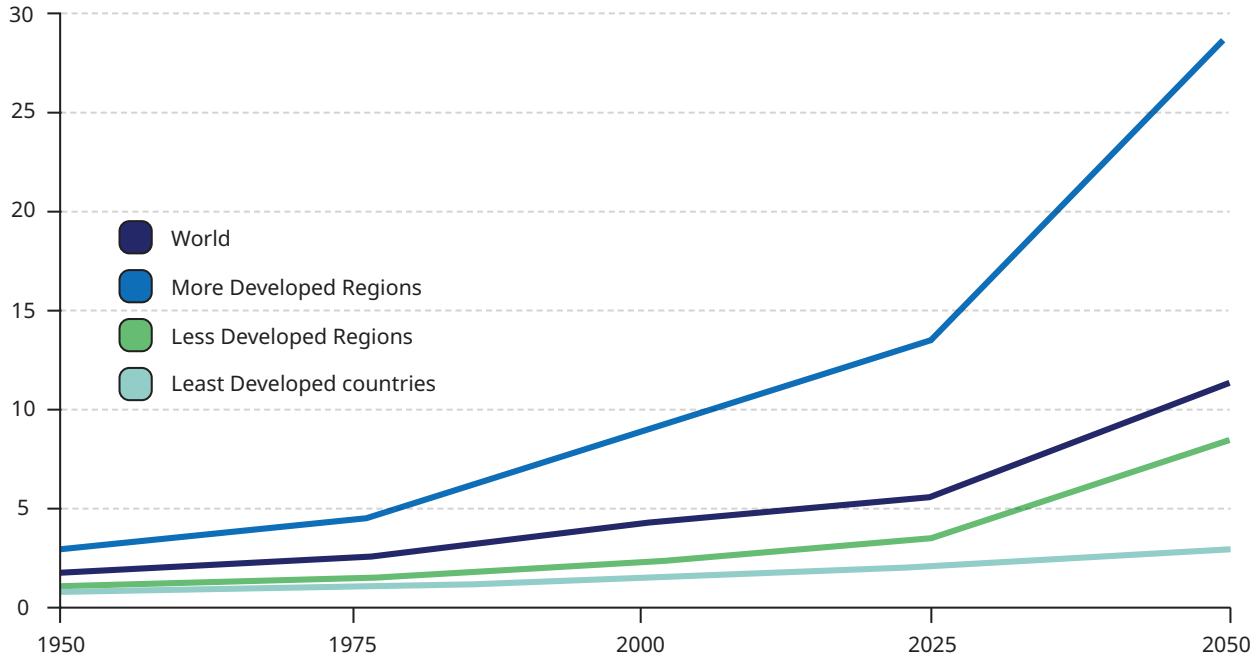


Figure 4: Parent Support Ratio 1950-2050

one in two people are ageist against older people.'[10] It has declared ageism a global challenge: 'Ageism seeps into many institutions and sectors of society including those providing health and social care, in the workplace, media and the legal system.'[11] As employment patterns, economic trends, and family structures change, many elderly people will find themselves needing to work in order to survive. But rapid shifts in workplace culture and technology as well as the types of jobs available make this a daunting prospect for anyone 65+ seeking employment. Of the various strategies shown to reduce ageism — policy and law, educational activities and intergenerational contact — we have a role to play.[12] In addition, the church must also always be committed to prayer.

Closely associated with ageism is elder abuse. The WHO fact sheet on the 'Abuse of older people'[13] includes the following:

Around 1 in 6 people 60+ experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year.

Abuse of older people is predicted to increase with rapidly aging populations.

Loneliness and isolation

Loneliness is already a very real issue. The U.K. now has a cabinet level Minister for Loneliness, and in 2023 the U.S. released a special Surgeon General's report entitled, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation."[14] Seniors in rural China are often left behind as their children go to the cities for work. A 2016 article from *The Globe and Mail* states, 'In some villages [. . .] 30 per cent of elderly people kill themselves.'[15] In Canada 42 percent of all people aged 85+ live alone. In the U.S. almost one-third of all seniors live alone, and 30 percent self-report loneliness.[16]

Loneliness and isolation also have health consequences. The National Institute on Aging and the National Institutes of Health summarize, 'Loneliness acts as a fertilizer for other diseases' and 'The biology of loneliness can accelerate the buildup of plaque in arteries, help cancer cells grow and spread, and promote inflammation in the brain leading to Alzheimer's disease. Loneliness promotes several different types of wear and tear on the body.'[17] Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, mental disorders were more than four times higher among those with feelings of loneliness or isolation. These include major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Further, suicide rates for the older demographic are graphic: 25 percent for those 70+ versus 10 percent for all ages.

The *Healthcare Management Forum* notes, 'Social isolation is a challenging and persistent issue experienced by many older adults, especially among immigrant and refugee seniors. Unique risk factors such as racism, discrimination, language barriers, weak social networks, and separation from friends and family predispose immigrant and refugee seniors to a higher risk of social isolation.'[18] For instance, 'Canada's senior immigrant population now makes up over a third of the overall population of older people.'[19] The Wellesley Institute notes that 27 percent of recent immigrant seniors perceive their general health as excellent or very good, compared to 52 percent of non-immigrant seniors; 53 percent of recent immigrants perceive their mental health as excellent or very good, compared to 74 percent of non-immigrant seniors.[20]

With the biblical mandates to honour the elderly as our parents (1 Timothy 5) and to visit and care (James 1:27; Matthew 25), together with the Holy Spirit's presence and the Good Shepherd's guidance, we will find many opportunities as well as both ordinary and creative ways of being faithful.

Opportunities for the Great Commission

Spiritual interest of the elderly

Research indicates, 'seniors value spirituality *more as they age*' while noting that 'a person does not become spiritual just because they get older.'[21] The Pew Center's detailed studies note that 'By several measures, young adults tend to be less religious than their elders; the opposite is rarely true.'[22] Older adults regard religion as more important than those aged under 40 in all but 2 countries of the 114 coun-

tries surveyed, as indicated by weekly worship, daily prayer, and reports of the importance for self-identity.[23] Globally, 84 percent of adults say religion is an important part of their daily lives.[24] It would be wrong to assume that Lausanne affiliates lack opportunity amongst the aging. If anything, the rapidly growing aging demographic grants greater opportunity to engage older adults with the message of the gospel, especially due to the high levels of spiritual practice. Further, in non-Western(-ized) cultures, the sacred/secular dichotomy is much less relevant.[25]

Ministries for the aging

Caring for our physical health never ends and neither does our spiritual care. Discipleship continues all our days, while the promise of fruitfulness in old age is often overlooked. The contributions and opportunities of the elderly are to be honoured. With the changing demographics within Christianity as well, ministry to and by the older generations must also have a central place in the life of the church.

Why would not parallel programs for seniors pastors and missionaries also be appropriate? And not just specialized programs for one age group (seniors), but an understanding of the full life course of human development for the body of Christ as inherently intergenerational.

Children's ministry has long been a major focus of Christian activity. Commonly evangelical churches focus on the 'emerging generations', with a lesser response to care for and reach out to seniors in the church and community. Already those 65+ are more than those <5, and by 2050 the ratio will be 2:1. Further, by 2050 those 65+ will equal those <15.[26] No one challenges the importance of youth pastors. Why the hesitancy for seniors pastors?

Many trusting Christ on their deathbed, and many come to faith in older ages. Increasing longevity and the looming shadow of mortality, combined with the evangelistic potency of Christian love and care may create something like a 70-100 Window, similar to the well-known 4-14 Window. A Bible-based theology (and missiology) of pastoral and spiritual care for the aging presents many strategic opportunities and responsibilities.

Grandparents as spiritual leaders

As *The Economist* stated in early 2023, 'The age of the grandparent has arrived.'[27] There are 1.5 billion grandparents in the world, up from 500 million in 1960. As a share of the population, they have risen from 17 to 20 percent. The ratio of grandparents to children under 15 has vaulted from 0.46 in 1960 to 0.8 today.

By 2050, we project that there will be 2.1 billion grandparents (making up 22 percent of humanity), and slightly more grandparents than those under 15. 'By 2050, 30 percent of China's population is projected to be grandparents (Bulgaria – 29 percent, Mexico — 28 percent, the United States and India – 24 percent, Senegal – 15 percent, Burundi – 14 percent). Surely grandparents can be as much a part of the solution to the challenges of global aging as otherwise; for instance, grandmothers regularly care for their grandchildren.[28] Also grandparents as mentors continue to prove beneficial.

Care for the caregivers

In Japan 24 percent of caregivers are spouses. *BMC Public Health* (2022) notes, 'In Indian households, [the] spouse is the primary person to provide care along with daughter-in-law from the younger generation. Thus, caregiver's age has a very broader range; older adults can be care-receivers as well as caregivers.'[29] One in four Canadians is a caregiver, with 75 percent of caregivers also working. Further, the number of caregivers is likely to double by 2035. In addition, according to the Center for Disease Control (2018), 25 percent of seniors are themselves caregivers. 30 percent of Americans are caregivers; 58 percent are women; 20 percent are 65+; 37 percent are caring for a parent (or in-law).[30]

Caregiving is taxing; at least one in three report being distressed. Ministries supporting families would undoubtedly be most welcome, an opportunity in itself, and an open 'back door' to our neighbours.

Governmental advocacy

There are many avenues for influencing public policy. For instance, age-friendly cities, vac-

cination policies, housing, climate and aging. The UN 'Principles for Older Persons'[31] is going to be a significant document that will become as important as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions. It is aligned with the core principles of Independence, Participation, Care, Self-Fulfilment, and Dignity. In addition, 'Key Resources' section below provides more leads and suggestions.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing[32] (MIPAA) provides a framework for integrated, wholistic mission, highlighting three priority directions:

- Older Persons and Development
- Advancing health and well-being into old age
- Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

Each of the three has multiple specified issues, followed by multiple objectives, and then suggested actions. For those committed to 'Integral mission [as] the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel,'[33] this is an invitation, if not a call, to such wholistic missional participation as the MIPAA suggests. The dimension of *spiritual care*, however, is missing.

Resources

Global

- "World Population Aging: 1950-2050" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division)
- "United Nations Principles for Older Persons" (United Nations Human Rights)
- "The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)
- International Federation on Aging
- World Health Organization — Ageing
- HelpAge International
- The Oxford Institute of Population Ageing

Global focus on the rights of older persons

- Pass It On Network
- Rights of Older People (https://rightsofolderpeople.org/)

Long-term care

- God Cares Ministry (https://www.godcaresministry.com/)
- Nursing Home Ministry Resources Online (https://nursinghomeministryresources.online/)

Resources by region (in English)

Africa

- African Research on Ageing Network (AFRAN)
- Reach One Touch One Ministries (Uganda)

Asia

- HelpAge — Asia

Europe

- European Federation of Older Persons
- Help Age – Europe

Latin America

- Alejandro Klein & George Leeson, Eds. *Ageing In Latin America And The Caribbean: Critical Approaches And Practical Solutions.* Oxford Institute of Population Ageing (2023).

Middle East

- Abdulrazak Abyad. "Ageing in the Middle-East and North Africa: Demographic and health trends." *International Journal on Ageing in Developing Countries* 6, no. 2 (2021): 112-128.
- Jamie P. Halsall and Ian G. Cook. "Ageing in the Middle East and North Africa: A Contemporary Perspective" *Population Horizons* 14, no. 2 (2017): 39-46.

North America

- Spiritual Elder Care (https://spiritualeldercare.com/)
- James Houston Center for Faith & Successful Aging

Endnotes

1 The Force of Character: And the Lasting Life (2000), p. xx.

2 The basic reasons are simple: decreasing fertility rate (# of children / women of child bearing age) and increased life expectancy. For a simple chart see WORLD POPULATION AGEING: 1950-2050, p. 5.

3 See https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Percentage-of-population-aged-60-years-or-over-by-region-from-1980-to-2050_fig4_344199610

4 See WORLD POPULATION AGEING: 1950-2050, p. 16.

5 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of World Population Ageing 1950-2050. Copyright © United Nations 2002 Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

6 The United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge International state, 'Population ageing is a major global trend that is transforming economies and societies around the world. "Ageing in the 21st Century: A Celebration and Challenge — Executive Summary." October 5, 2012. https://www.helpage.org/resource/ageing-in-the-21st-century-a-celebration-and-a-challenge-executive-summary/.

7 By 2025, 26% of those 85+ in the entire world will be in China.

8 http://www.duke.edu/web/cpses/Dudley%20Poston.ppt

9 In China there has been a steady decline of the number of working aged adults from 7.8 for economic support of each elder in 1985 to (projected as) 1.6 in 2050.

10 World Health Organization. "Global Report on Ageism: Executive Summary." March 18, 2021. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240020504.

11 https://www.who.int/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un

12 See the United Nations' 18 'Principles for Older Persons' as one example. https://olderpeople.wales/about/publication-scheme/our-policies/un-principles/

13 World Health Organization. "Abuse of Older People. " June 13, 2022. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people.

14 U.S. Public Health Service. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. 2023. https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf

15 The Globe and Mail. "How China's Rural Elderly Are Being Left Behind and Taking Their Lives." March 28, 2016. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/how-chinas-rural-elderly-are-being-left-behind-and-taking-theirlives/article29179579/.

16 Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser. "Loneliness and Social Connections." February 2020. https://ourworldindata.org/social-connections-and-loneliness.

17 National Institute on Aging. "Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks." April 23, 2019. https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks

18 Shanthi Johnson, Juanita Bacsu, Tom McIntosh, Bonnie Jeffery, and Nuelle Novik. "Competing challenges for immigrant seniors: Social isolation and the pandemic." Healthcare Management Forum 34. no. 5 (2021): 266-271. doi:10.1177/08404704211009233

19 Carmen Groleau. "Culturally focused dementia care needed for Canada's senior immigrants, researchers say." March 10, 2022. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/dementia-care-older-immigrant-population-1.6376972

20 Seong-gee Um and Naomi Lightman. "Seniors' Health in the GTA: How Immigration, Language, and Racialization Impact Seniors' Health." Wellesley Institute. May 2017. http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Seniors-Health-in-the-GTA-Final.pdf

21 Phillip A. Cooley. "Seniors and Spirituality." April 17. 2017. http://www.allaboutseniors.org/seniors-and-spirituality.

Clove Haviva, Zachary Zimmer, Mary Beth Ofstedal, Carol Jagger, Chi-Tsun Chiu, Yasuhiko Saito. "Linking Spirituality and Religiosity to Life and Health Expectancy, A Global Comparative Study." Funded by the John Templeton Foundation. 2018. https://globalagingandcommunity.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/spirituality-religiosity-life-health-expectancy.pdf.

22 Pew Research Center. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

23 Pew Research Center. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." June 13, 2018. http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/. Each of these countries is relatively poor, with a per-capita GDP below $5,000. These figures have remained consistent for decades.

24 Pew Research Center. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/why-do-levels-of-religious-observance-vary-by-age-and-country/.

25 Noted benefits of religiosity and spirituality include: An optimistic outlook on life and illness, facing life with more resilience and hope; improved social and familial relationships; coping better with such life stresses as financial, health, and other crises; a greater ability to cope with illness, disability, and death; lower mortality rates and improved health recovery outcomes; a sense of community and thus the avoidance of social isolation; involvement with

volunteer activities, keeping connected with others; a sense of purpose in life; personal sharing of their health and well-being; the exchange of ideas and information. Zachary Zimmer, Carol Jagger, Chi-Tsun Chiu, Mary Beth Ofstedal, Florencia Rojo, and Yasuhiko Saito. "Spirituality, religiosity, aging and health in global perspective: A review." *SSM - Population Health* 2 (December 2016): 373-381. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.04.009.

26 https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/files/documents/2021/Nov/undesa_pd_2002_wpa_1950-2050_web.pdf, p. 16.

27 The Economist. "The Age of the Grandparent Has Arrived." January 12, 2023. https://www.economist.com/international/2023/01/12/the-age-of-the-grandparent-has-arrived.

28 For the statistics for the U.S., https://www.apa.org/pi/about/publications/caregivers/faq/statistics.

29 R. Chakraborty,, A. Jana, and V.M. Vibhute. "Caregiving: a risk factor of poor health and depression among informal caregivers in India- A comparative analysis." *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 42 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14880-5.

30 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Caregiving." August 2018. https://www.apa.org/pi/about/publications/caregivers/faq/cdc-factsheet.pdf.

31 United Nations Human Rights. "United Nations Principles for Older Persons." December 16, 1991. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-principles-older-persons.

32 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "Madrid Plan of Action and its Implementation." April 2002. https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/madrid-plan-of-action-and-its-implementation.html.

33 From *The Cape Town Commitment*, 'It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.'

Authors

Jason Mandryk is the author of the 7th edition of Operation World and helps to lead the Operation World team. He has been serving at the convergence point of the mission, research, and prayer movements for most of the last 25 years. Using data and Scripture to mobilize prayer and mission is his passion. A Canadian/UK dual citizen, Jason has an M.A. in Global Christian Studies from Providence Theological Seminary and currently lives in Seoul, South Korea.

Dr Tom McCormick has ministered in nursing homes for more than 45 years, and as a missionary on 6 continents. He has taught graduate and undergraduate courses. Tom has an MA (Bible; Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia), a PhD (Humanities; University of Texas, Arlington), and a PhD (Philosophy; ICS, Toronto).

Adriana Saldiba is a nutritionist with a PhD in Sciences from the Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de São Paulo (FMUSP). She is a professor, coordinator and researcher in the Postgraduate Program in Aging Sciences at the Universidade São Judas Tadeu.

REGIONAL YOUTH POPULATIONS

Ana Lucia Bedicks, Menchit Wong, Maggie Gathuku

Psalm 78:4–7 give us a compelling purpose to focus our attention on youth in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, emphasizing 'we will tell the next generation [. . .] so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.' This need to give priority focus on the next generation was confirmed by the result of the Lausanne Movement listening conversations that took place in 2020 and 2021. From these listening calls, evangelical leaders from all regions of the world identified reaching, discipling, and listening to youth as one of two top identified needs for the Great Commission.

According to the United Nations, there are over 1.8 billion young people in the world today, accounting for 16 percent of the global population, 90 percent of whom live in developing countries. The number of adolescents and youth today is at an all-time high, though expected to decline considerably from 17.6 percent in 2010 to 13.5 percent in 2050 if global fertility continues to decline.

As with every other cross-cultural missionary, anyone interested in mission to youth must be a student of youth culture and its influences on young people. This is essential to understanding their worldview for the purpose of communicating the gospel to them and adopting them in the family of faith. It is not just a sociological issue; it is about understanding the cultural context with the aim of better reaching them with the gospel.

Thus, this report seeks to reflect on the demographic opportunities and challenges of regional youth populations in the light of the Great Commission in two sections — where youth populations are increasing and where they are declining. We will have a special focus on Africa which is the key youthful continent.

Who and Where are the Youth?

UNICEF, in providing a framework of protecting the rights and welfare of children, defines children as persons below the age of 18. The operational definition and nuances of the term 'youth' vary from country to country, depending on relative sociocultural, institutional, economic, and political factors. The United Nations has adopted the age range of 15 to 24 for describing youth populations. This is the age we will refer to.

Regions with Declining Youth Populations

Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean has about 16.3 percent of its population aged between 15-24, comprising about 16.3 percent as of 2021.[1] This presents a decline from 18.1 percent in 2011. The Global Youth Culture Latin America Report by One Hope[2] surveyed 1,673 young people ages 13-19 across Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Spain[3] revealing that only 16 percent of teens across the four countries identified as evangelical, 36 percent as Catholic, and 42 percent said they have no religion or identified themselves as atheist or agnostic, and only 3 percent of them are said to be committed Christians.

Brazil

In Brazil the same trend was observed with the young people's population declining from 17.5 percent in 2011 to 15.5 percent in 2021.[4] The Global Youth Culture Brazil[5] Report[6] by One Hope surveyed 420 young people revealing that 31 percent identified as evangelicals, 35 percent as Catholics, 6 percent as other religions, and 28 percent have no religion or identified themselves as atheist or agnostic with only 9 percent of the youth identifying as Committed Christians.

North America

In North America the population of young people declined from 14 percent in 2011 to 12.9 percent of the population in 2021.[7] The Global Youth Culture United States Report[8] shows that, while almost 51 percent of teens identified themselves as Christian, only 8 percent of the youth identified as Committed Christians. In 2022, the Barna Group released its research findings in a report entitled, "The Open Generation". In this global survey that included over 24,000 teenagers from 26 different countries, the teenagers were asked about their how they view Jesus, the Bible and justice. 56 percent of the 2000 plus North American respondents identified themselves as Christians. However, only 30 percent expressed that they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus.[9]

Europe

One in six Europeans is between the ages of 15 to 29. A study released in 2018 entitled "Europe's Young Adults and Religion" demonstrates that in the Czech Republic, 91 percent of young adults categorized themselves as religiously unaffiliated, while in the UK, France, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands between 56 percent and 60 percent said they never attend religious services and between 63 percent and 66 percent said they never pray. According to Bullivant, the researcher, many young Europeans 'will have been baptized and then never darken the door of a church again. Cultural religious identities just aren't being passed on from parents to children. It just washes straight off them.'

Increasing Populations

Asia

Asia is a geographically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse region. A huge part of the 10/40 window is covered by the Asia-Pacific region, as well as most of the world's religiously oppressive governments. There are more than 1.1 billion young people living in Asia and the Pacific. Asia's youth comprise more than 25 percent of the population. One of the biggest issues that youth believers and seekers face in the region is religious persecution. Thus, for many decades creative evangelism in limited access countries and relational evangelism that meets both the physical and spiritual needs of people, particularly for the youth, have been effective approaches to sharing the gospel in the region. The Global Youth Report by One Hope revealed that only 11 percent of teens were Christian, 50 percent identified with other religions, while 39 percent claimed to be agnostic.

Africa

Africa is the youngest continent in the world as of 2022, with 60 percent of its population aged 25 years and younger, compared to a global average of 25 percent with a median age of 19.7. Additionally, Africa is projected to have the highest youth growth spurt with 42 percent of her youth aged 15-24 years by 2030 and doubling current numbers by 2080.

Africa is not only the youngest continent in the world, but also projected to be the home of most young people by 2067, with 67 percent of the world's children living in Africa. This youthful character of African population perhaps embodies her most strategic potential for the world Christian movement.

One Hope's 'Global Youth Culture' report showed that Africa has the highest number of committed Christian teens at 28 percent compared to all other continents combined at 17 percent.[10] This means that every person thinking about missions must not only consider how Africa participates, but Africans themselves must be ready to be on the frontlines of the mission force ready to offer the largest mission force to the world.

The Global View

Globally, there are very few Committed Christian teens. Although 43 percent claimed Christianity as their religion, only 7 percent display the beliefs and behaviors that indicate they are committed to their Christian walks.[11]

Discipling Youth

The Family as the Primary Learning Center

In Moses's farewell speech in Deuteronomy 6, he charges the children of Israel not to for-

get God and his law and tells them that the things they have heard are first to be upon their hearts and then to pass them on to their children. God seems to say that the home is the primary learning center and the parents the primary teachers. There is need for church leaders to consider how to strengthen the family and equip parents to do the work of discipleship.

The New Testament introduces the analogy of the family of God to help give us a biblical view of youth in the church. In Matthew 12:46–50, when told by his disciples that his mother, brothers and sisters were outside looking for him, Jesus responded by defining his true family, saying, 'My father and mother are the ones who do the will of my father.' This is both good and scary at the same time. It is good in that we have a wider family, but scary in that unless our young people come to the Lord, they are not truly family. Christians are born again spiritually by the grace and love of God through Jesus. They become brothers and sisters as they are adopted into the family of God. The church has a call to live as a family of siblings with one Father. Four times in his letters Paul says that believers are justified by God and then are adopted into the family of God. Justification is to be declared righteous before God and adoption concerns our relationship to God.

How can we maximize on this blessing for missions? The first step in this process is to break the barriers of distrust, indifference, and the emotional gap that has been created by adults in our churches. We must go into their world to establish trust, care, and relationships. Young people are not ultimately interested in programs, but rather need meaningful relationships with caring adults.

The Incarnational Model

Twenty-first century youth face significantly different challenges that may require further reflection on how to reach them. We propose a return to the *incarnational model*,[12] the model of discipleship shown by Jesus, Paul, and the early church. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live among people, as John 1:1 and 1:14 particularly show. The Son of God came to live among people, in their culture when they were still sinners. This is the incarnational ministry of Jesus according to the purposes of a missionary God.

This incarnational model is referred to as *relational youth ministry* by Andrew Root.[13] Root proposes the need to see 'beyond relationships as tools of influence but seeing also the beautiful inner reality as the invitation to share each other's place, to be with each other in both joy and suffering and so doing to witness to Christ among us.' It is in these relationships that adults who embody God's word will be able to help the young people see what it means to live life from a biblical worldview.

This removes the pressure of relational youth ministry that demands an end that the relationship should bring. Relationship becomes the end. It is the place where Christ is the end, the place where both the adult and the young person encounter Christ. What matters is not the young person's ability to become something, like more spiritual or even convert to Christianity, but to be human alongside the adult, which is only possible through Jesus Christ who died and rose again as our human brother. Root says, 'place sharing takes shape when we place ourselves fully in the reality of the other, refusing to turn away even from its darkest horror.'[14] Just as Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection was fully our space-sharer, we too must imitate him by being the same to the young people.

When our young people hear the gospel preached, it is not enough if they do not see us living in light of it. Thinking of future world evangelization, our preaching must be accompanied by our living, and this is only possible in authentic meaningful relationships. A young person looking for a safe space should find it in these relationships where the gospel is lived, where sin is known and forgiven, where growth is encouraged, and where correction is received with enthusiasm for further spiritual growth. Life and theology cannot be separated; theology is constructed from within real life and existence informed by the Scriptures.

Scripture Engagement

Recent research on global youth with a sample of size of 25,000 youth aged 13-17 from 26 countries by Barna Group dubbed the 'Open Generation', sought to find out how they relate with Jesus, the Bible, and social justice. The research found out that even though 50 percent of young people have a high view of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God, only about 36 percent of them had been taught the Scriptures by an adult and about 42 percent of them receive wisdom on how the Bible applies to daily life. Again, in the report by One Hope, over half of teens globally say they never read religious scripture on their own. How do we help young people connect with God's Word? How do they see that God's Word is relevant in their situations?

In 2019, Lifeway research surveyed 2,000 parents whose children are now young adults to find the spiritual health indicators that seemed to matter most. The study discovered that the most likely predictor of spiritual health was that the child regularly read the Bible growing up. 88 percent of engaged Christian parents with children ages 6-9 report their child studied the Bible at least weekly. However, as kids grow older to youth age, parents tend to let their kids manage Bible reading on their own, which leads to a dip in Scripture engagement. How can we change this narrative? As parents and older adults, we must live by example in how we interact with God's word as well as come alongside our young people in their reading, meditation, and applying of these life words. Again, relationships in the family and the church are inevitable.

Challenges in Youth Cultures

Youth culture today has been influenced by philosophical movements and shaped by our digital age resulting in heavy mental burdens and changing global concerns.

A Post-Truth Era

This present culture can be described as a post-truth culture. The debate on whether truth is absolute or relative continues to occupy school halls, homes, university lecture halls, and workplaces. Phrases like, 'I am living my truths' are now more common than ever. The fact/value split where values are considered personal rather than public is significantly growing. The loss of Truth has severe real-life consequences. Seventy-five percent of young adults say that they are unsure of their purpose in life. Fully half of young adults say that there is 'no absolute value associated with human life.'[15]

How do we raise a generation of young people that base every aspect of life on Truth? If over half of teens believe all religions teach equally valid truths, and 40 percent of self-identified Christian teens say they never read the Bible, how do we help our young people to see that Christianity is 'total Truth'?[16]

The answer is going back to the Scriptures, reading them, preaching them, and living them out. It is by training our young people in apologetics and equipping them with skills to engage in public spaces in order to show that Christianity is the only faith that offers a comprehensive view of life. It is by showing that Christianity is not merely a list of propositional truths, but Truth is a person, Jesus Christ.

Social Media

We live in a digital era and more of it is coming. The internet has literally changed culture with a greater impact on generations that never knew a world without it. Craig Van Gelder claims that the 'internet represents the dominant cultural metaphor of the twenty-first-century world—decentralized, highly participatory, fluid, self-organizing, geographically dispersed.'[17]

Along with advances in information technology, our digital era has created not only a cyber culture but also a virtual world that changed the notions of time and space in social life and the relationships.

Mental Health

The conversation cannot be complete without learning from the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about alarming situations of mental health and well-being. A 2020 study published in the Journal of Population and Social Studies on the mental health effects

of COVID-19 on over 1,000 higher education students in China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, revealed that 38 percent of students surveyed had experienced 'mild-to-moderate' depression and anxiety, while over 20 percent reported regularly experiencing 'severe anxiety.' Research conducted in Brazil[18] and Latin America[19] also show that the pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of adolescents and young people. Isolation and lack of human contact only proves that community is key to the flourishing of human beings. It is therefore true that pursuing relationships will kill several birds with one stone.

Global Concerns

Barna asked teens which global problems are of greatest concern to them are, in order of greatest significance: extreme poverty, global climate change, sexual abuse, unemployment, and political corruption.

Does the church offer answers to these concerns? As they wonder how their lives make an impact in the world, will we be able to lead them to the right places, methods, and solutions? Young people complain that Christian leaders are not active outside the walls of the church and only see church as a place of worship. The church needs to extend its understanding of redemption beyond that we are saved *from* something but also saved *to* something and to resume the task for which we were originally created.

Conclusion

What is the significance of these statistics and reflections in the light of missions and world evangelization? If Africa is the most Christian continent now, it follows that the face of Christianity in 2050 will probably be a young African woman. What will they see? What sort of Christianity will they embody? It is the mission scholar, Andrew Walls, that rightly said, 'what happens within the African Churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come; what sort of theology is most characteristic of the Christianity of the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim.'[20]

What should leaders in Africa do? How are they preparing the young people forward evangelization? If Latin America, Asia and North America all have declining populations of young people, what does that mean for world evangelization in terms of the mission force?

Our submission is that we must rethink our models of discipleship and embrace the incarnational model that invites deep authentic relationships that allow the young people to flourish as humans as we encounter Jesus together. Equipping families to do the work of discipleship for their children and those whom the Lord will bring their way expanding the Christian family to seekers. Think about how to help young people live integral lives, as opposed to the modern dualistic approach to life where truth is lived out both in private and in the public. Lastly, we must imagine creative ways of entering the digital world to reach them and, of course, engage in prayer cognizant of the mission field before us.

Endnotes

1 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. Accessed August 24, 2023. https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/.

2 Global Youth Culture: Latin America Report" One Hope. Accessed August 23, 2023. https://globalyouthculture.oriocdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/LA-GYC-Report_N.pdf.

3 Apparently, Spain was included in the Latin America report because it is united to those countries by language.

4 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. Accessed August 24, 2023. https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/.

5 Brazil was not included in Global Youth Culture Latin America Report probably because it was colonized by Portugal, while all the other countries were colonized by Spain. Therefore, language, customs and traditions are very different.

6 "Global Youth Culture: Brazil Report" Accessed August 23, 2023.

https://globalyouthculture.oriocdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GYC-Brazil-Report_N.pdf.

7 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects* 2022, *Online Edition*. Accessed August 23, 2023. https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/.

8 "Global Youth Culture: United States Report" Accessed August 25, 2023. https://globalyouthculture.oriocdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/US-GYC-Report_N.pdf.

9 Hartman, Nick. "A Reflections on Barna's Open Generation Report",Youth Pastor Theologian, October 26, 2022

10 "Global Youth Culture: Insights From a Digital Generation." One Hope. Accessed July 25, 2023. https://globalyouthculture.oriocdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GYC-Global-Report-English-1.pdf.

11 Ibid

12 Different models and ministry approaches have been used in the past by different people. There is the inclusive congregational approach, which seeks to integrate youth into congregational life. Then there is the preparatory approach, which prepares young people to participate in the life of existing churches as leaders, disciples, and evangelists. There is also the missional approach, which views youth as a mission itself. Finally, there is the strategic approach that prepares youths to become a new church plant. Others have popularized the evangelistic-attractional mode, which involves attracting adolescents to the church by introducing some elements of the culture in the youth ministry program. All these approaches are wonderful with different rates of success and failures.

13 *Root, Andrew. Revisiting relational youth ministry: From a strategy of influence to a theology of incarnation. IVP Books, 2007.*

14 Ibid, 83.

15 George Barna. "Millennials in America: New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence." Cultural Research Center. October 2021. https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/George-Barna-Millennial-Report-2021-FINAL-Web.pdf.

Jeff Myers. *Truth Changes Everything.* Perspectives: A Summit Ministries Series:. Baker Publishing Group, 221.

16 Nancy Pearcey. Total Truth: *Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

17 Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective, Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, 128.

18 Mental Health Of Brazilian Adolescents During The Covid-19 Pandemic. Accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/handle/icict/58534.

19 The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of adolescents and youth Accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/impact-covid-19-mental-health-adolescents-and-youth.

20 Walls, Andrew F.Essay. In *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*. 180–90. Leiden:Brill, 1976.

Authors

Ana Lucia Bedicks is Brazilian, and hails from Brazil. She has been serving in Children and Youth Ministry for more than 20 years. She also has a DMin on Youth, Family and Culture from Fuller Theological Seminary. Since 2012, she has been serving as seminary faculty, teaching youth pastors and leaders. Her doctoral project is about Foundations for a Postgraduate Level Youth Ministry Course in São Paulo, Brazil

Menchit Wong is from the Philippines and is co Vice-Chair of the Lausanne International Board. She is a licensed social worker and ministry practitioner, serving children and families in underprivileged communities in Asia, Latin America and Africa for the last 30 plus years. Before she retired in 2018, she was Global Child Advocacy Director for Compassion International, a Christian child development organization serving 26 countries around the world. Currently she is involved in Christian global movements for children and families.

Maggie Gathuku is from Kenya and is the co-founder of Timazi Africa – a ministry that seeks to disciple young people in Africa where she serves as the director of content development. She also directs the Teacher Formation Program that works to equip teachers to think wholistically about education and how to use the classroom as a space for faith conversations as well enter closed nations as missionary teachers.

THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Ted Esler, James Patole

In 2018, for the first time in human history, 'the majority of humankind [was] no longer poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty'.[1] This enormous shift has fueled the historic growth of the global middle class.

This demographic represents unique opportunities and challenges for the global church. With more affluence, higher levels of education, and more social mobility, the middle class requires a unique way of connecting with people as compared to other segments of society such as students or the global poor. Urban ministry has rightly received much attention, but it is important to recognize that more people are found in suburban communities—where the middle class tends to live—than in the city core. As cities grow, the middle class tends to grow as well.

> ***"This demographic represents unique opportunities and challenges for the global church."***

The definition of who is considered middle class varies from country to country. The changing demographics of different countries create unique trajectories for mission efforts. In this paper, we will explore the middle class in three different countries with different trajectories over the next 25 years, namely the demographically stagnant middle class in the United States (US), the slowly declining middle class in China, and the rapidly expanding middle class in India. Taken together, these snapshots help us to address the unique situations of the middle class globally and consider the significant implications of this massive demographic for global mission.

Standing Stagnant: The middle class in the United States

The US has enjoyed a strong and growing middle class since the end of World War II. The Evangelical church in the US has largely been a middle class phenomenon, and the missionary movement has benefited from the growing US middle class over recent decades. Economic momentum, high immigration levels, and the relative wealth of the middle class all but guarantee that it will continue to exist as a significant constituent of the US population.

Patterns of the US Middle Class

The Pew Research Center defines the middle class in the US as households with an annual income that ranges from USD 48,500 to USD 146,000 for a family of three—ie between 67 percent and 200 percent of the median US household income. Based on this definition, approximately 52 percent of the population belong to the middle class. [2]

Income levels seem to correlate with church involvement. Using data from the Cooperative Election Study, a prime source of sociological data in the United States, Ryan Burge has found that, "the people who are the most likely to attend services this weekend are those with college degrees making $60K-$100K. In other words, middle class professionals."[3] In the United States, educated, middle class, married people are more than twice as likely to go to church as those without these three attributes.

Immigrants continue to come to the US to avail of economic opportunities, usually joining the middle class within a few years. In 2019, 14 percent of the US population were foreign-born, compared to only 5 percent in 1980. [4] Within a generation, many immigrant families have higher household incomes than their non-foreign-born counterparts. Even so, the US middle class population is likely to remain static given the falling fertility rates for the majority population.

Barriers to the Great Commission in the US

The authors of the 2023 book The Great Dechurching warn, 'We are currently in the middle of the largest and fastest religious shift in

the history of our country.'5 Affluence and the attendant secularization may be ending decades of US religious interest, with this trend strongest in the middle class. This may have grave consequences for the traditional sending and funding of missionary efforts, including support for disaster relief, literacy programs, and other aspects of global mission.

In a polycentric world, non-Western giving to global missions should certainly grow, but there is still a need for Christians in the US need to continue supporting global missions. The US middle class is wealthier than its global counterparts. There is an urgent need to disciple church members to overcome instant gratification, entitlement culture, self-interest, and discontentment.

Finally, political divisions are driving much of the current US narrative, including within the church. Racial tensions, sexual dysphoria and the acceptance of radical gender ideologies, and a debate over socialist policies lie at the heart of this division. Syncretism also poses a great threat to the middle class in the US. Reaching this middle class for the Great Commission requires us to discern wisely, love incarnationally, witness effectively, and use apologetics appropriately.

Opportunities for the Great Commission in the US

A significant opportunity in the US is the growth of diaspora congregations. Immigration to America may revive both its church and its middle class.[6] Current rates of immigration are at record levels, and many local churches are deeply involved in ministry to these communities. Diaspora populations in the US go through an assimilation process that stresses family dynamics, religious worldviews, and social relationships. The increased affluence associated with joining the middle class contributes to the changes these families experience. Whereas first generation immigrants typically stay within the immigrant community, second and third generation immigrants do not. This constitutes a significant opportunity for the church. Assisting these families through difficult transitions opens the door to the gospel.

The US continues to be the dominant sender and financer of missions globally. Even though contemporary global missiology is often seen through the lens of immigration and diaspora, the sending, training, and financing of global missions will continue to be a significant part of the US missionary movement. The overall percentage of missionaries in the global workforce is smaller because of increasing numbers from non-Western nations.[7] Yet, the overall number of American missionaries has remained at about the same level over the past few years. In 2010, there were about 127,000 American missionaries, increasing to about 134,000 in 2016.[8] The middle class supports most of the American missionaries and will continue to do so if the church remains healthy.

Much of the giving in the US is not from the wealthy, but from the lower and middle class.[9] The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability has reported increased giving by evangelicals every year over the past ten years, with international giving increasing over two percent in 2022. According to Christianity Today, even during the pandemic, giving has increased.[10] A healthy American middle class into the future can be expected to continue funding global missions as long as the church maintains its numbers.

Slow Decline: The middle class in China

Between 1990 and 2019, the top 40 countries experienced per capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth from 2x to 6x, while China grew at an unprecedented 32x.[11] In 2011, the definition of household incomes per capita per person per day for the middle class globally was USD 11 to USD 110. In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), the annual household income for a four-person middle class household would be USD 14,600 to USD 146,000.[12] Based on this definition, the size of the global middle class was estimated at about 90 million in 2006 and 730 million in 2016. By 2027, the size of the middle class in China is expected to exceed one billion people.[13]

By 2050, China's population is expected to decline to 1.3 billion, from 1.4 billion in 2022.[14] The decline is due to China's one-child policy from 1980 to 2015. However, even after the government loosened this restriction, few people in China are interested in having more children, as it is expensive to raise them.[15] Starting around 2030, the slowing Chinese

economy is likely to lead to a slow decline of the Chinese middle class.[16]

Patterns of the Chinese Middle Class

In 2021, China formulated an 'internal circulation' strategy with a focus on domestic consumption and sustainable development to counter the decline in foreign investment. It included proposed measures for better work life balance, including reducing long working hours known as '996' (ie 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week).

China could get older before it gets richer, with 330 million people expected to be above the age of 65 by 2050. The one-child policy produced a society marked by a 4-2-1 pyramid, where families have four grandparents and two parents who look to their only child to care for them in old age. Additionally, many new entrants to the middle class in China choose to prioritize their careers, as reflected in the decline in marriage registrations since 2013.[17]

The zeitgeist of the middle class is a consumeristic lifestyle fueled by discretionary income. This is the central difference with the poor. Consumerism is the engine of all modern economic systems[18], and the middle class is the biggest consumer market in China. The biggest challenge of the Chinese middle class church is 'mammon'. The most common expressions of mammon include workaholism, high levels of comfort, materialism, security, financial independence, self-sufficiency, social symbolism, and individualism. These adversely lead to detachment, isolation, nominalism, and syncretism. Similar middle class patterns can be seen in other countries. These different frontline middle class challenges are often mutually reinforcing and hard to solve through a piecemeal solution. Evangelism to this demographic calls for a 'whole-life discipleship' approach, where the cross is an integral commitment and not just an option.[19]

Barriers to the Great Commission in China

Government Suppression

During the 19th National Congress in 2017, China ended the separation of the Party and the State, returning to the 'Party and State' system, similar to the pre-reform era before 1978. The 2017 Congress also promulgated a holistic view of national security through technology and grid-based management for all services. Since 1949, China has promoted a formula of 'Marxism plus Chinese context', albeit recently adding the phrase 'Chinese excellent traditional culture', which explains the shift towards Chinese ethnocentricity at the core of China's nationalistic ideology.[20] This systemic control can stifle the freedom to be a disciple of Jesus.[21]

Prevailing Stigmas

The survey results of 120 Protestant pastors in 15 Chinese cities between 2017 and 2019 suggest that the CCP has been wary of Protestant churches for the following reasons:

- Faith is seen as an ideological threat, as Protestants are more loyal to an authority other than the party.
- Foreign connections are seen as a tool of the West to subvert China and are therefore viewed as an internal security threat.
- Churches regularly organize and mobilize followers and contribute to a vibrant civil society. [22]

Further insights can be discovered in the Lausanne paper.[23]

Opportunities for the Great Commission in China

Ministry of Presence

For the first time in the last few decades, China is seeing more people at home due to old age, unemployment, childbirth, or other emerging cultural trends like 'Tang Ping' or 'Lying Flat'. It is an alternative form of rebellion by doing the bare minimum for daily living in response to social pressures.[24] This presents an opportunity to minister to families through meeting their need for belonging.[25] This ministry can also be practiced by addressing the '996' work culture.[26]

Whole-life Discipleship

God created us to have a relationship and to partner with him to fulfill the creation mandate. We are called to advance God's kingdom in our homes, in our neighborhoods, and through our work. One avenue for this which may be particularly effective in ministry to the Chinese middle class is 'Triple Listening', where we listen to cries of the world, the wisdom of the Word, and each other's frontline stories. Next imagine what God wants us to do and respond contextually to the needs before us.[27]

Public Theology

The educated middle class is looking for a common theology[28] that analyses Chinese history, culture, philosophy, and religion to address socio-political movements in a contextual way from a Biblical point of view.[29] This is a promising opening for the Great Commission.

Rapidly Expanding: The middle class in India

The development of India's middle class has its origins in the English education system introduced during the colonial era in the 19th and 20th centuries.[30] Consequently, after the independence of India in 1947, the middle class received increased opportunities and rapidly expanded after the economic liberalization reforms of the 1990s. The size and definition of the middle class has been debated and dependent on several factors like income, status, education, identity and power, consumption, occupation, and lifestyle.

The Indian think tank, the People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE) identifies a household as middle class if it has an annual income of Rs 5–30 lakh (USD 6,700–40,000). Their recent survey found that the middle class in India has expanded from 14 percent of the total population in 2004-2005 to 31 percent in 2020-21 and is projected to rapidly expand to 63 percent by 2047,[31] contingent on stable political and economic reforms.[32]

Today, the Indian middle class ranks third globally after China and the United States. By 2035, it is expected to be the largest. One survey suggests that with India's rapid expansion, it could 'add an additional one billion consumers to the global middle class between 2016 and 2050'.[33]

Characteristics of the Indian Middle Class

India's middle class can generally be categorized as:

- Privileged and enthralled by English, equipped with education and high-end skills, and attaining to white collar jobs and stable income.
- Global yet local and traditional yet modern in their culture, social norms, education, career pursuits, and overall outlook.
- Materialistic, pragmatic, and aspirational, but religious.
- Dominated mainly by the upper caste.
- Recognized by their consumeristic lifestyle and identity.

As for their religious tendencies, this demographic's worldviews are different from other classes and are changing rapidly due to various factors, particularly among the educated middle class. It is important to note that the spirituality of the Indian middle class is multifaceted and blurred with the practical issues at hand. Almost all the cults, the New Religious Movements (NRM), and gurus strive to appeal to such followers appropriately while addressing issues pertaining to them, such as peace at home, success at work, resolving health and relationship issues, and blessings on children's education and career. Modern spirituality is best at reinterpreting old philosophical beliefs and traditions in modern-day language with practical applications.

Barriers to the Great Commission in India

The combination of India's religious, deeply caste-based social structure with this secular and pluralistic context poses a huge challenge in presenting the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Along with caste, consumerism, materialism, the nexus between corporate in-

stitutions, religion, and politics is posing a new set of challenges.

Further, it is necessary to avoid overemphasizing Christian dogma, rituals, traditional beliefs, and practices that are not biblical. Contextualizing Christian faith and focusing on experiential theology (Anubhava) needs attention. Misconceptions about Christianity—mainly that it is a Western religion—call for scholarly and historical correction.[34] In fact, the church existed in India from AD 52 when the apostle Thomas arrived in South India, but this history is largely unknown to Indians today. Meanwhile, the annual death anniversary of the Apostle Thomas is celebrated as Indian Christian Day. The Indian church and missions excellently engage with tribal, outcaste, and lower caste groups, however, effective missional engagement and research for the Indian middle class still lag behind.

Opportunities for the Great Commission in India

Considering the Indian middle class's unique characteristics noted earlier, gospel engagement requires a distinct, relational, friendly, and at times intellectual approach that will incorporate the necessary practical help to address their felt needs and challenges. It is essential that the whole church is discipled, equipped, and nurtured to live out the gospel. While building a relational approach, house churches utilizing family networks among the Indian middle class must be acknowledged. The Christian middle class needs to be strategically equipped to see 'work' and 'vocation' as God-given opportunities to fulfill the creation mandate while fulfilling the Great Commission in workplace engagement. Hence, equipping Christian professionals for workplace and marketplace engagement is vital.

A significant portion of the Indian middle class—particularly those most urbanized, globalized, educated, and financially secure—are not necessarily convinced by and dedicated to the teachings of their religion. Many would be open to listening and changing their view if invited to do so in a way that speaks to their experiences and needs. The Indian middle class will be a key field of mission in the 21st century and beyond.

Summary

It is estimated that by 2050, the middle class of the United States, China, and India will total a combined two billion. Mission to the middle class is marked by a robust engagement with both the positive and negative implications of consumerism. It must also be characterized by an integrated approach of both philosophy and strategy. This demands whole-life discipleship, fulfilling the creation mandate through our work, developing a culture of incarnational service, and investing in God's kingdom through time, talent, and treasure.

Endnotes

1 'Are You in the Global Middle Class? Find out with Our Income Calculator.' Pew Research Center. Accessed 4 May 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/07/21/are-you-in-the-global-middle-class-find-out-with-our-income-calculator/.

2 "Are You in the Global vMiddle Class? Find out with Our Income Calculator | Pew Research Center." n.d. Accessed May 4, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/07/21/are-you-in-the-global-middle-class-find-out-with-our-income-calculator/.

3 Ryan Burge. *Religion Has Become a Luxury Good*, (graphsaboutreligion.com) Accessed 16 September, 2023.

4 "Racial Wealth Snapshot: Immigration And The Racial Wealth Divide » NCRC." n.d. Accessed 20 June, 2023. https://ncrc.org/racial-wealth-snapshot-immigration-and-the-racial-wealth-divide/.

5 Jim Davis, Michael S. Graham, and Ryan P. Burge. *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023) p. XX.

6 Dany Bahar and Greg Wright. 'Immigration as an Engine for Reviving the Middle Class in Midsized Cities.' 18 November 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/11/18/immigration-as-an-engine-for-reviving-the-middle-class-in-midsized-cities/.

7 Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing. 'World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South.' *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 8–19. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2396939319880074.

8 Peggy E. Newell. *North American Mission Handbook: US and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas, 2017-2019* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishers: 2017).

9 'Who Gives Most to Charity?' Philanthropy Roundtable. Accessed 8 May 2023. https://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/who-gives-most-to-charity/.

10 Hannah McClellan. 'Evangelical Giving Goes Up, Despite Economic Woes.' *Christianity Today*. 30 November 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/november/state-of-giving-donations-parachurch-megachurch-finances.html.

11 Zak Dychtwald. 'China's new innovation advantage.' *Harvard Business Review.* 2021 May-June. https://hbr.org/2021/05/chinas-new-innovation-advantage.

12 Homi Kharas. 'The unprecedented expansion of the global middle.' Brookings Institution. 28 February 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-unprecedented-expansion-of-the-global-middle-class-2/.

13 Homi Kharas and Meagan Dooley. 'China's influence on the global middle class.' Brookings Institution. October 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FP_20201012_china_middle_class_kharas_dooley.pdf.

14 Department of Economic & Social Affairs. 'World Population Prospects 2022: A Summary of Results.' United Nations. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/World-Population-Prospects-2022.

15 Laura Silver and Christine Huang. 'Key facts about China's declining population.' Pew Research Center. 5 December 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/05/key-facts-about-chinas-declining-population/.

16 Donghyun Park and Kwanho Shin. 'Impact of Population Aging on Asia's Future Economic Growth, 2021-2050.' *Asian Development Review* 40, no. 1 (March 2023). https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-review-volume-40-number-1.

17 Charlie Campbell. 'China's Aging Population Is a Major Threat to Its Future.' *TIME Magazine*. 7 February 2019. https://time.com/5523805/china-aging-population-working-age/.

18 Kerryn Higgs. 'A brief history of consumer culture?' Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press Reader. 11 January 2021. https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/a-brief-history-of-consumer-culture/

19 Matt Jolley. 'What is whole-life disciple?' London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. Accessed 30 August 2023. https://licc.org.uk/resources/what-is-a-whole-life-disciple/.

20 John Zhang. 'Ministry Insights under a Nationalistic Trend.' *China Source Quarterly*. 13 March 2023. https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/ministry-insights-under-a-nationalistic-trend/.

21 Philip Le Feuvre's 1980 Lausanne Occasional Paper 'Christian Witness to Marxists' is one of the most comprehensive papers on communism, covering basic Marxist characteristics, reviewing successes and failures, and charting evangelistic strategies for pre-revolutionary societies in developing countries, developed Western societies, and post-revolutionary societies like Europe.
Philip Le Feuvre. 'Lausanne Occasional Paper: Christian Witness to Marxists.' Lausanne Movement. June 1980. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-12.

22 Sarah Lee. 'Pastors in China's New Era.' *China Source Quarterly*. 13 March 2023. https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/pastors-in-chinas-new-era/.

23 See Lausanne consultation paper on Witnessing to the Marxist.

24 Lily Kuo. 'Young Chinese take a stand against pressures of modern life — by lying down.' *The Washington Post.* 5 June 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-lying-flat-stress/2021/06/04/cef36902-c42f-11eb-89a4-b7ae22aa193e_story.html.

25 Shuya Kim. 'New era and new roles: Changes & Issues for Chinese Ministries in a new context.' *China Source Quarterly*. 13 March 2023. https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/new-era-and-new-roles/.

26 One helpful resource on this topic is the *Theology of Work Project* (https://www.theologyofwork.org/), which provides a commentary on all the books of the Bible in traditional and simplified Chinese. It also has devotions for professionals, Bible studies for small groups, sermons for pastors, and resources for scholars.

27 'Wise peacemakers: How to love your culture by triple listening (1/5).' London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. https://licc.org.uk/resources/wise-peacemakers-part-1-of-5/.

28 Jacob Chengwei Feng. 'Chinese Theology for English-Language readers.' China Source. 13 March 2023. https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/chinese-theology-for-english-language-readers/.

29 A Chinese Bible commentary, similar to the *South Asia Bible Commentary*, could also help develop indigenous public theology.
Brian Wintle. 'South Asia Bible Commentary: A one volume commentary on the Whole Bible.' *Themelios* 41, no. 2. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/south-asia-bible-commentary-a-one-volume-commentary-on-the-whole-bible/.

30 Vinita Pandey. *Crisis of Urban Middle Class* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2009).

31 Rajesh Shukla. 'Gearing Up For a Billion-Plus Middle Class by 2047.' PRICE. 2023. https://www.price360.in/publication-details.php?url=gearing-up-for-a-billionplus-middle-class-by-2047.

32 BW Web Team. 'One out of every three Indians "middle class"; to double by 2047: Report.' *Business Standard.* 2 November 2022. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/every-one-in-three-indians-middle-class-to-double-by-2047-report-122110200522_1.html.

33 Abhijit Roy. 'The Middle Class in India: From 1947 to the Present and Beyond.' *Asian Politics* 23, no. 1 (2018). Retrieved from https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/the-middle-class-in-india-from-1947-to-the-present-and-beyond/.

34 Pius Malekandathil. 'St. Thomas Christians: A Historical Analysis of their Origins and Development up to 9th century AD.' in *St. Thomas Christians and Nambudiris, Jews and Sangam Literature: A Historical Appraisal*, Bosco Puthur (ed.) (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 1-48.

35 The authors would like to thank the following for their inputs critique, to this paper: Dave Benson, Reuben Coulter, Al Erisman, Prabhu Guptara, L.T. Jeyachandran, Cherian Samuel, T.V. Thomas, and many others for their review.

Authors[35]

Dr Ted Esler is the President of Missio Nexus, an association of agencies and churches representing over 30,000 Great Commission workers worldwide since 2015. He worked in the computer industry before becoming a church planter in the Balkans during the 1990s. In 2000, Ted became the Canadian director of Pioneers and three years later moved to Orlando to join Pioneers USA's leadership team.

Rev James Patole has a PhD in theology from the University of Mysore (SAIACS-Bangalore). He is an ordained minister of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He is currently spearheading the Christian Professionals Fellowship in Pune, India. His expertise lies in urban missions with active engagement in diverse regional and national Christian organizations. He has authored two books, co-edited Rethinking Urban Mission and Ministry in India, and also contributed to various peer-reviewed articles in both secular and Christian journals.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?



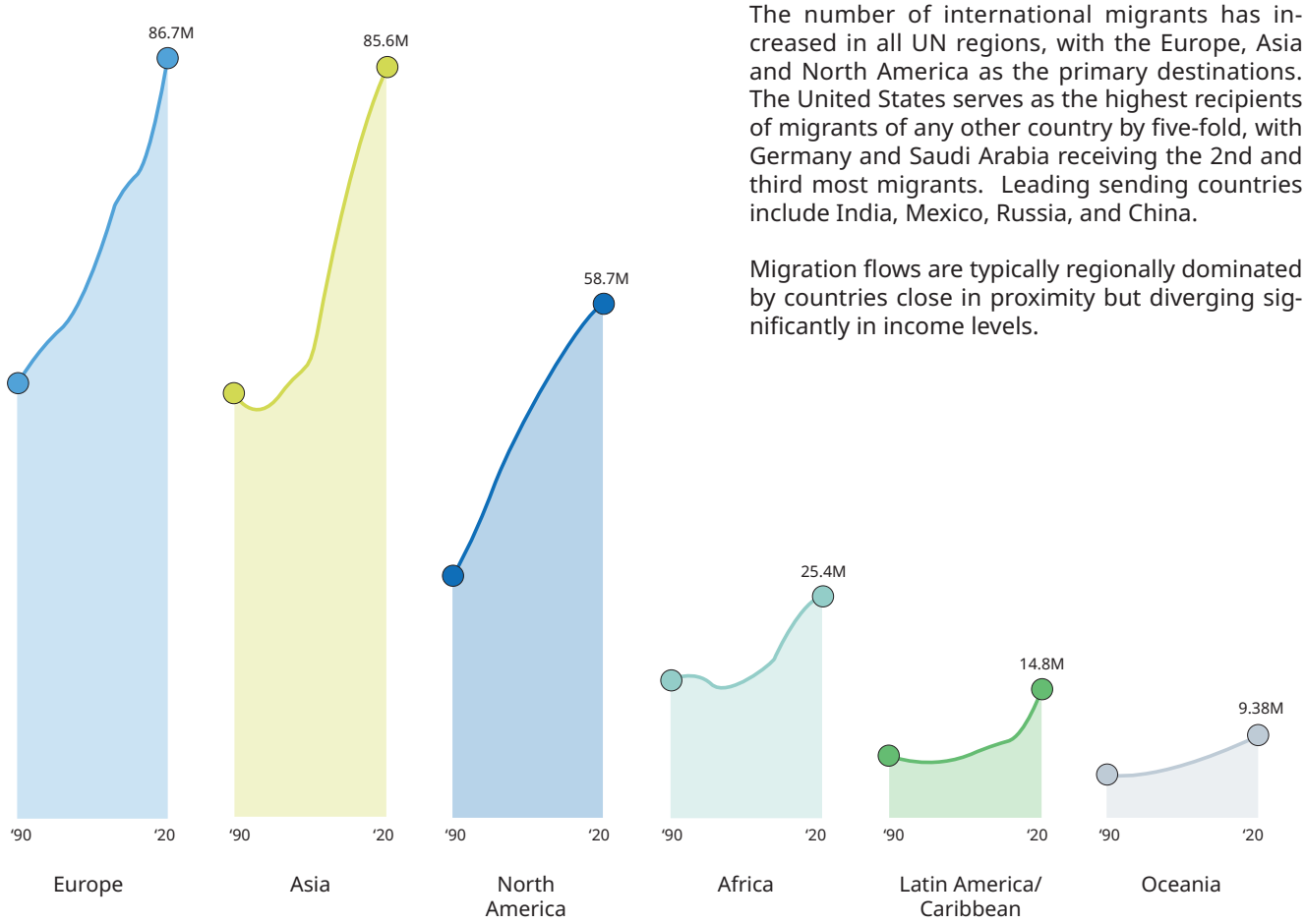
INTRODUCTION

For a growing number of individuals in the world, where they call home, what home looks like, and who their neighbors are is dramatically changing. These fundamental shifts in place and populations bring forth the fundamental question, 'What is community?'

The following section explores the context shifts in community including migration, refugees, international students, growth of cities and informal settlements.

MIGRATION

MIGRATION DESTINATION 1990-2020



Source: IOM UN Migration, 2022 World Migration Report; M = Million

RISING MIGRATION

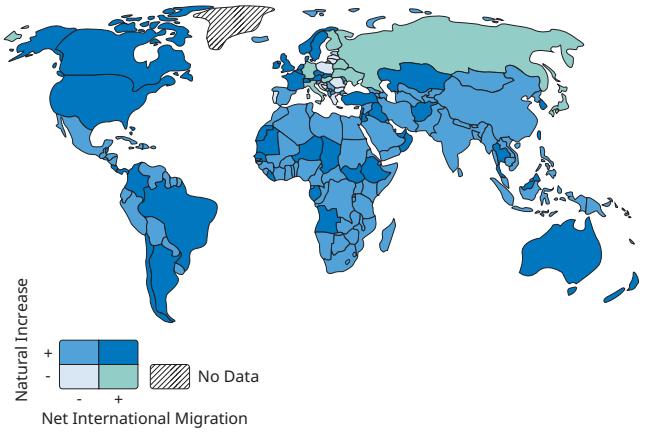
The number of international migrants has increased in all UN regions, with the Europe, Asia and North America as the primary destinations. The United States serves as the highest recipients of migrants of any other country by five-fold, with Germany and Saudi Arabia receiving the 2nd and third most migrants. Leading sending countries include India, Mexico, Russia, and China.

Migration flows are typically regionally dominated by countries close in proximity but diverging significantly in income levels.

FROM THE MIDDLE

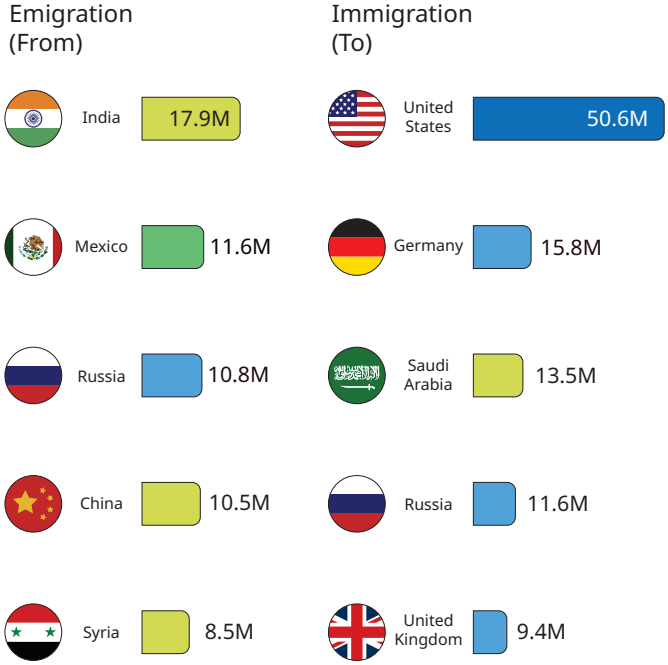
While migrants fleeing disasters dominate headlines, most migrants come from middle income countries experiencing economic transition. The very poor rarely migrate, as international migration requires significant financial resources. Even in war zones, the poorest often remain in their countries.

GLOBAL MIGRATION



Source: United Nations,"World Population Prospects," 2019

TOP MIGRANT COUNTRIES 2020

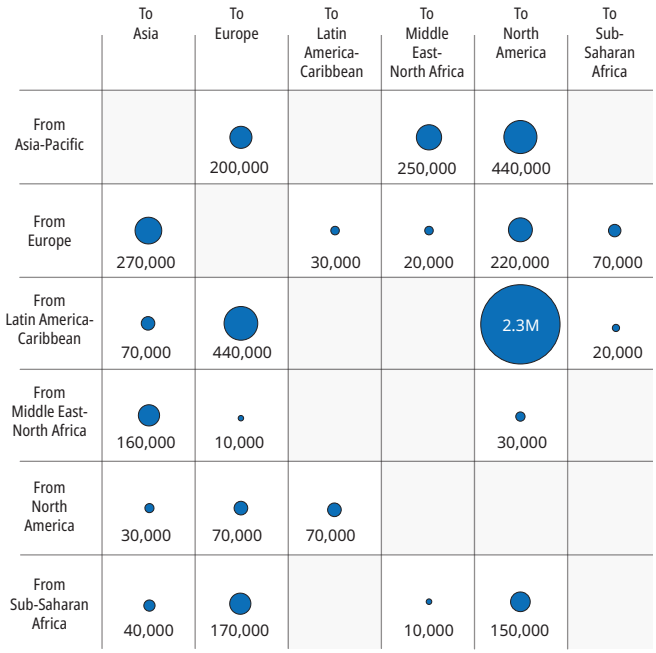


Source: United Nations, "Migrant Stock Data," 2020; M = Million

COMMUNITY

RELIGIOUS MIGRATION

CHRISTIAN MIGRATION 2010-2015

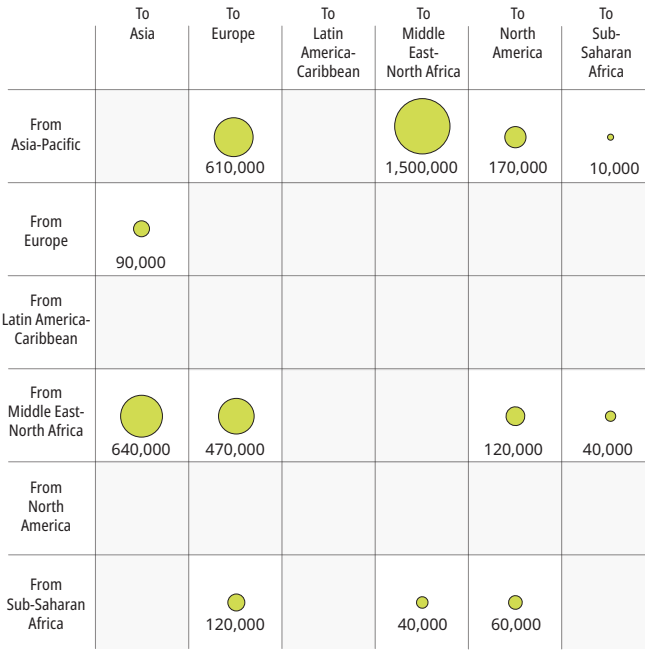


Source: Pew Research Center, "Future of World Religions," 2010-2050; M = Million

A MIGRANT RELIGION

Despite high migration numbers, Christian migration is not anticipated to affect regional religious affiliation percentages between 2020 and 2050 due to the balance between immigration and emigration. Christian migration covers more diverse geography than other religious migration. North America is the largest recipient of Christian migration, notably from Latin America. Europe is the second highest recipient from Christian migration, primarily from Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

MUSLIM MIGRATION 2010-2015

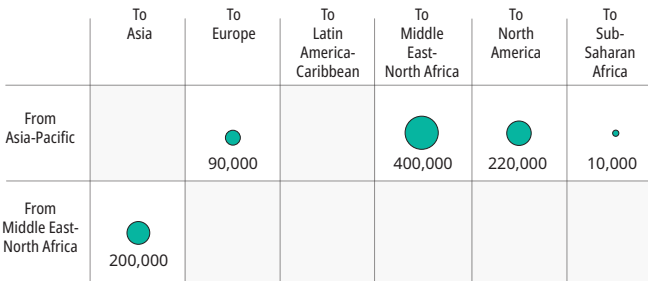


Source: Pew Research Center, "Future of World Religions," 2010-2050

ISLAMIC IMPACT

Muslim migration primarily occurs between predominately Islamic regions and Asia. Europe is a notable exception, receiving a large number of Islamic migrants. Population growth of Muslims in Europe between 2020 and 2050 is expected to be around 63 percent growth. When compared with an expected 6 percent population decline in Europe, the impact of Islamic migration to Europe is notable. Migration creates an opportunity for the Gospel. Migration can provoke religious change in a way that is less common in one's home context.

HINDU MIGRATION 2010-2015

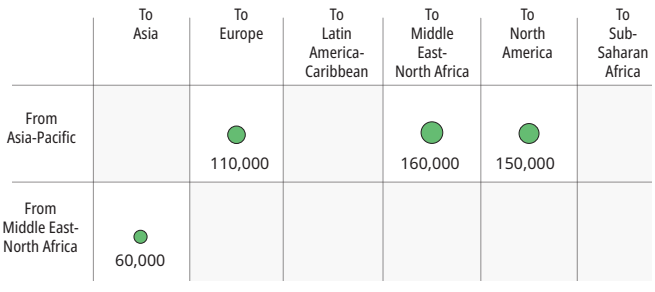


Source: Pew Research Center, "Future of World Religions," 2010-2050

INDIAN DIASPORA

Hindus represent a small share of the global migrant population. They are most prominent as temporary laborers in the Gulf nations (although this number is in decline) and secondarily in North America. The Indian diaspora in North America is primarily from middle- and upper-income levels.

BUDDHIST MIGRATION 2010-2015



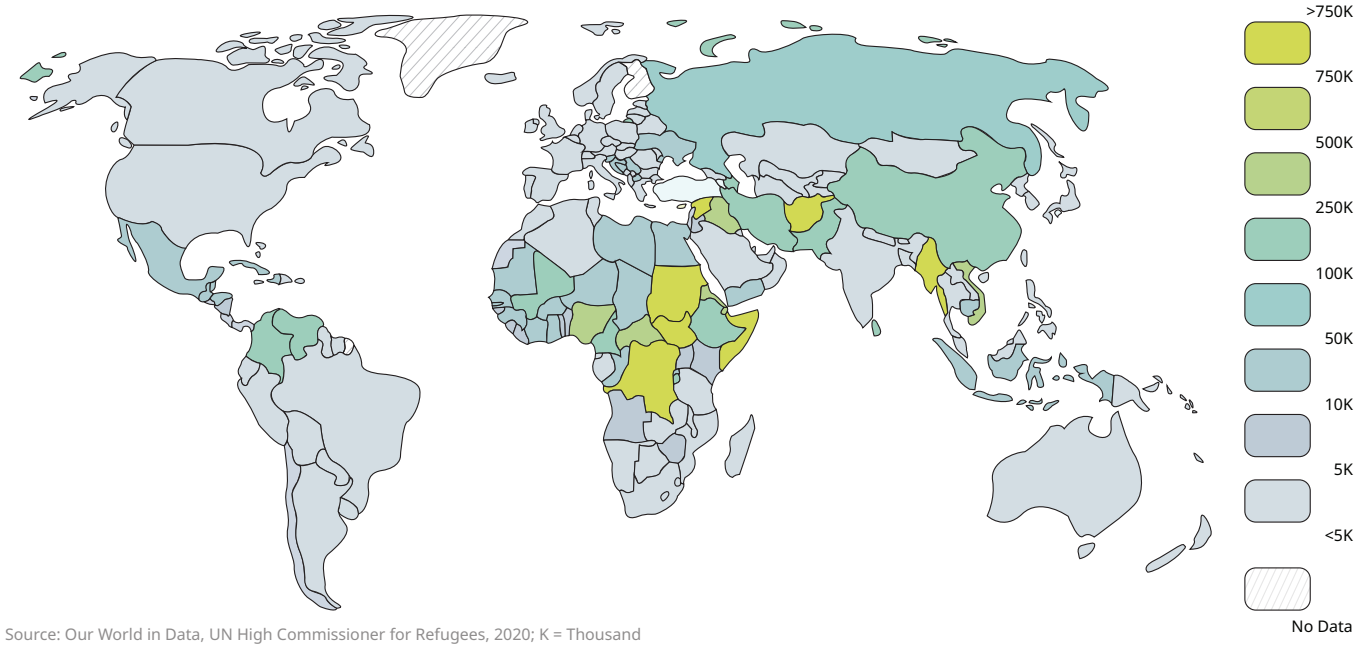
Source: Pew Research Center, "Future of World Religions," 2010-2050

GULF STATES

The Gulf nations (like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait) are a primary destination, in addition to Europe and North America for Buddhist migrants. As temporary laborers, and with high restrictions on religious freedom, migrants to Gulf nations are offered less opportunity to impact their host context than in pluralist societies like the United States.

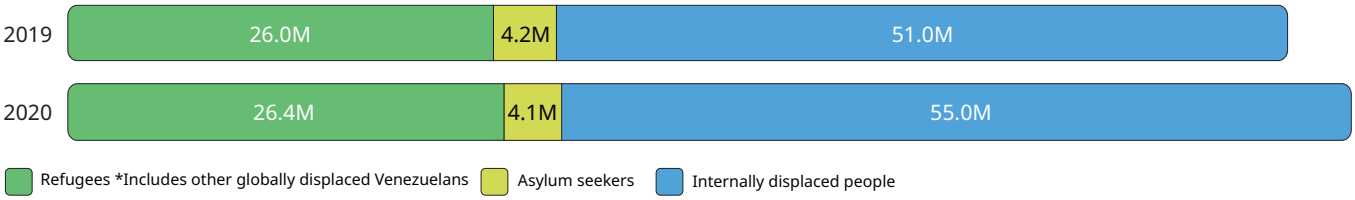
REFUGEES

REFUGEES BY ORIGIN COUNTRY



Source: Our World in Data, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020; K = Thousand

GLOBAL REFUGEE POPULATION

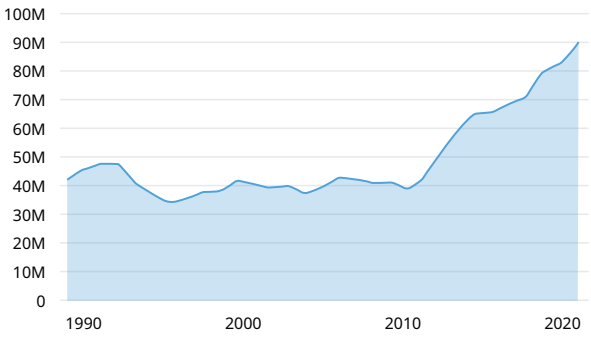


Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "2022 World Migrant Report"; M = Million

RISE OF REFUGEES

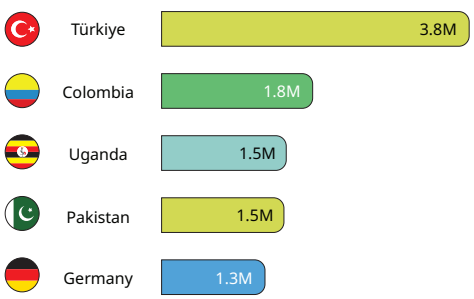
Total number global refugees saw a marked rise after 2010. The increase of the refugee populations continues to be strongly influenced by regional conflicts and geopolitical events. Internal displacement is the major result of destabilization, with less individuals receiving refugee asylum. An asylum seeker is someone who has left their country and is seeking protection, but who has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee. Despite smaller numbers, international refugees are a key people group for the church to minister to. From humanitarian aid to community integration, living out biblical hospitality is a key gospel witness to refugees who often come from countries with limited Christian presence.

TOTAL GLOBAL REFUGEES



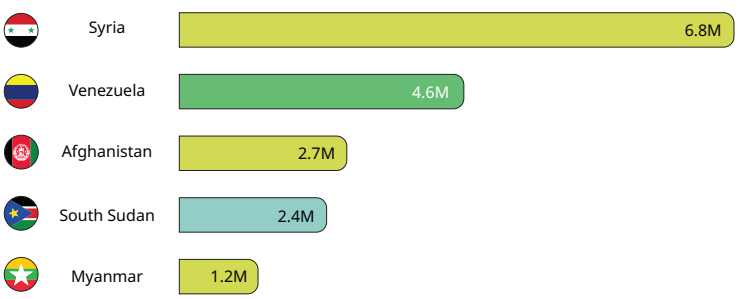
Source: UNHCR Global Trends, 2021; M = Million

TOP RECEIVING COUNTRIES 2021



Source: UNHCR Global Trends, 2021; M = Million

TOP SENDING COUNTRIES 2021

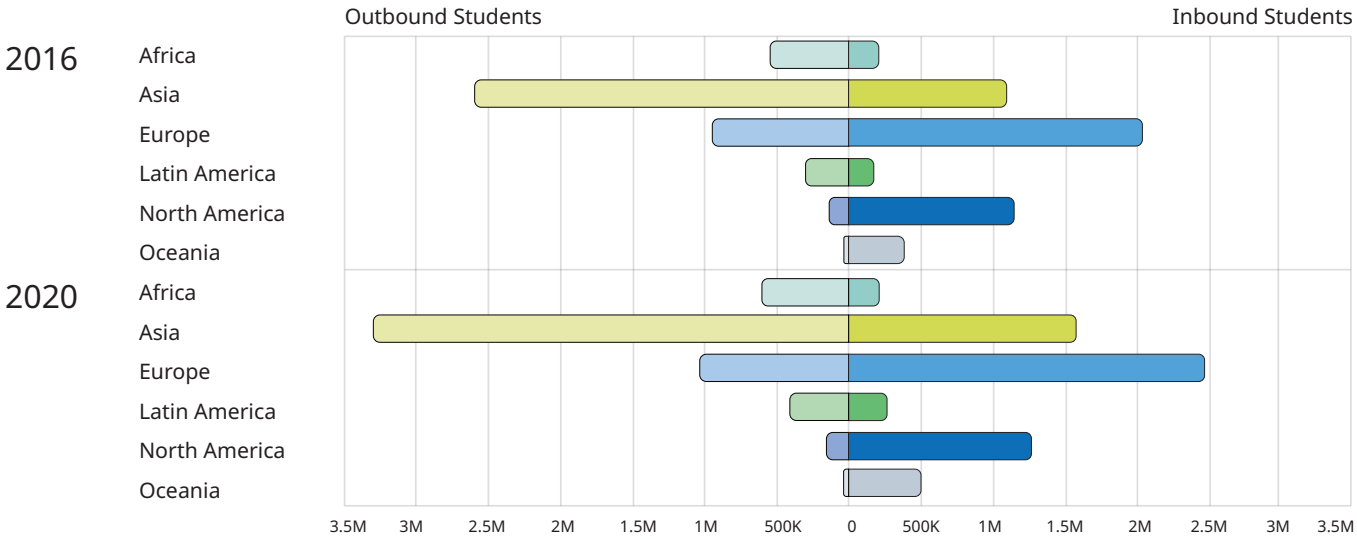


Source: UNHCR Global Trends, 2021; M = Million

COMMUNITY

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

INBOUND AND OUTBOUND STUDENTS BY REGION



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, Accessed Feb. 2023; K = Thousand M = Million

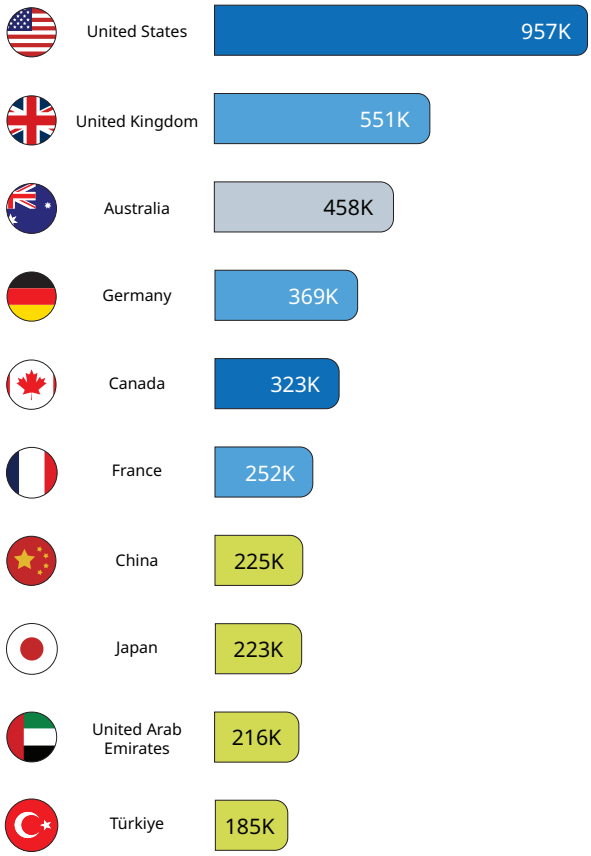
GROWING OPPORTUNITY

International Student numbers have grown each year since early 2000s. Student numbers declined during COVID, but has return to growth since. Many international students come to faith and are discipled through campus ministries, increasing the importance of such ministries.

FROM ASIA TO THE WORLD

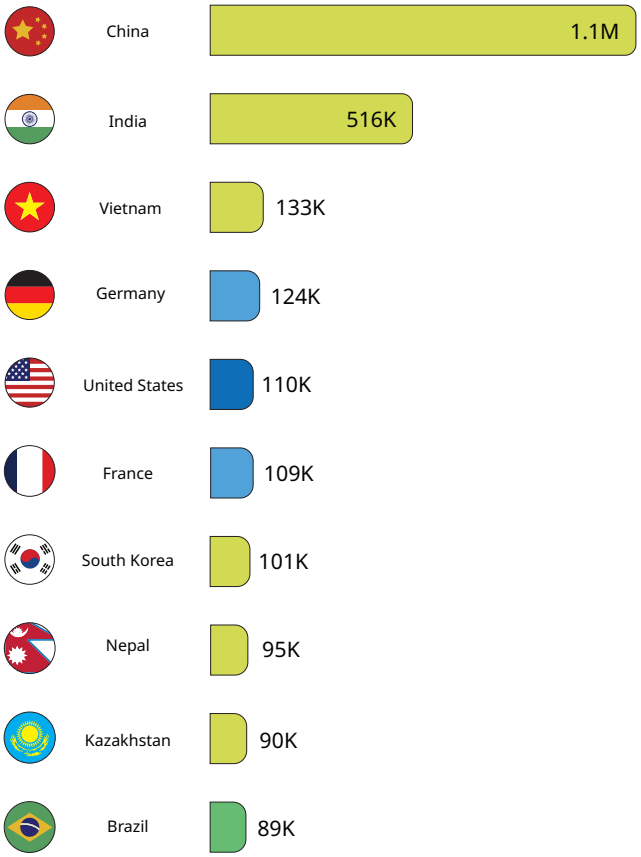
Young people from China and India dominate the global international student population. Western Anglophone nations like the U.S., U.K. and Australia remain the most popular destinations for international students. Asia and Latin America are growing as receiving destinations.

COUNTRIES RECEIVING STUDENTS



Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, Accessed Feb. 2023

COUNTRIES SENDING STUDENTS

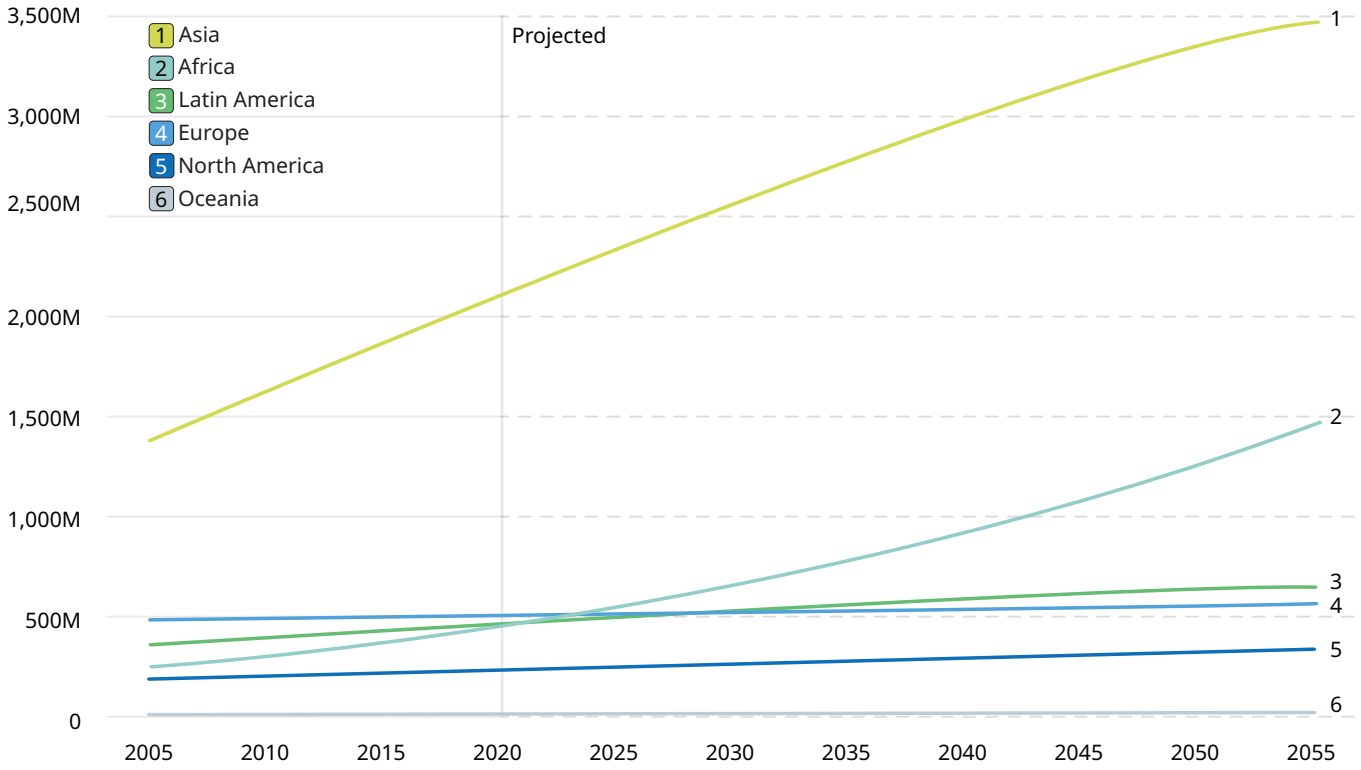


Source: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics, Accessed Feb. 2023

COMMUNITY

CITIES

URBAN GROWTH 2020-2050



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Urbanization Prospects," 2018; M = Million

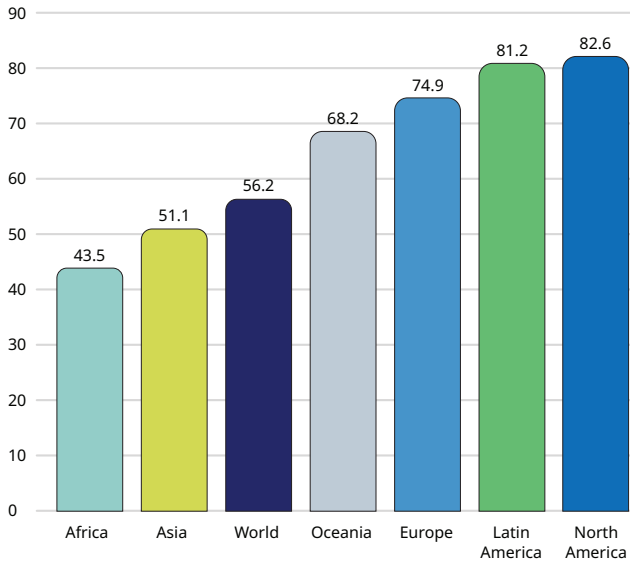
AN URBAN WORLD

The world is now majority urban. Asia and Africa are driving global urbanization. Asian rates of urbanization will slow in coming decades and African rates will accelerate.
Latin America became a largely urban region by the end of the 20th century. North America and Europe urbanized in the first half of the 20th century.

URBAN AND MIDDLE CLASS

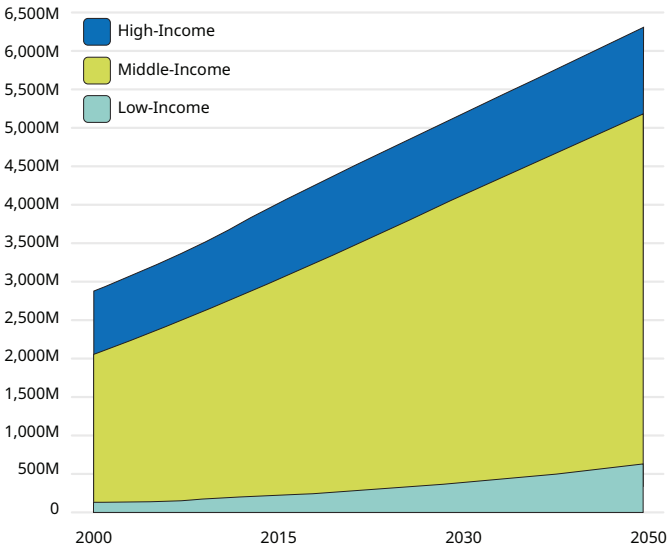
Global urbanization and middle-class growth have developed hand-in-hand. Rural-to-urban migration typically involves growing wealth and movement from lower to middle-class. However, while the poor have typically been concentrated in rural contexts, the coming decades will witness an expansion of urban poverty.

% URBAN POPULATION



Source: United Nations, "World Urbanization Prospects," 2018

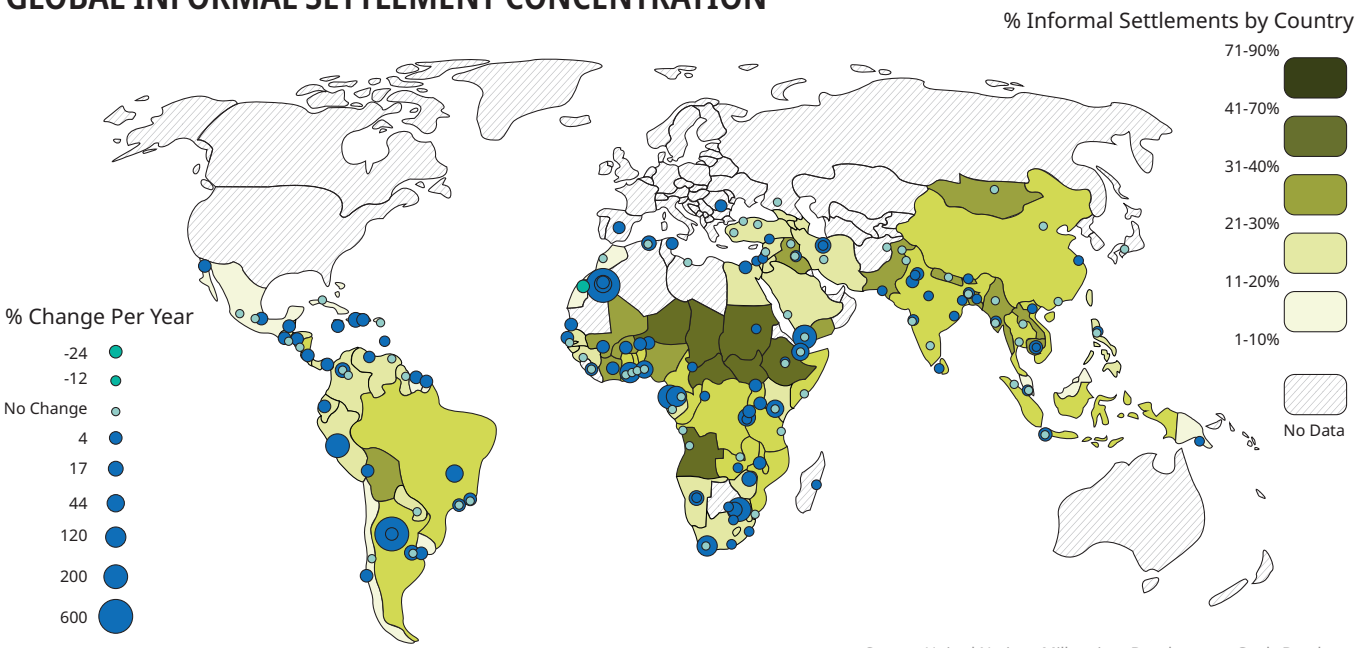
INCOME STATUS OF URBAN GROWTH



Source: United Nations, "World...," 2018; Middle Class = <$11-$110/day; M = Million

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

GLOBAL INFORMAL SETTLEMENT CONCENTRATION



Source: United Nations Millennium Development Goals Database

NEW URBAN COMMUNITIES

Informal settlements are urban environments that fall outside of government control, regulation, and protection, traditionally known as 'slums.' Informal settlements are the fastest growing aspect of urban life in the 21st century.

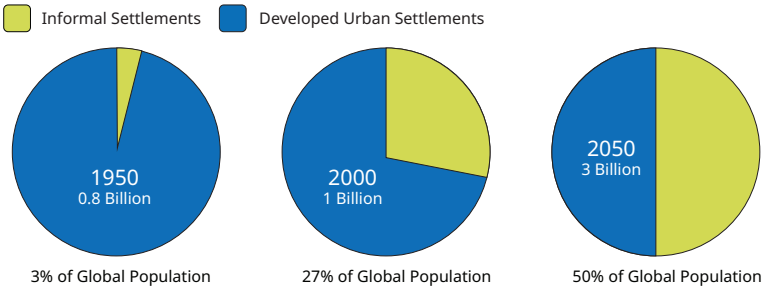
While only three percent of the global urban population in 1950, informal settlements will make up half urban populations in 2050. Informal settlements can be places of poverty and need but also places of human ingenuity and cultural mixing. New forms of urban community will be created in these informal contexts.

Informal settlements are the fastest growing aspect of urban life.

The highest concentration of informal settlements are found in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Central and Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have the largest proportion of their urban population living in slums.

Informal settlements are growing fastest in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and more slowly in Asia. In certain East Asia contexts, informal settlements are shrinking. Informal settlements are not just growing in population but also expanding in size and geography. They are constantly adapting to population influx, sporadic government interventions, resource availability, and the consequences of climate change.

URBAN SETTLEMENTS 1950-2050



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013

URBAN VS INFORMAL POPULATIONS 2018

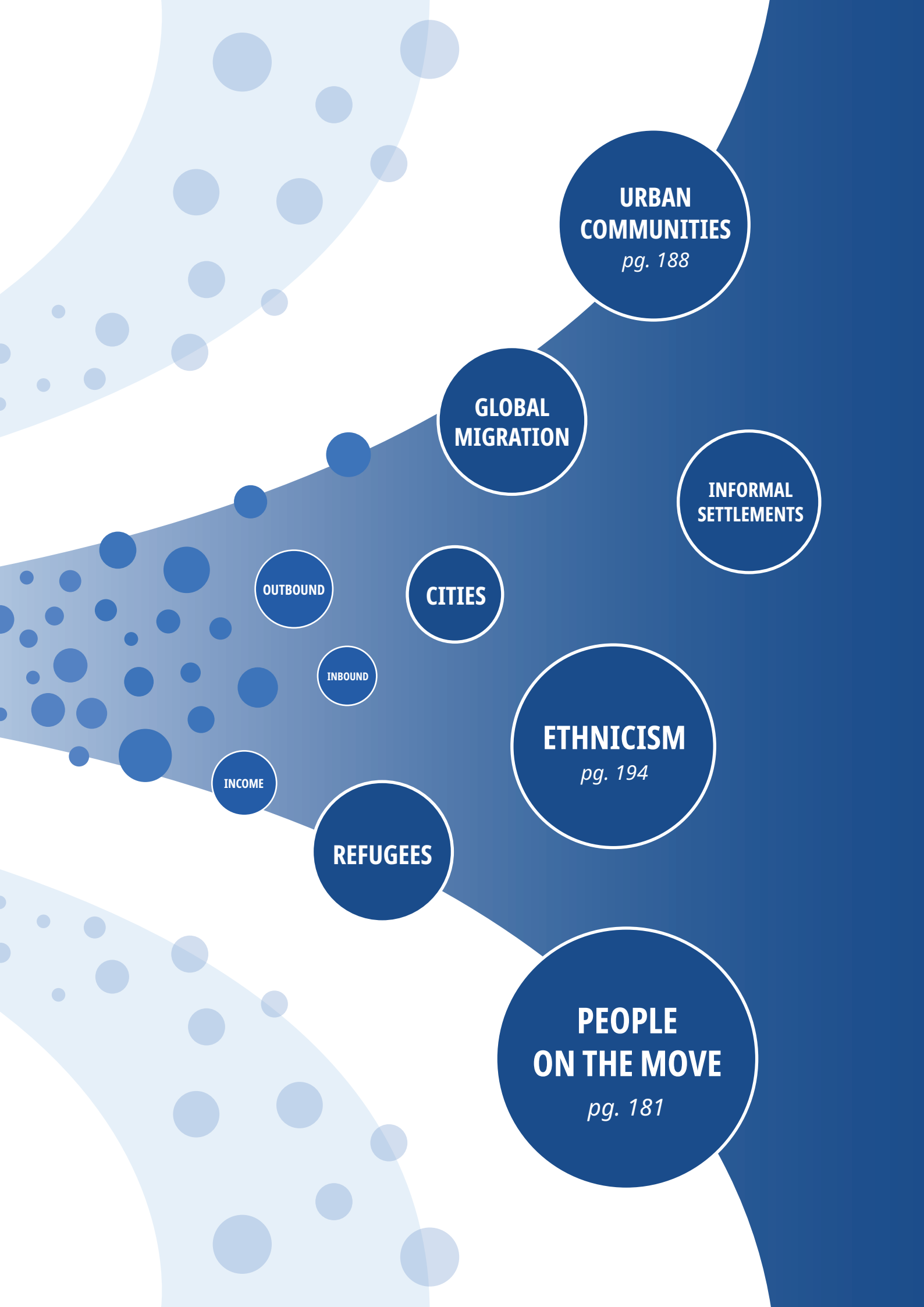


Source: United Nations Habitat, "World Cities Report 2020," pg. 318; O = Population Size

UNDERSTANDING

COMMUNITY




URBAN COMMUNITIES
pg. 188
GLOBAL MIGRATION
INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
OUTBOUND
CITIES
INBOUND
ETHNICISM
pg. 194
INCOME
REFUGEES
PEOPLE ON THE MOVE
pg. 181

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Edited Excerpt from Lausanne Occasional Paper

Introduction

Since the dawn of civilization, human beings have been on the move. Some people move in search of greener pastures, to find livelihood, to seek safety, for education, in search of employment, join family, for trade, to engage in business, or for sheer survival. Others move to escape from conflict, wars, violence, or persecution. Still others move because of adverse living conditions resulting from socioeconomic disruptions, natural disasters, or political upheavals. Human migration is a major global reality today and everyone is impacted by its far-reaching repercussions.

Human movements have emerged as one of the defining issues of our times as more people now live in a place other than where they were born than at any time in recorded history. The urge, scale, volume, speed, and direction of human migration have escalated to record levels over recent decades. As we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, the people on the move worldwide have accelerated to unprecedented levels. Human migration has become so pervasive since 2000 that the United Nations has designated December 18 of every year as 'International Migrants Day' and declared 2015 as 'The Year of the Migrant.'

> ***"As we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, the people on the move worldwide have accelerated to unprecedented levels."***

The goal of this article is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary issue of the movement of people and awaken the global church to understand the diasporic nature of the Christian faith and missional opportunities arising out of the large-scale human displacements. It hopes to help Christians grasp how the dispersed are transforming and advancing Christianity and to mobilize and resource the global church to engage and leverage diaspora communities worldwide.

World on the Move: We Are All Migrants

We are all either migrants or descendants of migrants. The story of some form of displacement is woven deeply into our very being, as it was for our ancestors so will it be for our progenies. Humankind is a migratory species. Modern societies, nations, economies, and politics have evolved from repeated human displacements. People move from the countryside to urban centers then to other cities and countries. As modes of economic activities evolve with the hopes of a better life, while others are forced to move for survival at the face of life-threatening circumstances, violence, instability or persecution.

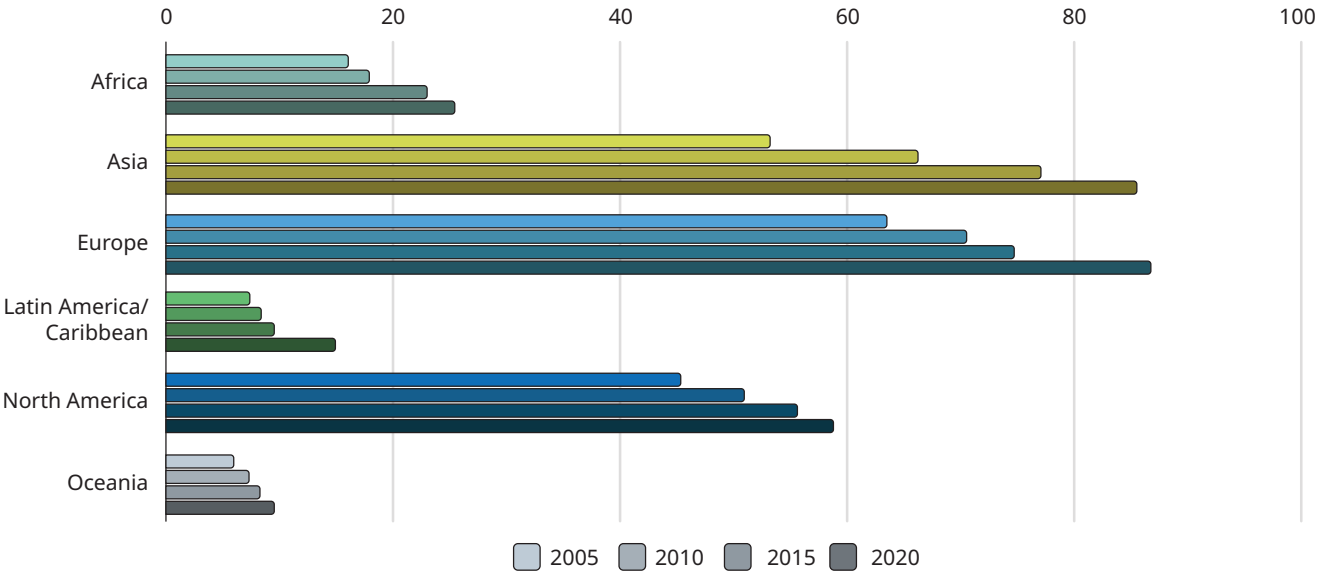
All migration research and forecasts predict that global human migration will continue to surge in the coming decades, and it will remain a central issue worldwide. The shift to renewable energy, inflationary pressure on national economies, new technologies of mobilities, autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, robotics, etc. will generate massive disruptions in our current socioeconomic order and it will not pan out fairly for all people in every nation, which in turn will increase outmigration out of many nations. We are at the cusp of a quantum leap in human mobility with flying cars, hyperloop, and supersonic planes. The depopulation of some urban centers, aging nations, and demographic shrinking of some nations will result in massive population shifts. Pandemics, inflation, climate change, wars, etc. will force more people to explore more livable places elsewhere in the world. All of that means more people will move in the next three decades than in the previous three centuries.

Growing Numbers: Data and Trends

A reliable source of most current data on global migration is hard to come by. The figures used by policymakers, demographers, government statisticians, census data scientists, journalists, nonprofits, and the public at large differ widely depending on their sources, definitions, methodologies, and the purpose of their reports. Another fact that makes this task challenging is that these data are dynamic and ever-changing. Counting migrants of many different kinds in different parts of the world on a regular basis is nearly impossible. Moreover, by the time any migration report is published, it may be considered obsolete, although it does not mean it is unhelpful at all.

The International Organization of Migration (IOM) of the United Nations tracks human migration from every nation and reports figures and trends by publishing a flagship report called the World Migration Report (WMR).[1] The WMR 2022 estimates that there are 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020 which amounts to 3.6 percent of the global population. Only one in 30 people in the world are migrants and the vast majority of people live in the countries where they were born, though many migrate to other places within their countries. Back in 2010, there were only 220 million international migrants in the world (about 3.2 percent of the world population) while in 2000, there were 173 million international migrants in the world which constituted (about 2.8 percent of the world population). In 1990, there were 152 million (2.9 percent), and in 1980, there were 102 million (2.3 percent), while in 1970 recorded 84 million international migrants in the world. In 2020, around 3900 migrants were reported dead or missing globally which is less than 5900 in 2019, though actual number of casualties will be countless more and continues to surge year after year.

Europe is currently the largest destination for international migrants, with 87 million (30.9 percent of the international migrants) followed closely by Asia with 86 million international migrants living there in 2022. North America is the destination for 59 million international migrants (20.9 percent), followed by Africa with 25 million migrants (nine percent). Over the past 15 years, the number of international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean has more than doubled from around seven million to 15 million, making it the region with the highest growth rate of international migrants and the destination for 5.3 percent of all international migrants. Around nine million international migrants live in Oceania, or about 3.3 percent of all migrants.



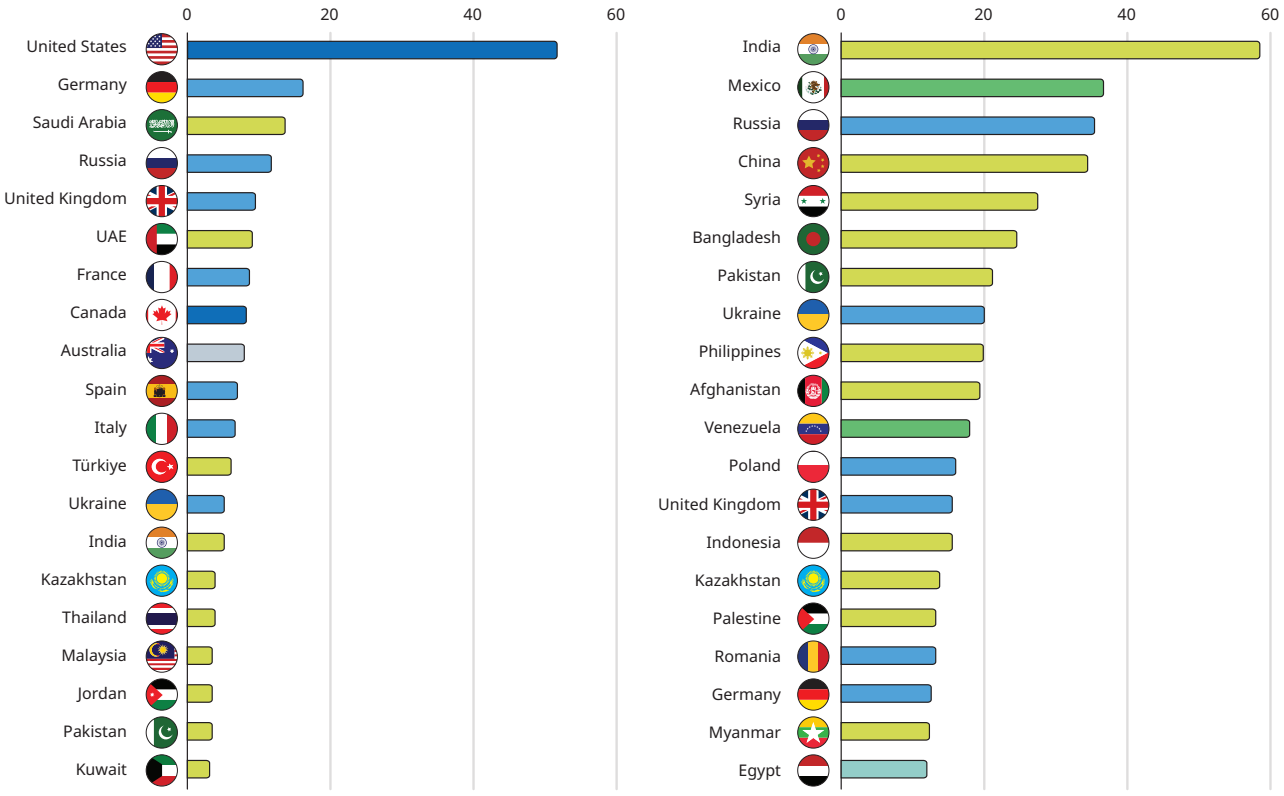
Source: World Migration Report 2022, United Nations

Figure 1: International Migrants by major region of residence 2005-2020 (in millions)

As India became the most populous nation in the world in 2023, it also has the highest emigrant population in the world (18 million). The next most migrant-sending countries are Mexico (11 million), Russia (10.8 million), and China (10 million). The fifth most migrant-originating country is the Syrian Arab Republic with 8 million, mostly as refugees because of the large-scale displacement arising out of war in the region over the last decade. The United States remained the largest migrant destination country in the world over the last 50 years and had 51 million international migrants as of 2022. The next most prominent destination is Germany with nearly 16 million international migrants while Saudi Arabia is the third largest destination country at 13 million. Russia had 12 million and the United Kingdom had 9 million migrants.

According to the UNHCR, by the end of 2022, there were 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced in the world as a result of persecution, human rights violation, war, violence or events seriously disturbing public order. This includes refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and others in need of international protection. There are 35.3 million refugees and 5.4 million asylum seekers in the world as of 2022. IDPs surged steeply in recent years to reach an all-time high of 62.5 million people in the world in 2022. About 52 percent of the refugees came from three countries namely, the Syrian Arab Republic (19%), Ukraine (16%), and Afghanistan (16%). The major refugee hosting nations are Turkey (3.6 M), Iran (3.4 M), Colombia (2.5 M), Germany (2.1 M), and Pakistan (1.7 M).

All the above figures and explanations fail to portray the scenario of contemporary global migration fully and accurately. The People on the Move is fast changing reality worldwide, and all figures and charts are outdated and do not depict ground realities. All data cited here would be superseded by more current data and readers are advised to visit the cited sources for the latest figures and trends in global migration. This makes the study of migrants and diaspora communities extremely



Source: World Migration Report 2022, United Nations

Figure 2: Top 20 destinations (left) and origins (right) of international migrants in 2020 (millions)

challenging as well as exciting as the number of migrants are ever evolving and all trends are constantly shifting.

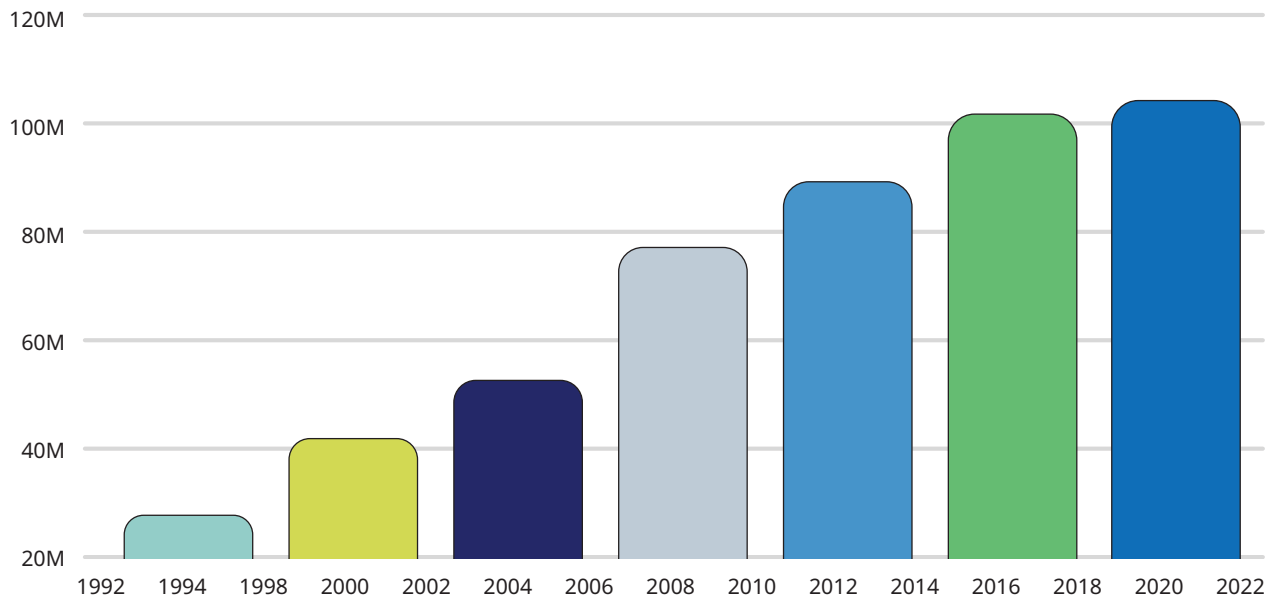
Finding the religious faith of immigrant communities is still harder to come by. The number of immigrant churches in Western nations are a fast-evolving reality that remains under the radar of host nation Christians and are generally underreported in Christian databases. Since most immigrant churches begin informally at homes or use rented facilities to conduct services in foreign languages with strong ties to their ancestral homelands, it is difficult to precisely assess the proliferation of new migrant churches worldwide. Christianity in the West is not declining, but immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America are reviving it and transforming it with renewed missional thrust.

People on the Move and Christian Mission

God is sovereign over human history and human dispersion. Apostle Paul in his Areopagus address at Athens during his second missionary journey clearly states:

And He has made from one man from every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, so that they should seek the Lord, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet, he is actually not far from each one of us; 'for in Him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed His offspring.' (Acts 17:26-28)

The fact that God creates nations (Gen 25:23; Psalm 86:9-10), God made provision for language and culture (Gen 11:1, 6, 7, 9) and He determines over the spatial and temporal dimensions of our habitation (Act 17:26). All of which serves missional purposes to bring God glory, edification of people and salvation of the lost. The displacement makes people inquisitive of others, question their inherited belief systems, marginalized in new settings, and seek devotion beyond the gods of the land and a savior who is universal beyond territorial deities. The dispersion of people is within the redemptive plan of God for human history. From the perspective of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, diasporas are the fulfillment of God's plan for a worldwide mission that may be called the 'missionhood of all believers.' Every nation counts on the presence, participation, and power (either good or bad) of diasporas (short-term, long-term, or those with acquired citizenship). All missionaries are migrants for having to cross national or cultural boundaries. Likewise, all



Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2022

Figure 5: Forcibly displaced people in the world 1992-2023 (in millions)

Christian migrants could be considered potential missionaries as they carry out the missionary functions of diffusing the gospel cross-culturally.

The term diaspora is widely used to describe all people who live in a place other than where they were born. Another associated Greek word is Ecclesia, meaning gathering which is often translated as the church. God scatters people and scattered ones are gathered while the gathered ones are scattered for God's mission in the world. The scattering and gathering of people are twin corresponding, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing archetypes to understand the mission of God in the world in the twenty-first-century context where mission flow, resources, and influence can arise from anywhere in the world and be directed anywhere else in the world. As we now live in an unprecedented age in the history of Christianity when there are Christians in every country of the world (geopolitical entity, not ethno-linguistic group), the gospel has truly reached the ends of the Earth and is bouncing back from the edges to gain new momentum worldwide. The radical reversal in the cultural and demographic composition of the global church is rendering a new face of Christianity and forging new collaborative alliances that will accelerate global missions in the 21st century.

The Diaspora factor forces us to consider Christianity as a universal faith with great diversity within and a healthy sense of mutuality with each other globally. It accelerates the advance of the gospel and mission work gains new momentum on account of diasporas. It enables the margins to become new centers of Christianity while remaining local everywhere. It is pneumatologically empowered global missiology that unleashes the missional potential of every Christian everywhere together to hasten the mission of God in the world. Christian Mission is no more from the West to the Rest, but from everywhere to everywhere. It allows multiple centers of Christianity, and the missionary flow occurs in many different directions (polycentric and omnidirectional). Everywhere has become a mission field as well as a mission force.

Diaspora Missions

The field of diaspora missions seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities of Christian missions among the dispersed peoples of the world, considering their unique cultural, social, and religious contexts. Diaspora Missions are the ways and means of fulfilling the Great Commission by ministering to and through diaspora peoples.

> ***"The diaspora factor forces us to consider Christianity as a universal faith with great diversity within and a healthy sense of mutuality with each other globally."***

Diaspora Missiology needs to be differentiated from traditional missiology along four distinctive lines such as its perspective, paradigm, ministry patterns, and ministry style. While the traditional missiology was geographically defined (leading to foreign vs. local or urban vs. rural), diaspora missiology is non-spatial since the unevangelized people cannot be solely defined geographically anymore and they are not bound within any national boundaries or latitudes. It challenged numerous established mission strategies such as the 10/40 window and geopolitical designations. The traditional missiology concentrated on the Old Testament paradigm of come (gentile-proselyte) and the New Testament paradigm of go (Great Commission), while diaspora missiology in contrast focused on the new reality of the 21st century where people are viewed as moving targets and mission as moving with the target audiences. In traditional missiology, the ministry pattern was sending missionaries and providing financial support while diaspora missiology recognizes a new way of doing mission among and with people who are at our doorsteps and every Christian as a missionary.

Diaspora mission embraces the growing reality of contemporary mass movement of people which results in an interconnected world and the inevitable formation of diverse and multicultural communities in various countries. Consequently, traditional mission approaches

were primarily centered around sending missionaries to foreign countries, now need to engage the diaspora populations everywhere. The former mission-sending nations have now become mission fields and some of the migrants from former mission fields are engaged in reaching fellow immigrants and peoples of their host nations. The world is now in our neighborhoods and all Christians need to be awakened to this reality and equipped to reach all people everywhere. Diaspora mission demands the need to contextualize the Christian message and practices to multiple specific sociocultural and religious contexts in multiple locations simultaneously. It requires everyone in every church to bear Spirit-empowered Christian witness to all people every day. It emphasizes the role of Christians in host countries as bridge builders between diaspora communities and the local church by acting as advocates, mediators, and translators to facilitate dialogue and providing help to integrate well into the society while being transformed through relationships.

Furthermore, Diaspora missions often encourages multilingual ministries as most migrants retain their native languages. Since all spiritual matters are often sensed in heart languages, learning foreign languages, teaching dominant language of the host nations, and offering small groups and church services in multiple languages become vitally important. Diaspora missions also recognize, value, and leverage the transnational ties of diaspora communities to have a kingdom impact by building partnerships with families and churches in their ancestral homelands.

The very transnational nature of diaspora communities whose relationships, resources, and influences between nations transcend geopolitical conceptions of missions. Diaspora missions involve a holistic approach that addresses the spiritual, social, and practical needs of the diaspora communities in a foreign land by providing social services, language classes, job assistance, and community support besides gospel sharing, especially those displaced under dire circumstances. It addresses issues of identity, belonging, social cohesion, and intercultural competencies as people navigate their lives in foreign lands while gradually over time and generations assimilating into host realities and maintaining (declining for some) ties with ancestral homelands. Overall, diaspora missions encompasses a global multi-directional view of Christianity where mission occurs from everywhere to everywhere.

Diaspora Missiology is conventionally divided into three paradigms: First, Mission to the Diasporas, which focuses on ministering to unreached peoples of the world who are now living among or near to Christians and how congregations in receiving countries can practice missions at their doorsteps by reaching the newcomers in their neighborhood without having to go abroad. The uprooted and transplanted peoples are open to the gospel in foreign lands and do not have any socio-cultural hindrances or inhibition to switch faith allegiance. They compare and contrast their inherited faith with those of others and come closer to the gospel witness after moving to new locales, especially those coming from regions where Christianity is a minority faith or Christians are persecuted. The people in transition are more receptive of the gospel and in need of Christian hospitality and charity.

"Overall, diaspora missions encompasses a global multi-directional view of Christianity where mission occurs from everywhere to everywhere."

Secondly, Mission through the Diasporas whereby the diaspora Christians are evangelizing their kinsmen in their adopted homelands, and other fellow immigrants from other parts of the world. These migrants serve as cross-cultural missionaries just as all missionaries are migrants. It is the physical displacement of Christians that causes the gospel to diffuse across cultures to new people in new places. Moreover, Christians make up the largest religious diaspora and are more open to going to the 'ends of the Earth' than others, knowing they will find Christians no matter where they go. The truism may hold some ground that 'if you are Christian, you will travel and if you travel, you will become a Christian.'

Thirdly, Mission beyond the Diasporas wherein Diaspora Christians are engaged in reach-

ing members of the host nation, has missional influence on people back in their homelands or minister across geographies and cultures to other peoples. Diaspora peoples are cross-cultural bridges with an uncanny ability and experience in multiple worlds who need to be mobilized as self-supported missionaries to have gospel impact on their immediate physical settings as well as their wide relational networks. They become natural translators, always explaining one world to the other because of which they become like evangelists of their views and beliefs. Since migratory displacement is fundamentally a theologizing experience, they seek to answer deeper questions about life, purpose, and ultimacy. Their spiritual vitality and insights are a tremendous asset to any existing congregation in the host society and they are motivated to establish new faith communities.

> ***"Christianity is a missionary faith par excellence since it is a faith that was born to travel."***

Diaspora missions is not just about ministering to four percent of the world's population who are international migrants nor the latest fad in mission studies. Since all of us are migrants and not native to the places we call home, we must view Christian faith as diasporic. Christian faith is always moving because our God is always on the move. Christian doctrines and theology of mission need to be reconceived as God on the Move (Motus Dei), for all static conceptions of God is idolatrous–as they are territorial and oppressive making their devotees motionless and lifeless. The Christian faith cannot be bound to a location or domesticated by any people because its nature is to break free of the prisons we enshrine it in. Seeing God as a living and moving being on mission is consistent with the biblical, historical and ongoing work of God in a moving world.

Conclusion

Christianity is a missionary faith par excellence since it is a faith that was born to travel. In fact, the mobility of its adherents and the moving nature of God are what make the Christian faith a transportable and translatable faith, as it continually transcends borders of all kinds over time. Seeing God as a moving being and his ongoing work as a result of the moving of God is a helpful way to develop a theology and missiology for a world in motion. The migrants, displaced, and diasporas are at the forefront of God's mission in the world today. As evident in the earlier eras of Christianity, the people on the move are powerful agents of growth, spread, and transformation of God's work in the world and will continue to shape the contours of the advancement of Christianity in the 21st century and beyond.

Endnotes

1 UN Migration. "World Migration Report." Access August 15, 2023. https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/.

Authors

This position paper was prepared by the Diaspora Issue Network of the Lausanne Movement. The principal author is Dr. Sam George and was written in August 2023. This paper was developed with inputs from the executive team of the Global Diaspora Network comprising of Dr. T.V. Thomas (Malaysia/Canada), Dr. Bulus Galadima (Nigeria/USA), Rev. Barnabas Moon (South Korea), Rev. Art Medina (the Philippines), Dr. Paul Sydnor (France), Rev. Joel Wright (Brazil/USA), Dr. Elizabeth Mburu (Kenya), Dr. Hannah Hyun (Australia/South Korea), Dr. Jeanne Wu (Taiwan/USA), Dr. John Park (South Korea/USA), and Dr. Godfrey Harold (South Africa)

URBAN COMMUNITIES

Afia Darkwa, Kavitha Emmanuel, Mac Pier

The Current and Potential Future of Cities

How many Christians do you think there were in the year AD 100 compared to just 200 years later just before Emperor Constantine? The answer is the staggering.

In AD 100 there were as few as 25,000 Christians. Then a few hundred years later in AD 310 there were up to 20,000,000 Christians. [1]

How did this happen? Christianity grew 800x in 200 years because the early church went to strategic urban centers in Western Asia and Southern Europe. The entire New Testament can be understood as Jesus' mission to die in Jerusalem as the religious capital of the world and Paul going to die in Rome as the political capital of the world. The early church was an urban church planting movement.

The explosive church growth of the first century needs to inform 21st century church strategy

In 2023 the global population surpassed 8 billion people. It is forecasted by the United Nations that the global population will grow to 9.735 billion people by 2050. Of that population, 68.4 percent will be urban dwellers.[2] By continent, Asia represents 60 percent of the global population and Africa represents 17 percent. In other words, more than three quarters of the world lives in Asia and Africa. In the world today, there are 48 'mega cities' with more than 10 million people each. Of these 48 cities, 29 are in Asia, four are in Africa, three are in Europe, three are in South America, and three are in North America.

If demographers are correct, the fastest growing continent for Christianity will be Africa. According to the data in the World Christian Database the African church will grow numerically by nearly 600 million people (692 million to 1.28 billion) from 2022 to 2050. Given that the average age for Africans is currently 19, investing into the lives of young African leaders is of highest priority.

The *City Vision* graphic 'Circle of Significance', a visual aid showing a large circle spanning much of Asia, provides a stunning analysis:[3]

- 29 megacities of 10 million or more are in this circle
- Over 50 percent of the global population lives in this circle
- 99 percent of all Hindus live in this circle
- 98 percent of all Buddhists live in this circle
- 60 percent of all Muslims live in this circle
- Christians comprise 9 percent of the Asian population

If indeed two-thirds of the world by 2050 will be living in cities, and predominantly in the cities of Africa and Asia, further reflection is needed for the church on those emerging dynamics.

Opportunities and Challenges – Exploration of the African Context

Throughout history, God has called His servants to address the gospel to cities. At no time has this been more urgent than in today's urbanizing world and never has it been truer that he who wins the city wins the world. The church is to move quickly to make its impact on the city before the city reshapes the church.[4] To understand the opportunities and challenges cities present, we turn to Africa.

Africa in the centre of global Christianity

Africa is home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population and many are moving to the city, urbanizing more rapidly than any other part of the planet. Africa's 1.1 billion citizens will likely double in number by 2050. Africa's youth population is growing faster than any other region, with 70 percent of the population being under the age of 30. Young people now account for about 20 per-

cent of the total population, 40 percent of the workforce and 60 percent of the unemployed.[5]

An interesting dynamic, however, is the fact that Africa has two flourishing and expanding faiths— Christianity and Islam—and both are profiting from the demographic expansion going on currently. The church in Africa is currently experiencing a surge in numerical growth, consequently making Christianity the continent's leading religion, and even now emerging as the global 'center of gravity of Christianity.' Professor Andrew Walls observes, 'it is Africans and Asians and Latin Americans who will be the representative Christians, those who represent the Christian norm, the Christian mainstream, of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries.'[6] What is the quality of that representation? What impact are the prosperity gospel, nominalism, syncretism, and compromise of biblical faith having on the quality of representation?

The opportunities and challenges of urban Africa

Many African megacities such as Lagos, Cairo, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Khartoum already struggle to absorb the bulk of the urban population. This results in urban poverty with all the main conditions of overcrowded living: congestion, unemployment, stark inequalities, a lack of social and community networks. This also is accompanied by crippling social problems including crime, violence, inadequate basic infrastructure, and low standards of living. In Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 60 percent of urban residents live in slums.[7] Despite tremendous growth, however, the church in Africa still lacks the influence and impact one would expect it to have. The church is described as being one mile long and one inch deep.

Embracing the season of opportunities

The World Cities Report 2022, developed by the United Nations Habitat, presents this critical challenge: 'cities that are socially inclusive and work for all their residents are better positioned to face environmental, public health, economic, social and any other variety of shock or stress, as cities are only as strong as their weakest link.'[8]

Does the church in Africa have strategies for urban mission that can satisfy the needs of the city, serving its 'weakest link'? Can the church develop strategies, enabling productive relationships to be built, to address the primary issues of the people they serve, and to develop strong leaders, faithful organizations, and redeemed neighborhoods that live out shalom?[9] Is the church able to see the potential of unlocking the pew: training and equipping every member to be light, salt, and leaven in every corner of the community? Can Africa lead a second reformation of discipling, equipping, and releasing every member to fulfill their calling as saints, priests, ambassadors, and as salt, light, and leaven?[10] Transforming urban communities can happen only when movements are unleashed.[11]

I see in the emerging Africa cities gospel movement, championed by Movement.org, strong elements that enable leaders to develop relationships around urban mission, embracing the gospel in its totality, knowing the city, loving the city, and serving the city together.

Additional Opportunities – Exploration of the Asian Context

Women are a significant part of the church and its mission numerically anywhere in the world. This is certainly true in the cities of the world. To understand the opportunities women in cities, present to accelerate change, this section will look particularly at the reality in South Asia.

The significance of women in cities

Gina Zurlo, Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, says that 52 percent of global Christianity is female.[12] This reality is not new. It has existed since the time of Christ — from the foot of the cross to the pioneering of the early church. Women throughout history have contributed significantly to revivals, missionary work, and church planting movements.

The first church in the Tirunelveli District (also a city) in South India was built by a woman named Rasa Clarinda, an Indian Missionary and the first convert in her town (now a city)

in 1785. This is the same region where Amy Carmichael founded the Dohnavur fellowship in 1901 and is known for her rescue and rehabilitation work among women and girls forced into prostitution. Both these women transformed the culture and the stereotypes of their day in the regions they worked, influencing laws, customs, and practices that were oppressive. Their influence won many to Christ. This region is today one of the regions with a higher population of Christ followers (11 percent or more).

What follows below is five opportunities to accelerate change in cities, as seen through the South Asian context.

City movements

City movements in the South Asian region are witnessing a growth spurt, which is initiating wake up calls for the church to respond to the challenges faced by women. The Disruptive Women's Movement was launched in September 2021 under the Movement South Asia network to mobilize kingdom women for leadership in city movements. Since its launch, the movement has had an overwhelming response. Both men and women across 30 cities in the region want to see change and are gearing up for a Disruptive Women's chapter in their cities. About 50 leaders (again both women and men) from 15 cities across South Asia are planning a strategic summit in 2023 in India to forge their way forward in building a Disruptive Women Network's presence in their cities.

Nonprofits

The response of the church in South Asia to the cries of pain of women and girls has seen the birth of a significant number of nonprofit organizations in the region focusing on rehabilitative work. Leading pioneers in this are globally recognized nonprofits like World Vision, International Justice Mission, Compassion International, and several others. In recent times there are also several indigenous nonprofits like Women of Worth, Lighthouse Disha, and several others initiated by women for women. Bringing about a collaboration of these well-established international nonprofits with the indigenous nonprofits that are making a difference can accelerate impact. This could be a strategic move with the international nonprofits facing the threat of closure in the region because of growing persecution.

Marketplace

City movements are today actively building and investing in marketplace initiatives in the region. Conscious effort to include women in these initiatives both at the leadership and participatory levels can accelerate the reach of the gospel to women in workplaces. There is a growing community of Christ followers who are committed to developing marketplace disciples who see business as missions.

Churches as safe spaces

With the alarming rate of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the region, churches could be equipped to become safe spaces in the city for women and girls. A growing example in this regard is Chennai in South India, a city with about 6,000 churches. There is literally a local church in every pin code. If all of these churches became safe spaces for women there would be significant gospel disruption in the city. But, statistically, churches are seen as more regressive than the world. A recent survey conducted by the Chennai Transformation Network reveals that 56 percent of women within the church have faced some form of abuse. Only 17 percent feel that the church helped them in some way. The good news here is that the Chennai Transformation Network (CTN) is rising up to the challenge of enabling churches to become safe spaces in the city.

Changing the narrative

The Theological Research and Communications Institute (TRACI) in India in their survey on domestic violence were surprised to find that women in the church are more silent about abuse than those outside because of the way women are being discipled. Most sermons focus on how women should be silent in the church rather than on how they are kingdom assets. There is an urgent need to change the sort of narrative that discourages women from looking to the church as a sanctuary from abuse.

Resources that can change the narrative

Today, the South Asian region has numerous formal theological associations and institutions who are trying to orchestrate a change in the narrative for women in kingdom initiatives.13 Churches in the South Asian region are also rising to make an impact like the Assembly of God Church, and local churches like Avatar in Mumbai, and Powerhouse Churches in Chennai to name a few are leading the way in enabling women as kingdom leaders both in the church and in city movements. Non-formal training entities like the City-to-City, Asian Access, and the Movement Day Scholars Program14 are also helping close the gap in the narrative for women. Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) are hoping to launch their India chapter in 2023 which is likely to have an impact in the South Asian region. There are other organizations across medical, technical, art, and other spheres which could be collaborated with to mold the mindsets of future generations.[15]

What is critical at this juncture is that there be collaborative conversations among several entities trying to change the narrative for women. City movements have a significant role to play in giving a place and space for these conversations. Movement Day Asia Cities held in Singapore in 2022 and Movement Day Middle East held in Dubai in March 2023 were strategic platforms for conversations on the need to radically transform the Kingdom narrative in these regions to include women as co-leaders in the transformation of cities.

Mobilizing women for kingdom impact is both strategic and significant. A disruptive mobilizing of kingdom women in city movements and churches can pave the way for safer cities and flourishing women.

Key Ways to Reach Cities

Young people and cities

There are two macro shifts happening in the world and the church simultaneously. As noted already above, the world is urbanizing. The other simultaneous reality for the global church is that young people are leaving the church in droves. In his article 'The Great Opportunity', Joshua Crossman forecasts that the United States will lose half of its churches by 2050 if the trend continues.[16] In 2015, while with Lausanne leadership in Cairo, the statement was made that the greatest challenge to the church in 2015 was not ISIS but young people leaving the church. The implications of this for the Great Commission are strikingly simple and profound. A significant strategic priority of the global church needs to be reaching young people in big cities. We need to recognize the outsized influence of the great global centers of cities like London, New York, Nairobi, Sao Paulo, Singapore, Dubai, and the great population centers of China.

Ecosystems in cities

The best way to understand how the gospel grows in a city is captured by Tim Keller's writings in *Center Church*.[17] The thesis is that in almost every city there is an ecosystem of churches, non-profit, Christian marketplace leaders, and sympathetic civic leaders. When the ecosystem matures relationally there is an increased appetite to make a difference together in unity for the city.

Unity in cities

To accelerate the gospel in cities, marketplace leader engagement is a critical success factor. But the speed of the gospel in a city is in proportion to the depth of unity between members of the same ecosystem. Unity grows from spending time together intentionally with diverse leaders in the same city. For more than 30 years we have convened 6000 leaders to gather for three days of prayer each January. This is happening all over the world in very diverse movements.

Relational alliances and aggregation of best practices

Movements require two primary elements: the formation of relational alliances which builds strength into various expressions of the gospel and the aggregation of best practices. The Church Multiplication Alliance, which began in 2003, helped catalyze a 500 percent growth in church attendance in Manhattan from 1989-2014. Churches ten years and younger are 8x more effective in reaching new people than

ten years and older. Every city needs multiple alliances and none more important than an alliance to reach the next generation.

A second primary element is the aggregation of best practices. In our cities we need to aggregate diverse expressions of prayer movements, campus work, church planting, marketplace efforts, and beyond. Aggregating is the capture of who is doing what and finding points of intersection to work together intelligently. We need to aggregate knowledge about our cities – their history, demographics, the greatest challenges, and the opportunity to work together city by city. Having congresses like Lausanne, Movement Day, Arise Asia, and many other diverse gatherings provide momentum for the gospel in cities. In 1981, it was said that 70 percent of all interdenominational missionaries from the United States got their calling at the Urbana Missions Conference.

We need alliances in cities that can meaningfully invite the whole church to collaborate together as never before, especially for the sake of the next generation. We need to invite next generation young people to shape, design, and lead efforts that can be transformative. Movements are often started by leaders under the age of 28. Now is the time to empower the next generation to tackle the challenges of cities for the sake of the great commission.

Endnotes

1 Stephen T. Um & Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter,* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishing, 2013), 123.

2 Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2022).

3 John A Meyer, "Circle of Significance*,"* Accessed. October 4, 2022, https://cityvisiontc.org/circle-of-significance.

4 Roger Greenway, *Apostles to the City: Biblical Strategies to Urban Missions*, (Baker Book House, 1978).

5 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/Africa-urbanization-cities-double-population-2050.

6 Andrew F. Walls, "Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *Transformation* 19, no. 4, (October 2002).

7 UN Habitat. (2016). "Urbanization and Development Emerging Futures," World Cities Report. http://wcr.unhabitat.org/).

8 UN Habitat (2022), "Envisaging the Future of Cities," World Cities Report. https://unhabitat.org/wcr/.

9 R. C. Linthicum, *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities* (Authentic and World Vision, 2006).

10 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20

11 'But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.' Acts 8:4 (NLT)

12 Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed June 2023).

13 Examples include Asia Theological Association (ATA), South Asian Bible College (An Assembly of God Institution), The South Asian Advanced Christian Studies (SIACS), Caleb Institute, and Filadelfia Bible College.

14 The Movement Day Scholars Program has contributed significantly to the growth of the voice of Disruptive Women Movement in South Asia.

15 Future resources that can be mobilized to equip the Alpha generation in this conversation are organizations like The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the collaboration of leading Christian schools founded by missionaries like, Hebron and the Kodaikanal International School. In the medical sphere, *eg* CMC; technical *eg* Karunya; art *eg*. Madras Christian College).

16 Joshua Crossman, www.thegreatopportunity.org, 2018.

17 Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 368.

Authors

Afia Darkwa is the Team Leader of Hopespring Foundation, a Ministry resourcing organization focusing on holistic discipleship and 'phygital' ministry among children and young adults. Co-Facilitator for Accra City and Ghana Gospel Movements, General Secretary for Oikosnet Africa: The Association of Christian Lay Centers, promoting laity formation, leadership development and Ecumenical learning across Africa.

Dr Kavitha Emmanuel is a pioneer of initiatives that bring gospel disruption into toxic culture. She launched the globally recognized campaign Dark is Beautiful to address colorism. Her recent endeavor Disruptive Women, a Movement South Asia initiative, is a network committed to mobilizing women as leaders in city gospel movements.

Dr Mac Pier is the founder of Movement.org and a 40-year resident of New York City. He has served the Lausanne Movement since 2013 as the Co-Catalyst for cities. He cofounded Movement Day with Tim Keller in 2010. He and his wife Marya have three adult children and five grandchildren.

ETHNICISM

David Chao, Soojin Chung, Alice Yafeh-Deigh

Israel was not ethnically monolithic, and the Bible clearly addresses the issue of ethnicism or ethnocentrism. In Luke 10:33, a Samaritan, a foreigner despised by Jewish people, was the one who exemplified compassion. In Luke 17:16, when Jesus healed the ten lepers, a Samaritan was the only person who came back to Jesus with humble gratitude. The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 shows that God confounded the language of people according to familial relationships and tribes of people, not according to their skin color or physical characteristics. Unfortunately, people throughout history have interpreted the Bible inaccurately to justify ethnic and racial discrimination. One example could be found in Genesis 9, where the curse of Canaan being the 'servant of servants' was used to justify the slavery of Africans. Many people believed that Ham's descendants, who were cursed, were racially black. This article examines the history of ethnicism and Christianity and discusses implications for the Church and Great Commission efforts.

History of Ethnicism in World Christianity

Latin America

Historically, Christianity has been used to both justify and fight against ethnicism. Race and ethnic issues have been especially prominent in Latin America and Africa in the colonial and post-colonial eras. When conquistadores from Spain and Portugal subjugated the new continent at the beginning of the sixteenth century, they viewed their work as a religious crusade and used force to Christianize the natives. Moreover, they enslaved the indigenous population and exploited them economically. In 1552, Bartolome de Las Casas, a Dominican priest, rebuked the atrocities of the enslavement of indigenous people in his book A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies. His publication played a significant role in the abolishment of the indigenous slave system. To compensate for the lack of an indigenous workforce, the Spanish and Portuguese settlers started to import African slaves to Latin America between 1650 and 1860.

A massive African slave industry resulted in racial mixing among the indigenous population, Africans, and Europeans. A strict racial hierarchy was created, and indigenous people and African slaves were harshly discriminated against. The Spanish and Portuguese settlers' racial attitudes had been formed during their religious crusade against the Muslims who had conquered the Iberian Peninsula in the 700s. European Christians viewed dark-skinned Muslims from North Africa as intruders and began to associate dark skin with heathenism. During the reconquest, the triumphalism and hatred toward dark-skinned Muslims were at their peak in the Iberian Peninsula. Race and religion became intricately intertwined, and Spanish and Portuguese Christians became defensive of their Christian faith and 'purity of blood.' Indigenous people and African slaves were treated as inferior beings who were unable to have full spiritual insight. They were prohibited from many civic and religious privileges and were segregated from people of European descent. They were not permitted to be ordained or join religious orders. While the racial hierarchy system no longer exists, ethnicism continues to affect Latin American churches today.

> ***"While the racial hierarchy system no longer exists, ethnicism continues to affect Latin American churches today."***

Latin American Christians continued discovering new, creative ways to indigenize Christianity and bring racial liberation. A prime example would be Lady Guadalupe, an indigenized Virgin Mary of Latin America. Traditionally, it is believed that the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a poor indigenous worker in Mex-

ico City. The Virgin Mary, or Guadalupe, was an indigenous woman in her Latin American dress. She gave a message of hope and compassion for all people, bringing comfort to indigenous Christians who had suffered from violence from the settlers. Lady Guadalupe serves as a symbol of compassion, hope, and racial liberation for Latin American Catholics.

Africa

Race issues are deeply interwoven in church history in Africa, especially in South Africa. In 1948, apartheid became the official law, affecting every dimension of South African citizens' lives. Apartheid referred to racial separatism, and people were classified according to race and were forced to live accordingly. Through the 1950s, a series of laws put economic, educational, political, and religious restrictions on Africans. Many advocates of apartheid argued that apartheid had biblical grounds, and even church leaders supported the separation of races. Using the tower of Babel analogy, the religious supporters of apartheid argued that churches, among other gatherings, must be separated according to race because people were created differently and God willed separateness.

Apartheid was challenged in 1982 when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared it was a heresy to support racial separatism. WARC emphasized the unity of common humanity, especially the communion among Christians. In 1985, mainly black South African theologians issued the Kairos Document based on liberation theology. Other parts of the world began to challenge racial injustice in South Africa. American churches and companies started disinvestment and economic boycotts. South Africa was denied loans from the world banking system. Apartheid officially ended in 1990 when South African President F.W. de Klerk released Nelson Mandela from prison. Nelson Mandela was the leader of the African National Congress and had been imprisoned for twenty-seven years.

Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1996. TRC's ultimate goal was forgiveness and reconciliation, but Tutu made it clear that true healing and reconciliation were impossible without confession and repentance. Many African countries believe in the philosophy of ubuntu, which refers to the interconnectedness of all humanity. According to this ideology, all human beings are dependent and responsible for one another, thus emphasizing the communal aspect of religious experience. Tutu also utilized ubuntu as the primary driving theology of TRC.

Around the world, ethnocentrism, racism, and xenophobia continue to be a problem, and churches have the ability and responsibility to play a prophetic role. Pew research shows that younger generations are more keenly aware of the connection between their faith and social responsibilities, demonstrating that by 2050, churches' engagement will increase in the fight against ethnicism.

"Around the world, ethnocentrism, racism, and xenophobia continue to be a problem, and churches have the ability and responsibility to play a prophetic role."

Implication of Ethnicism for the World and the Church

As we near 2050, the intersection of ethnicity, globalization, and diversity becomes increasingly crucial. This section explores the impact of ethnicity on global dynamics, the Christian church, and the reinterpretation of the 'Great Commission[1].' Ethnicity presents challenges and opportunities for the global church's mission of unity within diversity. This era is pivotal for the church to address ethnic identities, global interactions, and evangelization approaches. A key challenge is the church's historical role in colonial oppression[2]. Addressing these issues is vital for promoting global peace, effective evangelism, and discipleship across ethnic groups. Understanding ethnicity's complex impact is essential for future strategies aligned with the Great Commission in a pluralistic world.

Impact on the world

Ethnicism, in the context of an increasingly globalized world, profoundly influences global sociopolitical landscapes, impacting the church and its Great Commission mission up to 2050. Globalization, driven by technological advancements, facilitates interconnectedness, promoting the exchange of ideas and traditions among ethnic groups. This potentially reduces barriers, fostering effective communication and cooperation, thus benefiting the underlying goal of the Great Commission. It encourages cross-cultural dialogue, shaping the church into a boundary-crossing, socially engaged community receptive to the gospel across ethnic lines.[3]

> ***"Ethnicity presents challenges and opportunities for the global church's mission of unity within diversity."***

However, globalization can also exacerbate ethnic conflicts and divisions. Dominant cultures and international corporations may marginalize certain groups, and migration can lead to social dislocation, intolerance, and discrimination. These negative aspects challenge the church's mission, creating distrust and hostility and hindering the spread of the gospel among conflicting groups. Acknowledging ethnicism's dual potential to both unite and divide is crucial. A proactive approach is needed to shape global relations and religious missions, maximizing positive impacts while mitigating negative ones.

Impact on the church

Missionay activities in developing countries have faced criticism for perpetuating imperialism and colonialism[4]. These activities were often seen as part of the colonial project, demonizing local cultures as inferior[5]. Critics like Musa Dube and GM Soares-Prabhu argue that missionaries were, knowingly or unknowingly, imperial agents. Their activities were used for cultural domination, imposing foreign values and norms, and undermining indigenous cultures and languages.[6] The goal was not just conversion but also acculturation to Western standards, reinforcing colonizers' hegemony[7].

Additionally, there is a need to address the historical perspectives, especially the gendered nature of the Great Commission. In postcolonial settings, this commission has been used to reinforce patriarchal structures, marginalizing women's voices and religious experiences.[8] Consequently, many postcolonial communities have reinterpreted the Great Commission, detaching it from colonial and patriarchal legacies. They have reimagined it as a call for social justice, liberation, and affirmation of indigenous cultures and female leadership within the church.

As the world progresses towards 2050, the global church is anticipated to transform, especially in how the Great Commission is perceived and enacted. The hope is to shift toward a more dynamic dialogue influenced by diverse human experiences rather than a static approach. The Great Commission missionary mandate is expected to be subject to continuous contextualization, reinterpretation, and resonance with local cultures' histories and identities. The aim is to foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive interpretation of the Great Commission, enhancing its relevance in an increasingly interconnected yet diverse world.

Impact on the Great Commission

The Great Commission, in the context of ethnicism, presents significant interpretative challenges.[9] Understanding this within the Bible's contextual framework is crucial, especially regarding its implications for evangelism until 2050. Central to this discourse is the Judeo-Christian belief from Genesis 1:26–27, which asserts that every human is created imago Dei (in God's image), establishing individuals' intrinsic worth regardless of ethnicity. This principle is echoed in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)[10], which dismantles ethnic prejudices and underscores sacrificial love towards all neighbors. Such narratives can guide intercultural dialogue and mutual respect.

The Acts of the Apostles offers further insights. Peter's realization in Acts 10:34–35[11] emphasizes God's impartiality and promotes inclusivity, counteracting ethnocentric biases. The Jerusalem Council's resolutions (Acts 15) and theological claims in Galatians 3:28 and

1 Corinthians 9:20–23 present inclusive paradigms for Christian engagement, subverting unequal power relations and challenging ethnocentrism while preserving individual ethnocultural identities[12].

Ethnicism can be harnessed positively to build bridges and engage in cross-cultural missions. The eschatological vision in Revelation 7:9[13] exemplifies a faith community transcending ethnic boundaries. Given ethnicism's challenges to the church, the biblical model encourages recognizing each person's inherent value and advocates for unity and mutual understanding across ethnic divides. This approach provides a theologically grounded strategy for addressing ethnic relations within global Christian witness and evangelism up to 2050 and beyond.

> ***"Ethnicism can be harnessed positively to build bridges and engage in cross-cultural missions."***

Understanding the Great Commission in Christian contexts has evolved significantly, especially in postcolonial settings. While credited for advancing education and healthcare globally, its history is marred by instances where missionaries, intertwined with colonial powers, disrupted local cultures and values. This association has painted Christian missions with the brush of colonial oppression. As ethnicism rises globally, the church faces a pivotal moment. This rise could significantly and unpredictably affect global communities and religious landscapes. Influenced by ethnicism, these global dynamics have diverse and intricate effects on how the church understands and interprets the Great Commission. The future, with the potential to either bridge or widen gaps, hinges on the church's capacity to develop theologies and ethics of mission that resonate with the experiences of the communities they serve. These theological ethics should be transformative, aligning with God's mission of reconciliation, healing, self-giving love, and restorative justice, central to the Great Commission.

Challenges and Opportunities

Lausanne's mission to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, develop Christlike leaders, and make kingdom impact for every people and place assumes the notion that there are different kinds of people groups. One important aspect of the missional movement is the recognition that people are different across space and time. One way to begin describing this difference is through racial-ethnic categories. This essay takes racial-ethnic categories to be generated by material differences of geography, history, culture, and political economy. For this author, race connotes a social construction of identity attached to phenotypical difference while ethnicity connotes a socially constructed identity related to culture—for the purpose of this essay, the focus will be on language use as a primary feature of culture. Moreover, I take ethnicism to be similar to the social challenges of ethnocentrism and racism. Ethnicism, ethnocentrism, and racism are social ills the Christian church should seek to avoid and ameliorate.

Focusing on the universality of the gospel

There are two challenges that confront the Great Commission from the perspective of ethnicism. The first challenge to the Great Commission is the notion of the universality of the Christian gospel for all people across space and time unmarked by ethnic particularity. It is true that the Christian gospel has universal scope and appeal when we look especially to places like Galatians 3:28, which states that 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' While the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people across space and time, we can forget that our witness to this gospel is always communicated within a particular and local context and culture.

When we evangelize, we never proclaim the gospel in a generic, universal human language. The gospel is only ever proclaimed through the particularity of a local culture and language. Inclusion in the body of Christ through faith in Christ is only ever achieved through the particularizing work of the Holy

Spirit within a local culture's language. A distinctive feature of the Christian faith is its limitless translatability (Lamin Sanneh) to all people groups through specific contextual methods. So it is crucial for our fidelity to the Great Commission to always consider the universal appeal of the gospel but only ever through its socially embodied communication. Once we agree that the Great Commission can only ever be achieved through local languages (and not a generic, universal language), then we must acknowledge the important, significant, and necessary role of ethnicity. The cultural-linguistic character of the Christian faith (George Lindbeck), and thus the social and ethnic embodiment of the gospel are non-negotiable features of the Great Commission and the transmission of faith. Without acknowledging this appropriate ethnic character of all efforts in the Great Commission, our emphasis on the universal aspect of the Great Commission will mask our particular ethnic witness to the gospel. There is no acontextual, disembodied, or generic witness to the saving gospel of Christ.

Conflating Christian identity and ethnic identity

The second challenge to the Great Commission is the opposite of the first challenge. Once Christianity is viewed as a cultural-linguistic religion embodied by and for particular people groups speaking particular languages, the temptation (and thus challenge for the Great Commission) is for that ethnic identity to become co-extensive with Christian identity. This has multiple, pernicious forms whether in the state established form of Christian nominalism that Søren Kierkegaard complained about in Danish Lutheranism or in virulent forms of Christian nationalism as increasingly evident in places like the U.S. To be Lutheran or Christian in Kierkegaard's time was simply to be Danish and thus to be Christian in name only (thus the nominalism).

The intertwining of particular ethnic and racial identities with Christian identity occurs in part because of the loss of the universal character of Christian identity that is recognized as crossing people groups. There is a very legitimate sense in which conversion to Christianity is crossing a boundary to what the Bible calls the people of God (Judges 20:2, 2 Samuel 14:13; Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 21:3). Scripture speaks of the people of God as a new people with a new identity written in our hearts through the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34) established by the blood of Christ. Scholars have called this Christian language about peoplehood a form of ethnic reasoning (Denise Buell). When Christian identity becomes fused with ethno-racial identity, the ethno-racial identity is problematically baptized and divinized. The sins of the human spirit are then attributed to the Holy Spirit which then damages the collective witness of the body of Christ.

In the first challenge, Christians are forgetful of the role their ethnic identity plays in their Christian identity and desire to do good in the world as Christians. In the second challenge, Christians are self-conscious of their particular ethnic identity and seek to dominate other ethnic groups through Christian rhetoric.

Path Forward: Universal and Particular Nature of Christianity

The path forward through the Scylla and Charybdis of the blindly universalizing and pernicious particularizing challenges is to rightly coordinate the universal and particular features of the Christian faith. The path forward is not either-or. Christianity is both a universal religion of salvation and transformation for all people across space and time, and Christianity only ever takes root in local communities of particular cultural-linguistic practices. These are not competing nor exclusive commitments. Ethnic identity is essential for understanding Christian identity, but this does not mean that there is not a universal Christian identity for all people across space and time. Christian identity is never separate from ethnic identity, but this does not mean that Christian identity is simply reducible to ethnic identity. The key mechanism that coordinates the universal and particular features of the Christian faith are the social practices of the church that are mutually recognized as Christian practices across space and time by different people groups. This is a claim about the Spirit-filled catholicity of the body of Christ. The challenge for the work of the

Great Commission is to recognize the radical, boundary-crossing work of the Holy Spirit that continually shines a light on the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (J.I. Packer).

Sometimes there are new challenges facing the catholic church that require spiritual discernment and recognition. This recognition cannot be determined a priori but must be discerned spiritually through prayer and fellowship in mixed gatherings. With the rise of global movements that shrink our world through commerce and technology along with the continued exploitation and domination of marginalized people groups, the spiritual discernment of the work of the Holy Spirit will need to continue in gatherings such as the 2024 Lausanne Conference.

Resources

- Bocala-Wiedemann, T. J. (2022). "Social media as a tool for evangelism among youth and young adults." *Great Commission Research Journal*, 14 (2022): 19-34.
- Boesak, Allan. *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015.
- Buell, Denise. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity.* New York City: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Chung, Y. "A postcolonial reading of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) with a Korean Myth." *Theology Today* 72 (2015): 276–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573615601466
- Cronshaw, D. "A Commission 'Great' for Whom? Postcolonial Contrapuntal Readings of Matthew 28:18–20 and the Irony of William Carey." *Transformation* 33 (2016):110–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378815595248
- Dube, Musa W. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19a): A postcolonial perspective on biblical criticism and pedagogy. Pages 224–46. *In Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy.* Edited by Segovia, F and Tolbert, M A. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Dunaetz, D. R., & Priddy, K. E. "Pastoral attitudes that predict numerical Church Growth. Great Commission." *Research Journal* 5 (2014): 241–256.
- Hong, E., & Botner, M. "Competing Notions of Humility: Why Korean Americans Do Not Need to Abandon Confucius to Get to Christ." *Great Commission Research Journal* 14 (2022):19–29.
- Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age.* 25th anniversary ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa. African Women and Patriarchy.* Maryknoll (NY): Orbis Books, 1995.
- Packer, J. I. *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God.* Rev. and enlarged ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005.
- Patte, Daniel. "Reading Matthew 28:16-20 with Others: How It Deconstructs Our Western Concept of Mission." HTS 62 (2006): 521–557.
- Sanneh, Lamin O. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture.* 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.
- Stanley, Brian. *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Thiong'o, Ngugi Wa. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language.* London: James Curry, 1994.
- Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019.
- Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness.* New York: Doubleday, 2000.
- Wainwright, Eliane M 1998. *Shall We Look for Another: A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.

Endnotes

1 Though the missiological-theological underpinnings of the Great Commission are encapsulated in the post-resurrected Jesus' injunctions to the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, the label the 'Great Commission,' which is now used as a technical phrase in Christian theology and mission, was popularized and normalized in the 19th century, particularly among Protestant missional movements. The text gave missionaries, evangelists, and theologians legitimization for what they saw as missionary imperative. The Baptist missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission, Hudson Taylor, is often cited as an embodiment of the Great Commission. Cf. "The Bible in Hudson Taylor's Life and Mission, Part 1 & II" Global China Center, https://www.globalchinacenter.org/analysis/2014/03/28/the-bible-in-hudson-taylors-life-and-mission-part-ii

2 Cf. Musa Dube,; Pui-Lan Kwok, Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J., "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the light of a Buddhist Text," in *Voices from the Margins* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 319-39.

3 Cf. Daniel Patte, "Reading Matthew 28:16-20 with Others: How It Deconstructs Our Western Concept of Mission," HTS 62 (2006): 521–557; Choan Seng Song. *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005); "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19a): A postcolonial perspective on biblical criticism and pedagogy," in *Teaching the Bible* (ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1998); 224–245.

4 Cf. Dube, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"; Song. *Theology from the Womb of Asia*; Young Chung, "A postcolonial reading of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) with a Korean myth," *Theology Today* 72 (2015): 276–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573615601466

5 Cf. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 61.

6 Cf. Dube, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19a)"; Daniel Patte, "Reading Matthew 28:16-20 with Others: How It Deconstructs Our Western Concept of Mission," HTS 62 (2006): 521-557; Ngugi Wa. Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986); Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*. Soares-Prabhu argues that the Christian mission was "a mission more preoccupied with the aggrandizement of the missioner rather than the welfare of the missionized" ("Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20 in the light of a Buddhist Text," 333). He strongly critiques "the traditional triumphalistic exegesis of the Matthean passage" (Soares-Prabhu, 319); Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

7 Cf. Musa, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19a)"; Rs Sugirtharajah, "A postcolonial exploration of collusion and construction in biblical interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. Sugirtharajah RS. "Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 91–116; *The Bible and the third world: Precolonial, colonial and postcolonial encounters*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Darren Cronshaw, "A Commission 'Great' for Whom? Postcolonial Contrapuntal Readings of Matthew 28:18–20 and the Irony of William Carey," *Transformation*, 33 (2016): 110–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378815595248

8 See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa. African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll (N.Y.): Orbis Books, 1995); Pui-Lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Soares-Prabhu, S.J., "Two Mission Commands, 319-39.

9 While acknowledging the complicated reception history of missionary activities in Sub-Saharan Africa, Lamin Sanneh has extensively investigated the colonial legacy of missionary activities and how indigenous communities reappropriated the "Great Commission" to legitimize local autonomy and cultural preservation. Sanneh also pointed out, rightly, that the translation of the Bible into local languages have not only indigenized Christianity but also motivated, energized, and upheld local cultures and dialects against colonial homogenization. Cf. Lamin Sanneh, "Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008; *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989); "Christian Mission and the Pluralist Milieu: The African Experience," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XII, (October 1984). See Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002).

10 The 'Good Samaritan' parable in Luke 10: 34–35 emphasizes love across ethnic lines.

11 Acts 10:34–35: 'Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people, anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him"'(NRSVUE). Acts 10:34-35 underscores God's impartiality and inclusivity.

12 The Jerusalem Council and teachings in Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 9:20–23 provide inclusive Christian paradigms.

13 Revelation 7:9: 'After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.' ((NRSVUE).

Authors

Dr David C. Chao, is Director of the Center for Asian American Christianity at Princeton Theological Seminary. He teaches courses on Asian American theology and organizes programs in Asian American theology and ministry. His research and writing focus on the faith and practice of ordinary Asian Christians in diasporic contexts. His research on Asian American religious life and politics is funded by The Henry Luce Foundation and the Louisville Institute.

Dr Soojin Chung, is Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center and Editor of the International Bulletin of Mission Research at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is the convener of the Gerald H. Anderson Lectures and teaches in the Department of History and Ecumenics. She is the author of *Adopting for God: The Mission to Change America through Transnational Adoption* (NYU Press, 2021). Her current research explores racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia in world Christianity.

Dr Alice Yafeh-Deigh, is a professor of Religious Studies at Azusa Pacific University in California. She is passionate about providing inclusive education and works to promote equity in her classroom. Alice strongly advocates for cross-cultural interpretations of the Bible and is involved in various biblical translation initiatives. As a Human Rights consultant, she works to develop education policies that benefit underrepresented children in Cameroon, focusing on supporting children with disabilities.

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST?



INTRODUCTION

As Scripture teaches, all humans are made in the image of God and are worthy. Yet, globally, not all humans are treated equally. With an increasing consciousness of discrimination, the world and the church continue to ask, 'What is fair and just?'

The following section explores the context shifts in global justice including poverty, persecution, women, marginalized, human rights, slavery, and corruption.

JUSTICE

GLOBAL POVERTY

REDUCTION OF POVERTY

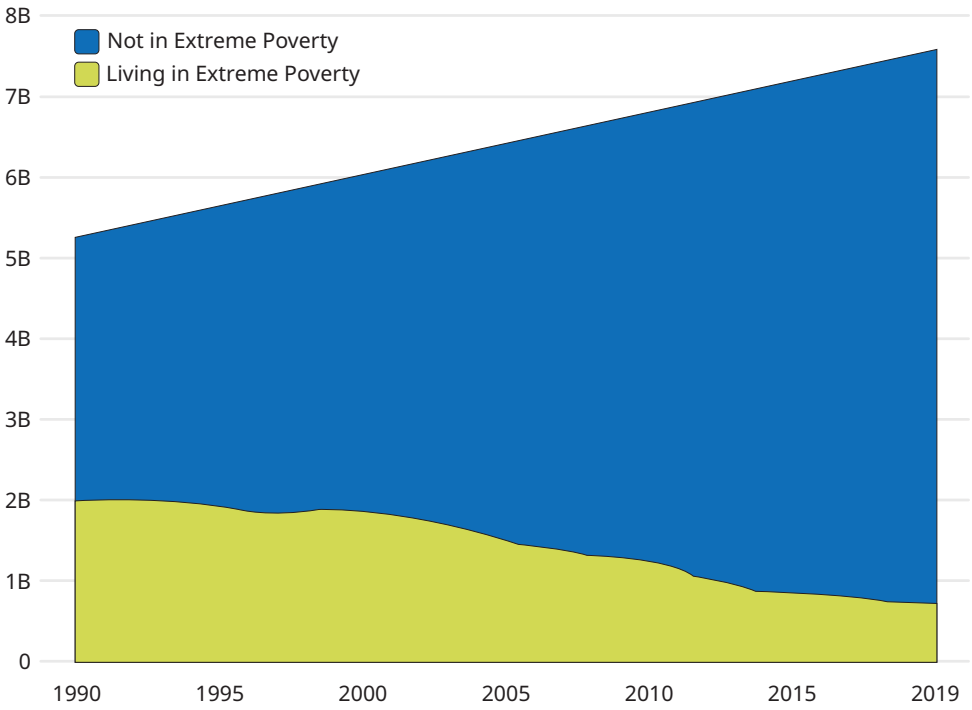
There has been a remarkable reduction in global extreme poverty, defined as surviving on less than $1.25 per day.

The number of people living in extreme poverty has reduced from over two billion people in 1990 to under one billion in 2019.

Over thirty years, extreme poverty has been cut in half globally even while the global population grew by over 2 billion people.

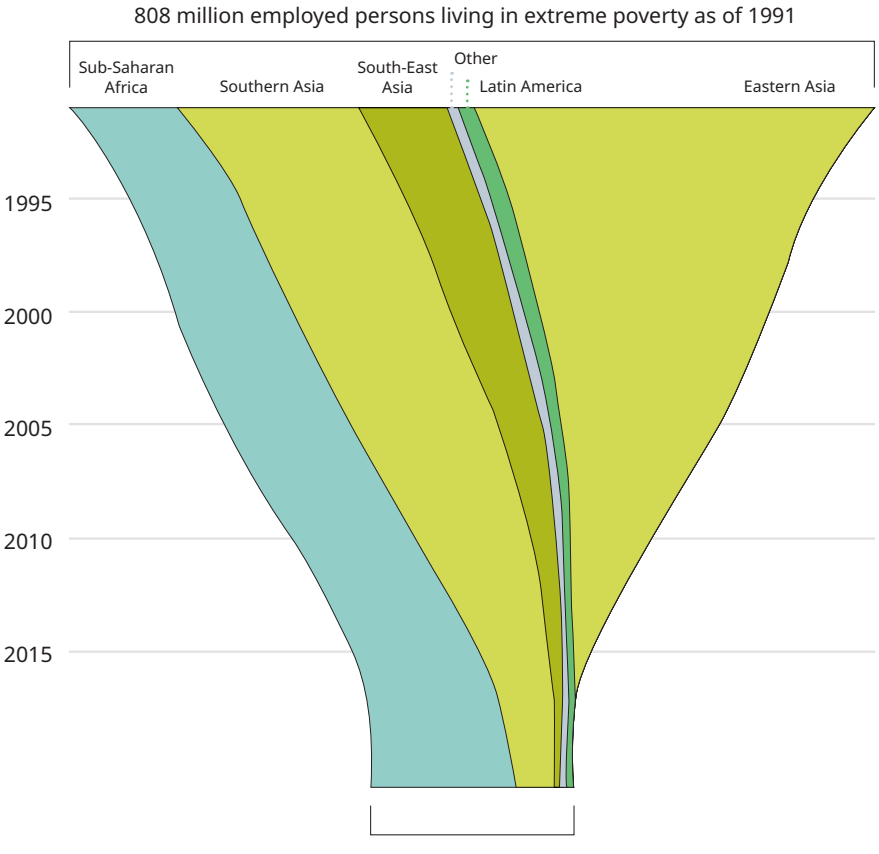
This highlights the importance of integral mission, calling Christians to address not only spiritual needs but also the physical, social, and economic well-being of all people.

EXTREME POVERTY 1990-2019



Source: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform; B = Billion

REGIONAL POVERTY DECLINE



Source: Gilbert Fontana, The Visual Capitalist, International Labor Organization, 2021

REGIONAL POVERTY

Remarkable global reduction in extreme poverty has occurred across most regions, although progress has varied among them.

Overall, Asia has seen the largest reduction of poverty across all sub-regions. East Asia has seen the most dramatic reduction of extreme poverty, followed by South East Asia and South Asia.

Asia has seen the largest reduction of poverty across all sub-regions.

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen an increase in extreme poverty, deviating from the positive global trend. With the reduction of poverty in Asia, and rise in Africa, the people living in extreme poverty are African.

Acknowledging the complexity of poverty reduction is crucial, considering factors such as conflicts, population growth, environment, and inequality.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

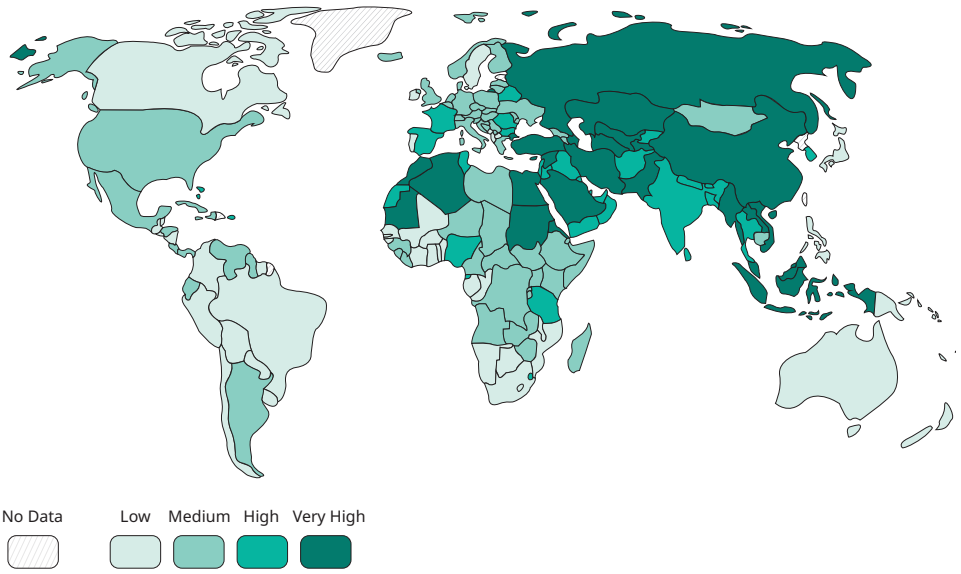
RISING RESTRICTIONS

State restrictions on religion have grown throughout the world. State support for Christianity has declined in the wake of decolonization in the Global South and the rise of secularization in the West.

State restrictions on religion have grown.

Persecution is highest in parts of North Africa, Middle East, and Asia.

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION



Source: Pew Research Center, "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen around the World," 2019

GOVERNMENTAL REGIONAL PERSECUTION

Number of countries with:

	Year	Americas	Asia-Pacific	Europe	Middle East-North Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Global
Government interference in worship	2019	28 80%	35 70%	41 91%	20 100%	39 81%	163 82%
Government use of force against religious groups	2019	8 23%	28 56%	19 42%	18 90%	23 48%	96 48%

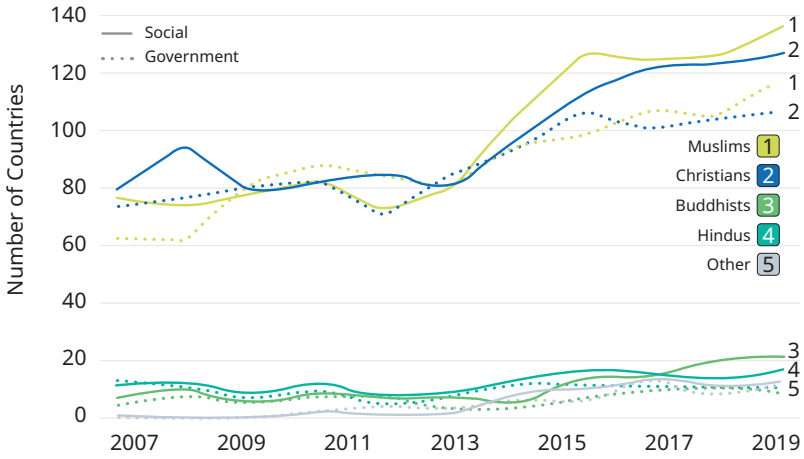
Source: Pew Research Center, "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen around the World," 2019

PERSECUTION RANKING

	Overall Persecution	Recorded Violence
1	North Korea	Nigeria
2	Somalia	Pakistan
3	Yemen	Cameroon
4	Eritrea	India
5	Libya	Burkina Faso
6	Nigeria	Central African Republic
7	Pakistan	Mozambique
8	Iran	DR Congo
9	Afghanistan	Tanzania
10	Sudan	Myanmar

Source: Open Doors International, "World Watch List 2023"

RELIGIOUS BASED HARASSMENT



Source: Pew Research Center, "A Closer Look..." 2019

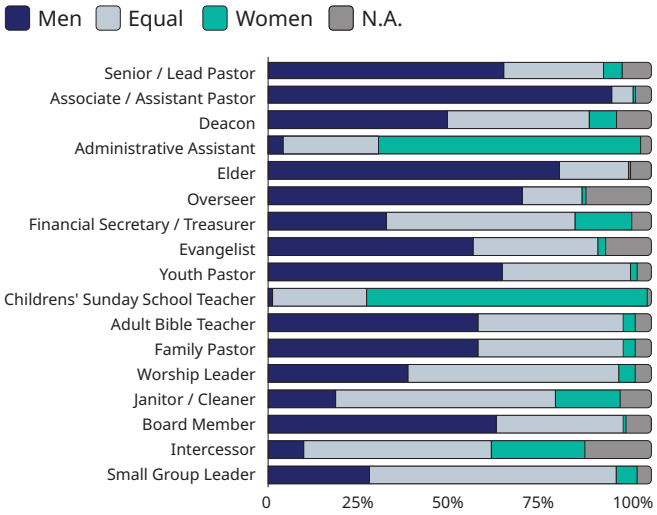
PERSECUTED MUSLIMS

Globally, Islam is the most persecuted religion, notably in India, China, and Myanmar. Persecution of Christians is most common in Asia and North Africa. Hindu and Buddhist persecution is lower than Christian and Muslim, but similarly has increased in recent years.

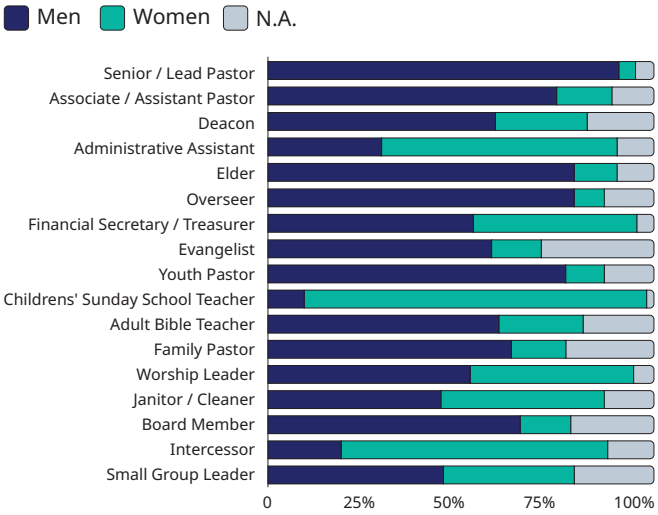
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHURCH LIFE

"How do you think the chances of women and men compare when it comes to getting a position?"



"Thinking of the ____ in your congregation, is this person male or female?"



Source: Zurlo, Women in World Christianity, 30

FEMALE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

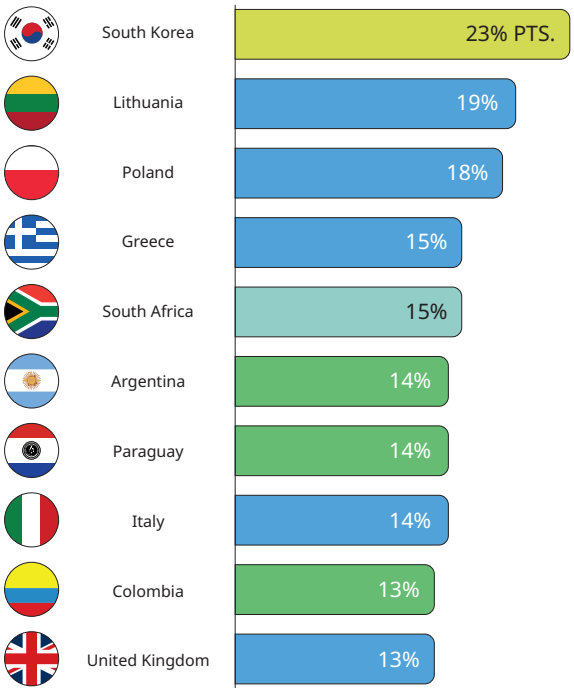
Percentages of Christian men and women ages 20+ across 192 countries



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of global census and survey data

RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE GENDER GAP

Percentage-points higher that women say religion is very important compared to men



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008-2015

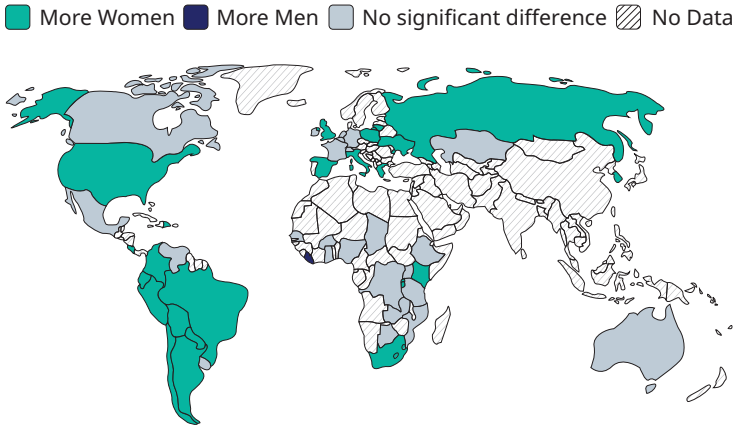
GENDER DYNAMICS

Globally, when polled, more women than men say that Christianity is 'very important' to them. This is seen most predominantly in the Americas, Asia, and parts of Africa. In some cases, the difference gap ranges from 15-20 percent.

Most church leaders are male, although many perceive that both women and men have equal chances at holding such positions. Typically, men hold pastoral positions, while women serve as Sunday School Teachers or Administrative Assistants.

RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE BY GENDER

Christians who say religion is "very important"



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008-2015

MARGINALIZED

DISABLED & EXCLUDED

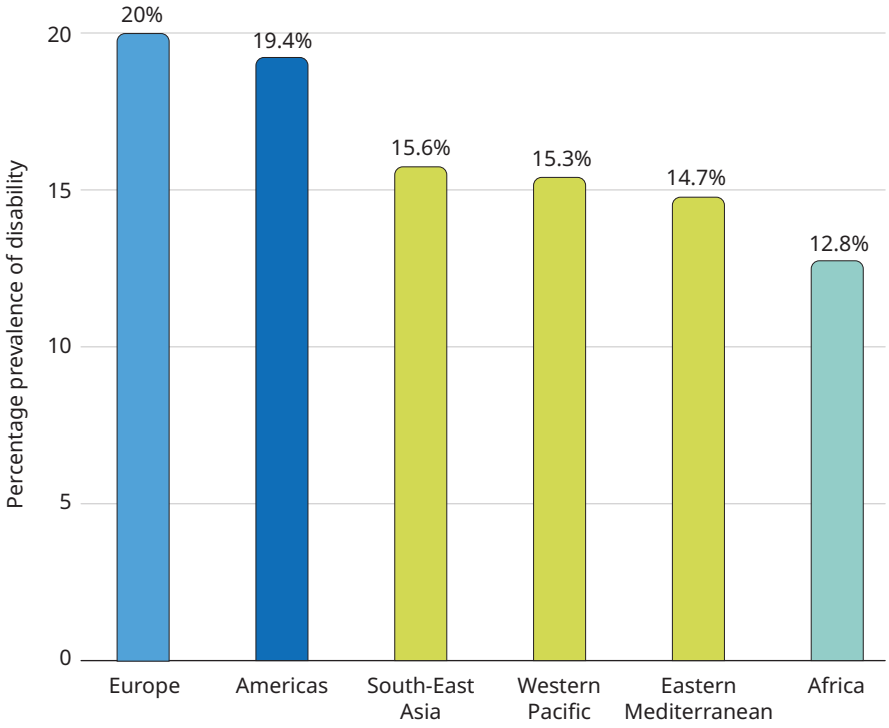
Of an estimated 8 billion people in the world today, 1.3 billion have a physical or mental disability; one out of six people globally. This population has no demographic boundaries.

They are present in all people groupings, speaking all languages, and populating all cultures.

Individuals with disabilities are often physically and socially excluded. Some cultures perceive disability as shameful because they consider the disability to be the result of a wrongdoing, karma, or bad luck.

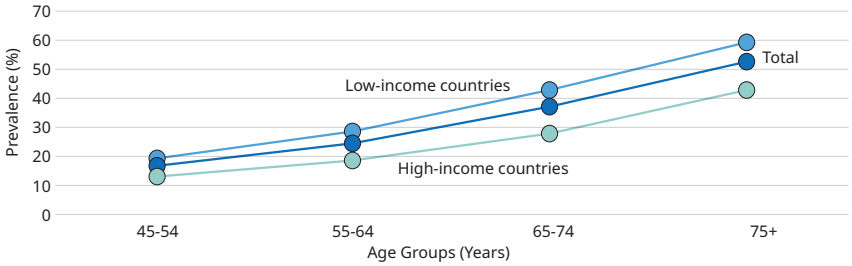
Supporting people with disabilities and their families has missiological implications. With greater awareness, visibility, and inclusion, people with disabilities, who are often hidden from and overlooked by the church, can become active members and contribute to the body of Christ.

PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY



Source: Global Burden of Disease Date, 2021

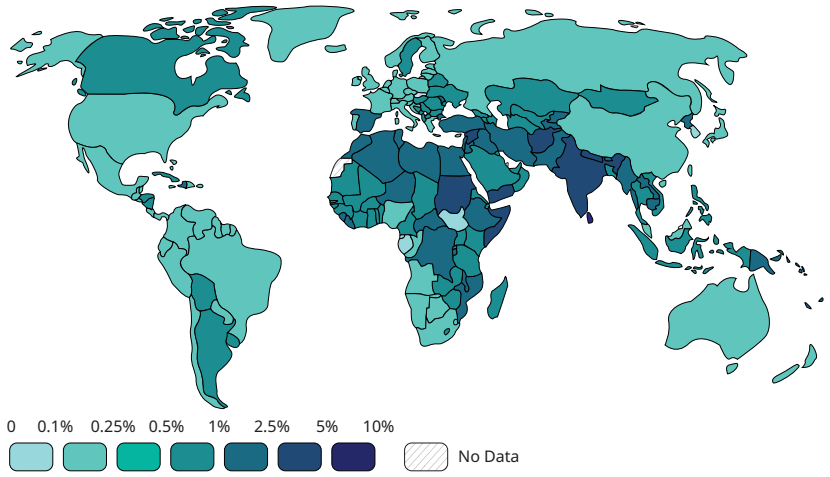
DISABILITY BY INCOME



Source: World Health Organization, "World Report on Disability," 2011

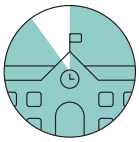
GLOBAL INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

"Share of population with 'idiopathic developmental intellectual disability' including delayed or impaired speech, language, motor condition, and visio-spatial skills."



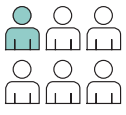
Source: Our World in Data; Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Burden of Disease, 2019

DISABILITY STATS



90%

of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school.



Around

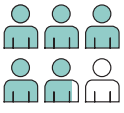
15%

of the world's population, or estimated 1.3 billion people, live with disabilities.



30%

of street youths have some kind of disability.



About

80%

of disabled people live in the majority world.

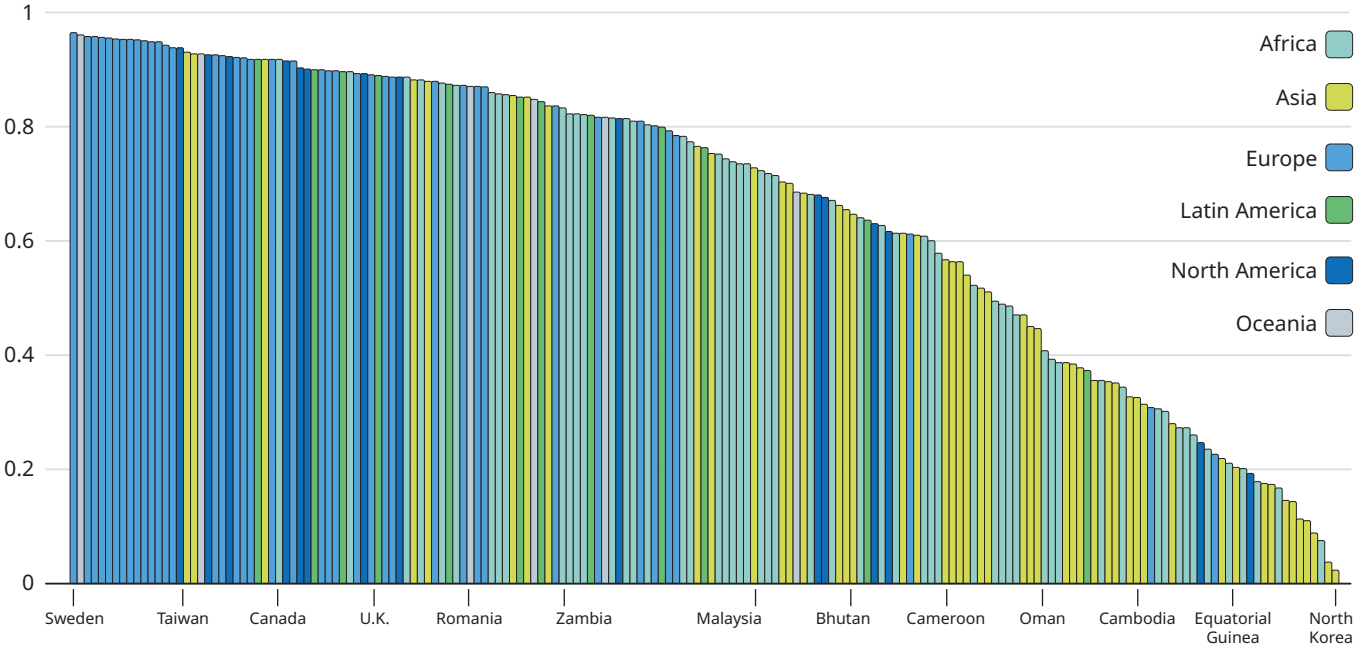
Source: World Health Organization, "World Report on Disability," 2011

JUSTICE

HUMAN RIGHTS

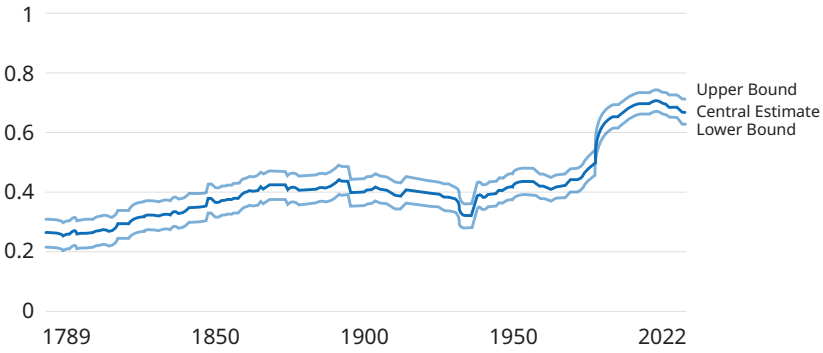
DISTRIBUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

The variable ranges from 1 (most rights) to 0 (least rights).



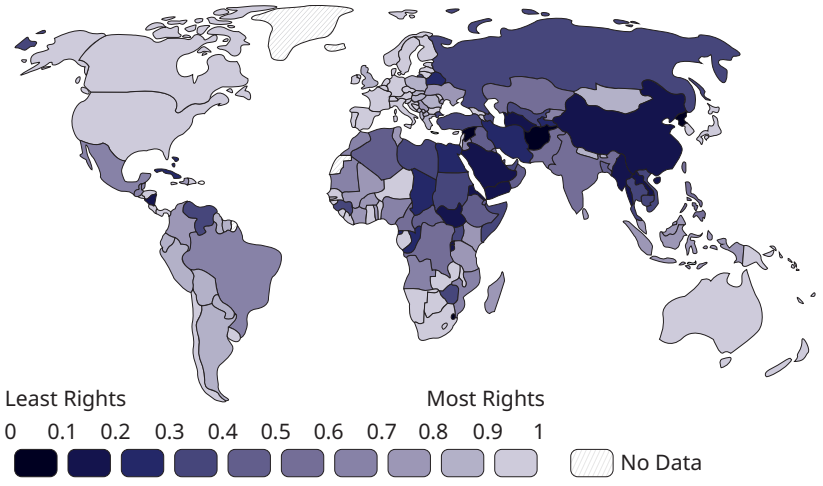
Source: Our World in Data; Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), 2022

HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX 1789-2022



Source: Our World in Data; Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), 2022

HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX 2022



Source: Our World in Data; Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), 2022

PROTECTED RIGHTS

The top graph captures the extent that people are free from government torture, political killings, and forced labor and enjoying freedoms of property rights, movement, religion, expression, and association. The Global North, in general, has the highest protection of human rights with the Global South generally lower.

Human Rights have seen a set back in recent years.

Globally, human rights are more protected than in the previous centuries. In the 18th century human rights – including physical integrity, private rights, and political liberties - were poorly protected by governments. The 20th century has seen an improvement in human rights with setbacks seen during world wars and in the 1970s.

Although we are currently at a general historically high protection of human rights, recent years have seen a set back in the protection of human rights.

SLAVERY

EXPLOITATION ABOUND

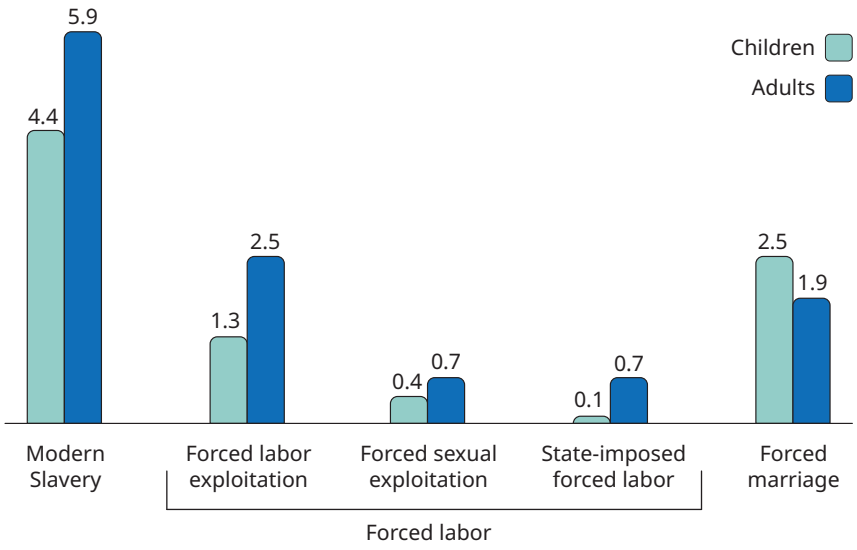
Despite steady improvements in the protection of human rights, slavery continues to force large numbers of people into work, sexual exploitation, and unwanted marriage. In 2016, an estimated 40 million people were victims of modern slavery.

Of these estimated 40 million people, 25 million people were in forced labor – including labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, or state-imposed forced labor; 15 million were living in forced marriages.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, accounting for approximately 70 percent of all exploitation; and 99 percent of all victims in the sex industry.

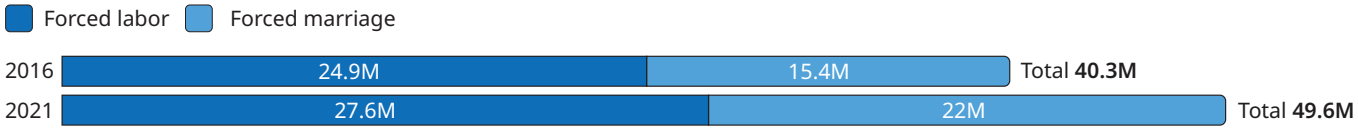
MODERN SLAVERY FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS

"Prevalence (per 1,000 persons) of modern slavery, by age and category"



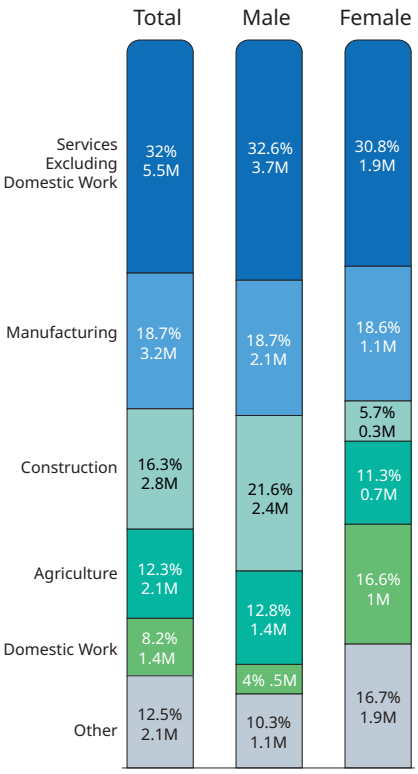
Source: International Labour Organization, "Forced Labour and Forced Marriage," 2017

MODERN SLAVERY CATEGORIES



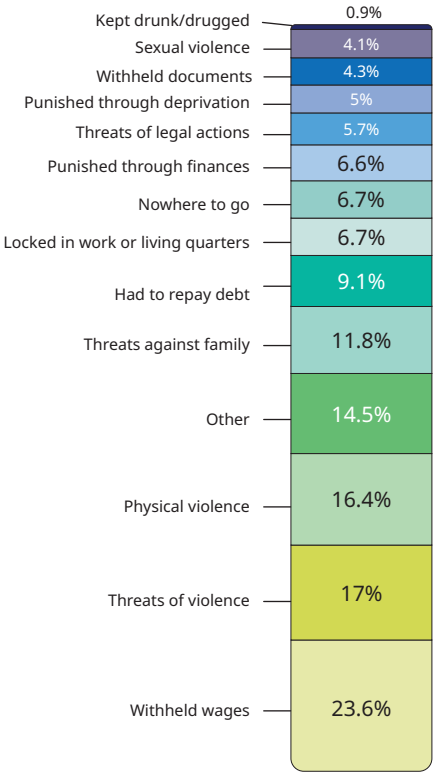
Source: International Labour Organization, "Forced Labour and Forced Marriage," 2022

SERVICE EXPLOITATION



Source: International Labour Organization, "Forced Labour and Forced Marriage," 2022

MEANS OF COERCION



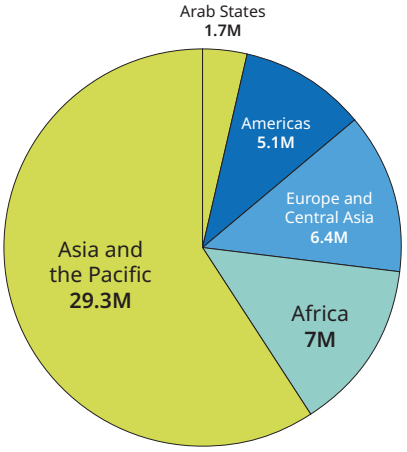
Source: International Labour Organization, "Forced Labour and Forced Marriage," 2022

ASIA & AFRICA

Modern Slavery occurs in every region of the world. Slavery is most prevalent in Africa (7.6 victims per 1,000 people) with Asia and Pacific Region second (6.1 per 1,000).

The largest enslaved population is in the Asian and Pacific regions with 62 percent of global victims.

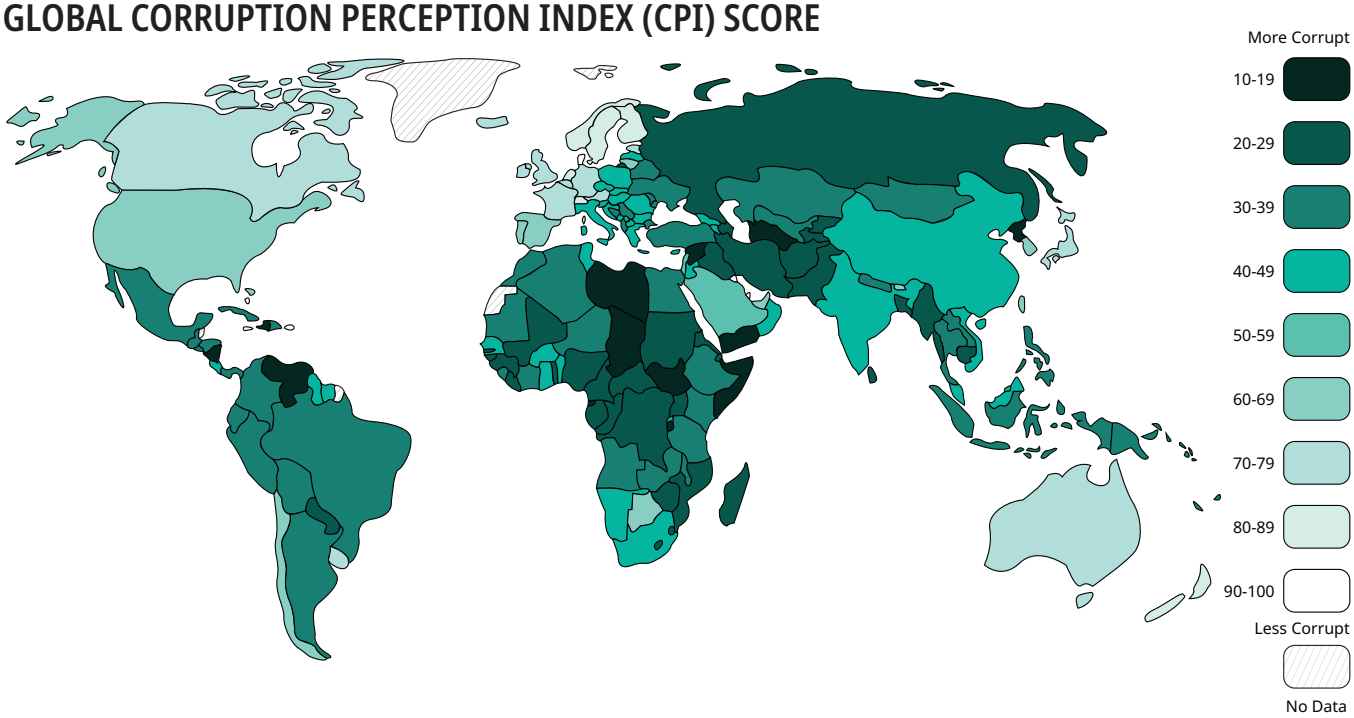
OF PEOPLE ENSLAVED



JUSTICE

CORRUPTION

GLOBAL CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX (CPI) SCORE



Source: Transparency International, 2022

GLOBAL ISSUE

Corruption is globally pervasive, and a societal norm in many countries. It is a complex issue with cultural, moral, historical, political, and institutional dimensions.

CHRISTIAN ROLE

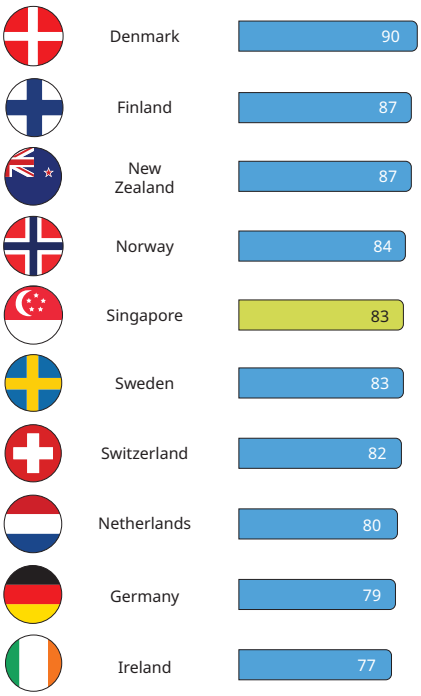
Globally, high levels of corruption exist in regions with the fastest growing Christian populations. Christians can play a role in combating corruption, rendering hope for these regions.

ANTI-CORRUPTION

Corruption is not an unchangeable reality. Recently, numerous countries have decreased corruption, including Asian countries such as South Korea, and African countries such as Angola.

LEAST CORRUPT

100 = Least Corrupt; 0 = Highly Corrupt



Source: Transparency International, 2022

MOST CORRUPT

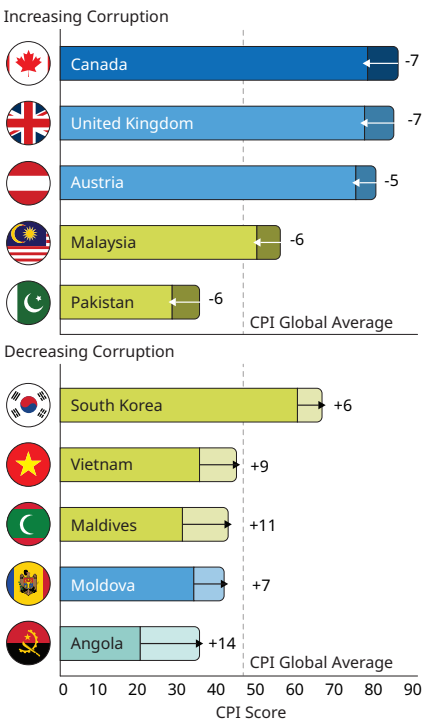
100 = Least Corrupt; 0 = Highly Corrupt



Source: Transparency International, 2022

CHANGE IN CORRUPTION

Change in CPI Score between 2018 & 2022

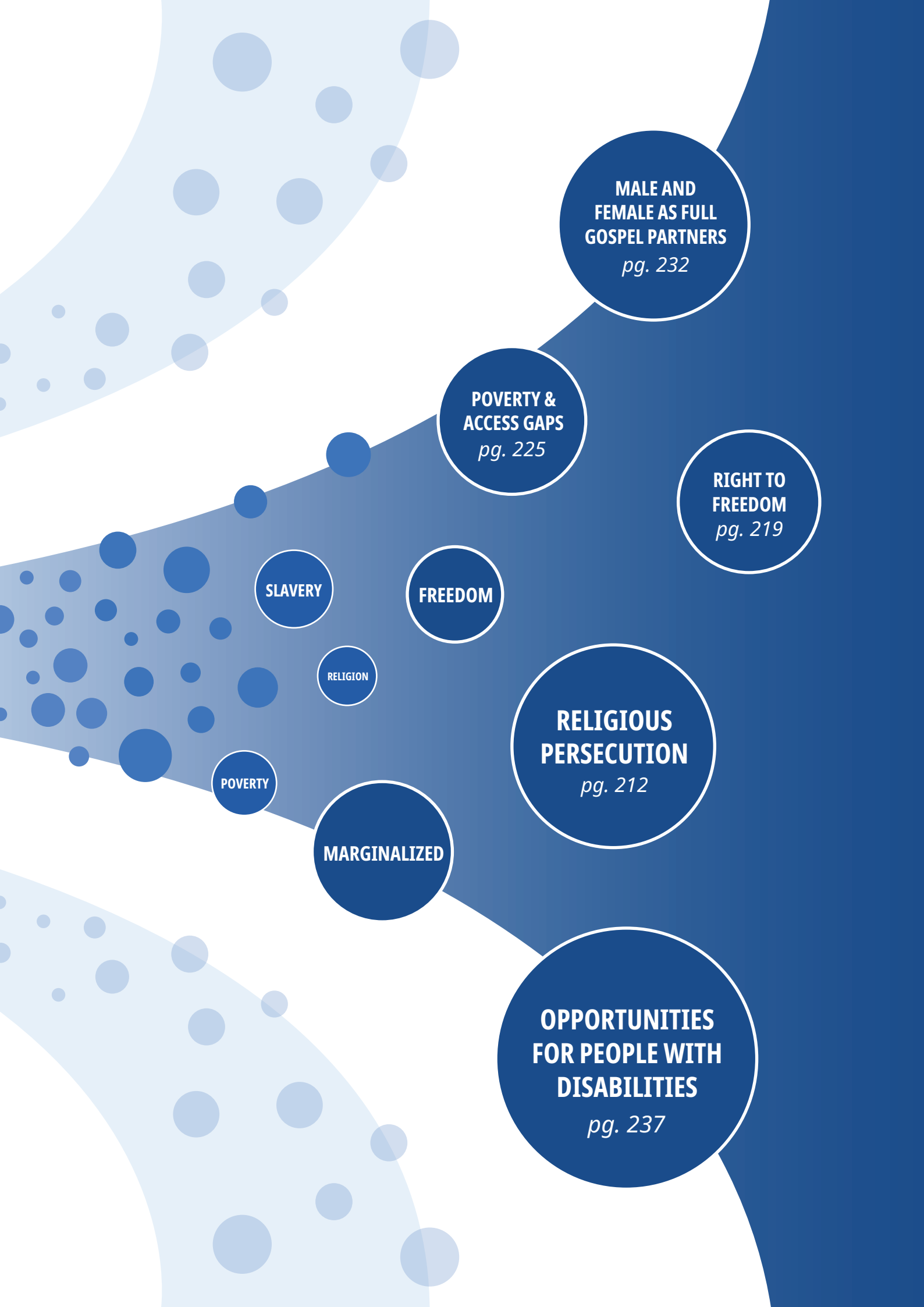


Source: Transparency International, 2022

UNDERSTANDING

JUSTICE




MALE AND FEMALE AS FULL GOSPEL PARTNERS
pg. 232
POVERTY & ACCESS GAPS
pg. 225
RIGHT TO FREEDOM
pg. 219
SLAVERY
FREEDOM
RELIGION
RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION
pg. 212
POVERTY
MARGINALIZED
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
pg. 237

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Tehmina Arora, Roshini Wickremesinhe

The persecution of Christians has existed from the very beginning of the church and, sadly, continues into the 21st Century. Various forces are at play in shaping religious freedom in our nations, and their implications are far-reaching.

Social hostilities are on the rise as identity politics continues to fuel tensions and deepen divisions, especially where religious identities become tools for power and control. Geopolitical conflicts and territorial disputes put pressure on precious resources further exacerbating religious persecution, often leading to displacement and targeted violence, especially against religious minorities. The dynamic landscape of religious persecution intertwines with the ongoing struggles for gender equality. Women and marginalized communities often bear the brunt of discriminatory practices rooted in religious traditions, even as they are targeted for their faith.

Across the globe, governments increasingly adopt laws and policies that restrict religious practices, limit the engagement of religious institutions, and curtail freedom of religion. Additionally, the balancing protection of religious freedom and enforcing censorship is fueling debates about the limits of expression and the protection of vulnerable communities. Furthermore, as data security concerns escalate, the gathering and surveillance of religious information can pose serious threats to individual privacy and religious freedom. The rising legal restrictions and the erosion of various human rights protections cast a shadow on the future of religious freedom.

This article endeavors to explore the complex relationship between these pressing issues and religious persecution, offering insights into the potential trajectory of religious freedom as we navigate the uncharted territory of the next three decades.

The State of Religious Persecution

Today, more than 360 million Christians worldwide suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.[1] The rising tide of violence targeting Christians shows no sign of abatement. Incidents of attacks on churches, burning, demolition, or looting of churches and homes, physical assault, arrest, imprisonment, kidnapping, rape, torture, and killings are reported worldwide. It is estimated that 312 million Christians in 76 countries suffer extreme levels of violence, a figure that has doubled over the past 30 years.[2] This trajectory indicates an upward trend in violence against Christians in the coming decades. Some of the main drivers of religious persecution are outlined below.

> ***"The rising tide of violence targeting Christians shows no sign of abatement."***

Rising government restrictions / legal restrictions

Violence and social hostilities are the most visible forms of control in subjugating religious minorities. Less visible but equally effective are rising legal restrictions and controls imposed by governments.[3] Such restrictions include national laws, government policies, and practices. Processes of registration, requiring religious groups or places of worship to be 'registered' with a government deems those registered to be 'legitimate' and others to be illegal, exposing them to social hostility. Laws and processes which grant 'recognition' to religious groups, granting legal personality[4] or privileges[5] restrict the full enjoyment of the right to religious freedom of those who are denied recognition. The practice of utilizing these legal methods to discriminate against minority religions is a growing concern.

More prominent laws regulating religion subscribe to severe punishments including death, imprisonment, or confiscation of property. Apostacy laws, which exist in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, penalize the act of renouncing one's religion and are in some countries punishable with death. Blasphemy laws ban speech or actions considered to be contemptuous of God or of people or objects considered sacred. In countries such as Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia violations of blasphemy laws may be punishable by death.[6] Anti-conversion laws prohibit changing one's religion or facilitating changing of religion. It is prevalent in South Asia, particularly in India, and carries penalties of imprisonment and fines.

It must be noted that laws and government restrictions invariably attract social hostility and violence targeting minority religious groups and individuals, creating a vicious cycle of discrimination and violence.

Geo-political conflicts

Geopolitical conflicts have impacted the world for centuries and continue to present increasingly complex challenges to religious freedom. Disputes over territorial claims, trade, natural resources, ethnic identities, and cultural or historical grievances impact the freedom of religion or belief of communities, even when the issue of contention has no overt religious dimension. The emotive power of 'religion' is harnessed to justify any claim or conflict, secure mass support, and even inflict violence on others. Religious minorities are targeted or used as pawns.

Geopolitical conflict where a state or group seeks to exert power over others or spread an ideology, invoking religion as a source of national identity or pride, invariably results in oppression, discrimination, and violence against other religious communities. Recent developments in global geopolitics and the spillage of religious militancy across borders pose a growing threat to religious minorities and the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Conversely, religion and the freedom of religion or belief can contribute to the resolution of geopolitical conflict by fostering dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and respect among different faiths and cultures across the globe. It is an opportunity to engage and a responsibility that the church must pursue.

Identity politics

Ethnic and sectarian violence and conflict are experiencing an alarming surge globally with little indication of abatement. Historical conflicts coupled with other drivers such as poverty, corruption, institutionalized injustice, etc. have led to frequent divisions between groups along religious lines. The linkage between religious identities and nationalism is only expected to rise even as groups strive to gain dominance over land and other natural resources.

The causal link between religious nationalism or Islamic militancy and violence against religious minorities is increasingly visible in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The role played by governments as instigators, enablers, or perpetrators of violence in many countries violates the right to freedom of religion or belief and denies justice for victims.[7]

Hostility towards Christian ideas

Additionally, in today's context, certain biblical truths are seen as hostile or intolerant, leading to instances of censorship. This broader societal battle to share Christian ideas may also manifest within households, where parents may encounter challenges in imparting Christian ethics, particularly regarding sexuality, when faced with opposing viewpoints promoted by a powerful 'progressive' state and strong media lobby.

Another significant challenge the church is confronted with is the very definition of human life. As scientific advancements enable greater control over the selection and alteration of physical traits during conception, the ethics surrounding genetic technologies will remain contentious. This will have a direct impact on the ethics and morality of abortion, surrogacy, genetic engineering, and the ending of life, fueling the physician-aided suicide or euthanasia debate. To navigate this complex landscape, the church must actively con-

tribute to the establishment of strong moral guidelines, ensuring the responsible and conscientious application of these technologies.

The Impact of Religious Freedom Violations

Religious freedom violations driven by geopolitics, global trends, and advances in technology pose new challenges which impact evangelism and the church worldwide. Some of the most prominent of these challenges are outlined below.

Global migration and refugees

The issue of religious persecution and forced displacement of religious communities is a tragic and deeply concerning problem that persists in various parts of the world. Many religious communities, targeted for their religious beliefs or affiliations, have been compelled to leave their homes in search of safety and security. They often encounter numerous challenges and even face transnational repression in their host countries. Tensions between refugees and host countries, pressure on scarce natural resources, urban infrastructure, restricted access to justice, and economic disparities fuel debate and conflict. Concerted efforts are required by governments and civil society to build trust and decrease violence and extremism.

Fake tolerance / hate speech laws

Even as governments try to regulate conflicts between communities, there is increased pressure on individuals to conform to new standards of tolerance. Increasingly, censorship of biblical truths is a common phenomenon. Coupled with a broad definition of what constitutes hate or outrage, this trend will continue to result in chilling of speech and increased restrictions on the gospel.

'Cancel culture' has had a detrimental impact on numerous college campuses, which are traditionally regarded as the marketplace of ideas and spaces dedicated to rational and unbiased discourse. Speakers are now frequently interrupted or disinvited due to hostile reactions from students, and professors face the risk of demotion or even termination for expressing viewpoints deemed offensive by the student body. Bolstered by social media, 'cancel culture' has resulted in the loss of employment for various professionals across the globe. 'Cancel culture' has led to a new form of social ostracizing for speaking truth and is impacting the ability of Christians to access public platforms and services.

Gendered persecution

The interplay of gender and religious identity also continues to victimize women. Religious women often face violence and discrimination which are described by experts as hidden, violent, and complex.[8] When women are subjected to discrimination based on their gendered religious identity, it can result in profound psychological distress for both the individuals affected and the communities they belong to. This is due to the close association between women's religious identity and their communities' prevailing norms and values. Furthermore, religious rights and gender rights are often viewed as opposing each other, despite repeated findings that women tend to identify as religious more often than men.[9]

Digital surveillance

The increased presence of religious communities online has both positive and negative implications. On one hand, it enables them to engage in online worship, share religious texts and beliefs, and connect with a broader audience. However, it also exposes them to risks such as intimidation and targeting. As a result, cyberspace has become an increasingly perilous environment for religious minorities and those who may be seen as opposing government policies or social norms. The integration of artificial intelligence in social media platforms, such as algorithmic ad targeting and personalized content, has raised concerns about the potential influence on individuals' opinions and autonomy. This influence extends to platforms like Google and Facebook, where there is a risk of shaping and modifying thoughts, potentially impacting our ability to make independent choices.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Great Commission

Increased challenges, restrictions, and violence necessitate rethinking traditional methods of sharing the gospel. It is imperative to create resources and communication tools that are useful, effective, and remain true to the gospel, as well as innovative methods of delivery that can evade or prevail over oppressive surveillance and attacks.[10] Resources for creative evangelism should also be developed with cultural and gender sensitivity.

The level and type of restrictions and violence may differ from country to country. What works in one may not work in another. For example, a community that is highly vulnerable to physical attacks may benefit from digital resources and online gatherings for worship, while a community under sophisticated digital surveillance may benefit from non-digital, traditional methods of communication. In dangerous situations where there are severe restrictions or legal bars with excessive penalties for sharing the gospel, understanding these restrictions and the extent of the repercussions is important in determining the most suitable method of delivery. The following are some opportunities and challenges.

Pre-evangelism

Escalating hostilities and persecution of Christians globally creates a climate of fear and diminishes opportunities for pre-evangelism. Challenges posed by the rise of secularism and pluralism undermining the truth of the gospel, the increasing influence of social media in shaping worldviews and values, and the alternatives offered by cyberspace further erode space for building traditional relationships and communication. Creative and flexible methods of connecting with people and presenting the gospel as a relevant answer to present-day complexities are needed. These challenges require pre-evangelists to be well-informed, well-equipped, and well-prayed.[11]

Interfaith dialogue

Interfaith dialogue can play a critical role in promoting peace, tolerance, and understanding between diverse religious communities. Building trust is key to dispelling fear of the unfamiliar, diffusing tensions, and significantly reducing religious conflict. It can also be an opportunity for a Christian to witness as a peacemaker, to practice forgiveness, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Faith Communities' Involvement in Civil/ Democratic Movements

Faith leaders can play a critical role in strengthening human rights by increasing the understanding of their communities of the international human rights framework, building resilience and empathy, and creating opportunities for reconciliation and healing in conflicts.

Youth engagement

Young people make up 33 percent of the world's population and are the largest demographic globally.[12] 'Generation Z' (those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s), also known as 'Digital Natives', are the most diverse and multicultural generation in history, with high levels of digital literacy and social awareness. Engaging this demographic is vital in sustaining the mission of the global church and developing the next generation of leaders who bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to new challenges faced by the church.

Data and Security

A major challenge in responding to religious freedom violations is lack of documentation. This challenge arises due to underreporting, lack of transparency, government censorship, fear of reprisals, and limited resources for data collection. Without comprehensive and reliable data, it becomes difficult to gauge the scale, nature, and impact of religious persecution accurately. Even among groups where data is collected and disseminated, there is disagreement on the definition of persecution and ways to share and distribute the data.

The Way Forward

There are several strategies to protect and promote religious freedom globally. Some important tools and strategies both in terms of preventive and reactive strategies which can

provide more comprehensive support to the persecuted church, are outlined below.

Education

Education is imperative in preventing and countering intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Human rights education is the most effective strategy for promoting respect for diversity and human rights. Learning critical thinking skills can help challenge prejudice and hatred. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recognizes the importance of education in combating intolerance against persons based on religion or belief.[13] Resources such as the 'Faith for Rights' framework and toolkit, developed by the OHCHR, to facilitate peer-to-peer engagement, exploring the relationship between religion and human rights.[14]

Legal systems

International legal standards form the backbone of all national legal systems in protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantee the right to religious freedom for all people. These and other key international statutes are an important resource in defending the freedom of religion or belief.

National laws which reflect the standards and protections enshrined in international statutes are imperative in protecting religious freedom, particularly for minority religious communities within a country. However, laws and statutes which guarantee basic human rights are ineffective in a context where democratic governance, the rule of law, and independence of the judiciary are absent.

Community mechanisms

Sensitive local communities play a critical role in combating violence and discrimination. This can be done by creating opportunities to document and respond to hostility through mediation, access to justice and reconciliation, relief, and rehabilitation. The 'Fez Process' developed by the United Nations provides some excellent suggestions for faith leaders and communities to take action to prevent sectarian violence[15]

Lifestyle evangelism

In communities where Christian worship, observance, practice, or teaching are deemed illegal or banned, lifestyle evangelism may be the only practical manifestation. Living according to biblical principles and reflecting the character and teachings of Christ in daily life can be a silent but powerful witness where the active proclamation of the Gospel is impossible.

Advocacy for religious freedom along with other human rights

Integration of freedom of religion or belief (FORB) into human rights is essential for the protection and promotion of the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. As stated earlier, this right is enshrined in international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

By integrating FORB into human rights frameworks, governments can be held accountable to ensure that individuals are free to practice their religion or belief without fear of discrimination or violence. The linkages between the right to FORB and other important human rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and right to equality make FORB central to any meaningful human rights discourse.

In an increasingly globalized world, the efforts of various governments to make freedom of religion or belief central to their foreign policy offer several opportunities to strengthen nation-states' commitment to FORB and hold errant governments to account. The growing movement to promote FORB globally can help to promote social harmony, tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for diversity in countries where minority religions are targeted with discrimination and violence.

Technology

Life without technology and the conveniences it offers is unthinkable. Modern technology

has transformed human communication, education, work, and entertainment. Advances in digital technology provide instant access to vast amounts of information and instant connectivity to people across the globe.

This technology enables the gathering, storing, and sharing of information, relaying incidents, and events in real-time on the world wide web, and connecting with people across time zones and geographical borders. These means can be harnessed to advocate for the rights of those targeted for their faith and to expose discrimination and violence. Documentation of human rights violations, however, comes at great risk to human rights defenders. While technology has been pressed into service to some extent to document violations, it continues offering even greater potential, opportunities, and risks.

Conclusion

Looking back, every past century and decade has brought new challenges to nations, regions, and the world, impacting religious freedom and the mission of the church. The challenges of the 21st Century are more complex and diverse than ever. The church is called to serve in this ever-evolving landscape of hostility. While acknowledging that persecution is inevitable, as Christ Jesus warned, it is the responsibility of the global church 'to stand against injustice and to remain faithful to the gospel, whatever the cost.'[16] The resilience and persistence of the faithful who have, for centuries and to this very day, endured violence for following Christ stands as testimony to the unstoppable mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jesus himself said, '[. . .] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18). This is our hope and our future.

Resources

- In the Shadow of the Cross - A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship ; Glenn Penner ; 2021
- Faith that Endures – The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church ; Ronald Boyd-MacMillan ; 2006
- Sorrow & Blood – Christian Mission in the Context of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom ; Ed. William D. Taylor, Antonia Van Der Meer, Reg Reimer; 2012
- In Response to Persecution: Findings of the Under Caesar's Sword Project on Global Christian Communities, Under Caesar's Sword Project; 2017.
- Truth Overruled - The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom; Ryan T. Anderson; 2015
- Censored; Paul Coleman ; 2016

Endnotes

1 Open Doors. "World Watch List 2023." Accessed August 23, 2023. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/.

2 Ibid.

3 Samirah Mujumdar and Virginia Villa. "Globally, Social Hostilities Related to Religion Decline in 2019, While Government Restrictions Remain at Highest Levels." Last modified September 30, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/30/globally-social-hostilities-related-to-religion-decline-in-2019-while-government-restrictions-remain-at-highest-levels/.

4 Legal Persona entitles non-human entities to be treated as a person to enter into contracts, sue or be sued, purchase immovable property etc.

5 Benefits provided by the state which may include providing security in situations of conflict, compensations and funds to reconstruct places of worship destroyed in conflict, access to education and scholarships, tax exemptions etc.

6 Virginia Villa. "Four-in-ten countries and territories worldwide had blasphemy laws in 2019." Last modified January 25, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/25/four-in-ten-countries-and-territories-worldwide-had-blasphemy-laws-in-2019-2/.

7 Article 13 of the Lausanne Covenant says, 'It is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and preach the gospel without interference.' https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov.

8 Open Doors UK. "Why are Christian women and girls particularly vulnerable to persecution?" Last modified February 22, 2023. https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/latest-news/christian-women-vulnerable/.

9 The Conversation. "Why the future of the world's largest religion is female – and African." Last modified March 23, 2022. https://theconversation.com/why-the-future-of-the-worlds-largest-religion-is-female-and-african-178358.

10 Article 10 of the Lausanne Covenant calls for 'the development of strategies for world evangelization calls for imaginative pioneering methods.' https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov.

11 Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 42. "Prayer in Evangelism." September 29 to October 5, 2004. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/prayer-evangelism-lop-42.

12 Virigina Ang. "Visualizing the World's Population by Age Group." Last modified June 16, 2021. https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-worlds-population-2020-by-age/.

13 'It is vital to address intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief with a human rights-based approach. Nelson Mandela famously said that 'No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion'. In addition, nobody is born knowing how to manage religious diversity, which can have a huge positive potential for human rights but also be the source of serious tensions. These truths underline the importance of inclusive peer-to-peer learning on faith and human rights.' United Nations Human Rights. "Combating intolerance against persons based on religion or belief." Accessed August 23, 2023. https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/combating-intolerance-against-persons-based-religion-or-belief.

14 United Nations Human Rights. "OHCHR and the "Faith for Rights" framework." Accessed August 23, 2023. https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights.

15 United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. "Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors To Prevent Incitement to Violence That Could Lead To Atrocity Crimes." Accessed 23, 2023. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf.

16 Article 13 of the Lausanne Covenant. https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov.

Authors

Tehmina Arora is a human rights lawyer and serves as the Director of Advocacy, Asia with ADF International, specialising in constitutional law and the rights of religious minorities. She also served previously as the Advocacy Director for the Evangelical Fellowship of India and as the General Secretary for the Christian Legal Association, India. Arora has frequently written on critical issues such as female foeticide, forced marriages and conversion and religious freedom in Asia. Her work has been prominently featured in national and international newspapers and scholarly journals. Tehmina has served on the board of several Christian charities including the Lausanne Movement. In 2018, Arora was awarded the Champion of Human Rights Award by the Delhi Minority Commission for her services to the Christian community.

Roshini Wickremesinhe is the Executive Director of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), which facilitates global strategic collaborations for religious freedom. She is a human rights lawyer and writer advocating religious freedom and minority rights. Roshini previously served as the Director Advocacy and Law at the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, and as a Senior Legal Consultant on missing persons and enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka, through the UN. She has served in honourary positions including as the Hon. Executive Director of the Asia Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission and Colombo Bureau Chief of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. Roshini's writing on the right to freedom of religion or belief, hate speech and women's rights have been published internationally and locally in scholarly journals, reports, compendiums and magazines.

RIGHT TO FREEDOM

Christie Samuel, Jocabed Solano, Jenny Yang

Future of Freedom

'*Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred* '. Martin Luther King Jr. was clear in what *freedom* is and what is not, thanks to his Christian faith and upbringing. He was even clear on the methodology of achieving that freedom – not at the cost of others. Freedom traditionally considered as the 'liberation from the power of another'[1] is becoming invalid now, though the former Secretary General Ban Ki Moon of the United Nations renewed his commitment to the famous "Four Freedoms" speech of President Franklin Roosevelt which spoke of four fundamental rights – freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.[2]

The Now Generation[3] defines freedom as the state in which one can self-determine their life path, goals, opinions, choices, expressions, and resources.[4] It suggests having power over one's own life to strive for a better life. Freedom going forward, is not being looked upon from external factors, but from within themselves.[5] The preamble of the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" document states that the foundation of freedom is considered as the 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.'[6] Thankfully, freedom as a community notion is still visible among some Indigenous peoples.

However, this collective, community notion is disintegrating in many contexts with the entry of an economy and ways of life that are strongly influenced by capitalism that promotes consumerism, accumulation of money, and a focus on individualism. This has created a type of neo-freedom. For example, in a community culture, the land belongs to everyone, and everyone lives accordingly, with no one left without land. The people who work in the land to cultivate share the fruits of the land with the community. The life is simple, and accumulation is absent. Unfortunately, this emergent neo-freedom is making community life into individual triumphalism and liberality into a lack of generosity. The definition of freedom is being twisted from a community notion to an individual concept. A social perspective is inadvertently turning into a selfish one: 'Do not I have the right to speak like this or do this.'

> ***"The [younger] generation defines freedom as the state in which one can self-determine their life paths, goals, opinions, choices, expressions, and resources."***

Predictably, the future of freedom is alarming. For when selfishness creeps into the framework of freedom, it is only a matter of time for offenses to be justified. The offenses need not be limited to physical ones. They can be emotional, economic, or even enterprise in nature. To add to the confusion, the world is facing innovative technologies and definitions created by Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies. The intentional inputs can be skewed up for favoring offensive selfishness, thereby changing the definition of freedom for the next generation.

Change in Perspectives on Freedom

While the term freedom has so many connotations across ages and regions, it is also important to understand what the Scripture says about freedom. Starting with the creation story where Adam and Eve had total freedom to enjoy everything, they gave up their freedom by choosing to rebel against God. The perfect freedom was gone, and the long-term effects were both physical and spiritual.[7] The loss of physical freedom was often tied to spiritual disobedience and, to gain back freedom, one should pursue deliverance from sin. Biblical freedom received then is holistic – freedom of health, freedom in economy, freedom of hu-

manity, freedom of culture, freedom from oppression, freedom of land, and the list goes on.

God's freedom, however, does have constraints.[8] Constraints continue in God's design, be it personal freedom, as in the case of Naaman's healing[9], or political freedom, as in the case of Israel formation. When constraints were not respected, freedom was lost, be it Gehazi getting leprosy[10], or the Israelites overrun by their enemies. Dr. Robert Gillies, Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, echoes it, 'While one values liberty and freedom of expression, restraint on the grounds of careful responsibility and respect for others helps create a tolerant and humane society.'[11]

> ***"Freedom is explained as something where one is free to act according to their own choices while not being coerced or restrained."***

Injected by the New Age teachings and existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre, the Now generation misconstrues freedom with Individualism, where capitalism permeates into societies today strongly impregnating utilitarianism, consumerism and creating a cannibalistic competitiveness resulting in lots of damages. Freedom is explained as something where one is free to act according to their own choices while not being coerced or restrained.[12] Individualistic thinking attenuates the importance of restraints and elevates unrestricted lifestyle affecting the society at large.[13] Ethics can be redefined by any individual, and what is perceived as right by one section of the society can be considered as wrong by the other in the same society. This can be broadened to any issue, be it religious majoritarianism, ethnic suppression, linguistic divides, gender discrimination, workplace capacity allocations, or anything where injustice can prevail. Decision-making would become challenging as the rulership of the respective entities who design institutional policies would end up favoring the majority who need not be ethically or spiritually right.

Individualistic freedom has already caused enough damage to society where the rich are 'freer' than the oppressed and marginalized, increasing the greed for money, stemming up crimes, making people insecure, and in turn losing their freedom. Unrestricted freedom works only in a society where everyone is inherently good and respects each other's freedom. Since it is not the reality, it would only accelerate the crimes and chaos in the society.[14]

Within the church, the majority of the Now Generation, influenced by their peers, feel they are restricted and not given proper freedom. Lifeway Research states that the second largest reason for the Now Generation to get disillusioned with the church is because of judgmental members.[15] The judgmental approach is being conceived by them as an infringement of their freedom. Though their frustration is justifiable to an extent, given the generation gap, absolute freedom is not the solution. Progression, on the other hand, can occur when critics are properly attended to. Further, upon discernment, it helps to be in the shoes of the oppressed, and to acknowledge alongside them the varied reasons for which the church has been complicit. However, unrestricted freedom can result in dilution of dogma to allow for personal preference and construction of faith preferences leading to syncretistic faith.

Opportunities and Challenges

The kingdom of God treats everyone equal, and it is the responsibility of Christians to treat people impartially in their vocations and in society. Though few communities that encourage solidarity economies are emerging, for the majority, freedom promotes individualism that will create chaos in society. The church has two choices. First, it can act prophetically, which minimizes the chaos. Second, it can continue its regular activities and act over this chaos in a retrospective manner.

The Wholistic Gospel

For most, the Macedonian call[16] of churches limits itself to direct evangelism. While its importance is not moderated, it needs to be remembered that Christ has called his bride

to present a holistic gospel for an all-encompassing world. Presenting the gospel should pair up preaching with actions. The most important action to prevent this chaos would be to call for and implement the freedom designed in the Bible. Following one of the foundational principles of the Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Mark 12:31), Christians seeking to be salt and light have the opportunity to get involved in designing and effecting freedom with ethical constraints in society.

To fail in this would mean that the freedom envisioned by the Now Generation will embolden society with the practice of 'Might will be right.' The challenge for the church will then be to negate the superiority stature of the 'Might' for creating an egalitarian society. If not, segments of society will go through severe ostracism. The post-colonial world has already created major chaos in splitting communities across political boundaries, making major ethnic communities minorities in newly formed nations.

For many, freedom from colonial nations has only seen the change of masters. With freedom being equated with 'nationalism' by the political class, through various forms and disciplines, ethnic and economic minorities are facing untold hardships. Policies and practices are being designed that are considering the freedom of the majority and thereby encouraging communal nepotism. Many countries under a false identity of infrastructure development have systematically and intentionally displaced Indigenous communities from their territories. The cultures and languages of the minorities are becoming extinct upon displacement, and the majority are less worried. Multiple organic and spiritual knowledge systems, land-based systems, and frameworks arising from social movements of the marginalized are intentionally killed. Under the pretext of a false peace, minorities are forced for negotiations. Cannibal economy is promoted, threatening the life of creation, including those of Indigenous peoples. Free access for knowledge-sharing is a powerful tool to deepen democracy and to advance a struggle for a fairer and healthier world. Higher education, unknowing of the long-term effects, excludes many of the diverse knowledge systems in the world.[17] The envisioned freedom will just embolden these oppressors even more.

The Church's Prophetic Role

The responsibility of the church, therefore, should be concerned with the freedom of the oppressed and the marginalized. While traditional fasting is not decimated here, one needs to remember the kind of fasting God loves: 'This is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free and remove the chains that bind people' (Isa 58:6). One needs to introspect how much emphasis the church is giving to this genre the fasting which calls for the freedom of the oppressed. Though the church speaks out in certain pockets favoring the oppressed, in many of these cases it limits itself to statements from leadership and does not get it converted into actions among the people on the ground. The church must take on its prophetic role by working more promptly in denouncing injustice, freeing the oppressed, and rising against the unrestricted freedom of the oppressors.

"The responsibility of the church, therefore, should be concerned with the freedom of the oppressed and the marginalized."

Regrettably, in some territories, the church ends up aligning with rulers forgetting its prophetic role in the community. Historically, the theology of 'submission to authorities' devised and formed in the colonial era has not been given a rethinking. Contextual thinking needs to be put to it when submission becomes valid, though the substance in it is not being negotiated. This theological understanding has created confusing situations for the church, particularly in discerning how to manage when the nucleus of injustice is initiated from ones in authority in the name of freedom that is coupled with patriotism.

Biblical freedom gives priority to equality among communities. It does not talk about

ignoring someone, but instead about including everyone. Being neutral makes the situation worse. Bishop Desmond Tutu warns, 'Being neutral in situations of injustice always helps the oppressor.' Decades ago, there was a common saying which did rounds among the Christian community – 'What Would Jesus Do?'[18] It is time for the church to reflect its call on the same lines – what would Jesus do in this kind of situation? As anyone knows, Jesus would be setting the oppressed free.

Contextualized Freedom

As the understanding on freedom is constantly changing, the Christian response to it should also be revisited at frequent intervals. Theological reflections written during a homogeneous monarchial society cannot be relevant in every aspect to a heterogeneous democratic community. Theological understanding, alongside prayerful deliberation, is needed for the Holy Spirit to guide us.

A capitalist, for example, will think freedom is where the individual can do their mining business by displacing the Indigenous people to thoughtless geographies. The government might also stand with the capitalist for it brings revenue to the nation at-large. Therefore, displaced and intentionally scattered Indigenous community would become a minority in its new geography and might lose its opportunity to gain experience in their language and systems in the schools, citing that it is of no use for the majority. The displaced communities losing their customs and source of living are then prone to trafficking, infections, exploitation, and things untold. In many cases, the non-governmental sectors are interested in working on rehabilitation of the affected or addressing these atrocities, but then forget to manage the root causes.

The Role of the Church

What would then be the role of the church in these situations? Should it be a bystander? Should it give voice to the minority needs? [19] Would the church run its prayers for every linguistic minority in the community, or will it keep quiet for want of the funds from the capitalists or protection from the government?

The confusion of 'submission to authorities' starts here. Should the church stand for the so-called long term economic benefits of the nation or should it stand with the Indigenous people who are shuttled across the geographies thoughtlessly? What would be the stand of a national church where the leaders are from the majority community and the minorities are being targeted by the government represented by the majority community? How much of the teaching in the church speaks for the politically or economically oppressed? How much of those teachings are put in tangible practice?

The church at-large is responsible for implementing the *Just Freedom* modeled in the Scripture by developing influencers in society. The faith community, instead of getting crippled by limiting itself to the cycle of worship in the church, should become the agents of implementing God's will in this world. Believers of Christ should exert to hold all decision-making positions and centers of influence in the community – be it in arts, business, media, education, governance, hospitality, or technology.

To achieve those positions of influence, there should be continuous prayers and actions with proper planning and decisions. Unity in the body of Christ is essential to accomplish the marketplace influence which would invariably define the right freedom and then implement it in the society.

Christ's Freedom

Having said the above, it is imperatively agreed that the foremost role of the church would be to evangelize the community and sustain the evangelized within the evangelized framework. This is solely possible only if church preaches the gospel in the community – be it reached or unreached. Jesus, when preached and being the truth, will set everyone free — not just spiritually, but holistically. The integral gospel calls the church to proclaim the good news, which includes to denounce the structures of corruption and systematic violence that permeates society, including a revision of the church structures if required.

Jesus came to give life in abundance for those who do not live a full life, including due to sys-

tematic injustice. He preached, but he also healed. He spoke against injustice and acted in every form against it. So too the church, which has the responsibility to follow His footsteps, should also ensure the gospel is preached, the sick are healed, and freedom put into practice.

Endnotes

1 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "freedom," accessed June 13, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom.

2 Arwen Armbrecht. "What Are Your Four Basic Freedoms?" *World Economic Forum.* December 11, 2015. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/12/what-are-your-four-freedoms/.

3 Now Generation refers to the 'Young generation' in the church. Instead of referring them as tomorrow's generation, which does not give them a space in the larger church today, the Asia 2020 Congress of Lausanne Movement decided to call them as 'Now Generation'

4 Paul Jenkins. "Why Freedom is Important (Fully Explained)." Brilliantio. Last updated May 4, 2022. https://brilliantio.com/why-freedom-is-important/.

5 Alin Trodden. "What is Freedom in Modern Society." TostPost. September 25, 2018. https://tostpost.com/news-and-society/24811-what-is-freedom-in-modern-society.html.

6 United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Accessed May 2, 2023. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

7 Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. "4 Things the Bible Says About Freedom." June 29, 2020. https://billygraham.org/story/4-things-the-bible-says-about-freedom/.

8 Art Lindsley. "Seven Implications of the Biblical View of Freedom for Our Lives." Institute for Faith, Work, & Economics. July 4, 2016. https://tifwe.org/seven-implications-of-biblical-freedom/.

9 2 Kings 5; Luke 4:27

10 2 Kings 4—5

11 Robert Gillies. "Freedom Without Restraint?" The Scottish Episcopal Church. January 28, 2015. https://www.scotland.anglican.org/freedom-without-restraint/.

12 David Richo. "From Compliance to Choice." Accessed June 13, 2023. Shambhala Publications. https://www.shambhala.com/longing-for-freedom/.

13 David Grace. "Unrestricted Freedom Is A Zero-Sum Game." May 18, 2021. Government & Political Theory Columns by David Grace. https://medium.com/government-political-theory-columns-by-david-grace/unrestricted-freedom-is-a-zero-sum-game-more-freedom-for-you-means-less-freedom-for-me-a4da2cef5c4d.

14 Law Aspect. "Why do Liberals Not Believe in Unrestricted Freedom?" Accessed April 24, 2023. https://lawaspect.com/why-do-liberals-not-believe-in-unrestricted-freedom/.

15 Aaron Earls. "Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church When They Become Young Adults." Lifeway Research January 15, 2019. https://research.lifeway.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/#:~:text=Two-thirds (66 percent), from Nashville-based Lifeway Research.

16 Acts 16:9—10

17 Budd L. Hall and Rajesh Tandon. "Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education." *Research for All* 1, no. 1 (2017)*: 6-19.* https://www.unescochair-cbrsr.org/pdf/resource/RFA.pdf.

18 Charles Monroe Sheldon. In His Steps. Scotts Valley: Create Space, 2012.

19 Francesca Gino. "Why It's So Hard to Speak Up Against a Toxic Culture." Harvard Business Review. May 21, 2018. https://hbr.org/2018/05/why-its-so-hard-to-speak-up-against-a-toxic-culture.

Authors

Christie Samuel is the chief operations officer of Infinity Centre, which engages in empowering socially marginalized communities with quality education through a group of institutions based in South Asia. He is also part of the core team of SAMA Link, a network of mission organizations in South Asia. Christie is a contributing author for Tamil Diaspora: Intersectionality of Migration, Religion, Language and Culture, and serves as the Lausanne Movement Catalyst for Freedom and Justice Network.

Jocabed Solano is the director of Indigenous Memory and a missionary at Unidos en Misión. Currently she is pursuing a PhD in theological studies at NAIITS. She is from the Gunadule indigenous nation and is Panamanian. Jocabed serves as the Lausanne Movement Catalyst for Freedom and Justice Network.

Jenny Yang is the senior vice president of advocacy and policy at World Relief, where she provides oversight for all advocacy initiatives and policy positions at World Relief, representing the organization's advocacy priorities to the US government and mobilizing churches on advocacy campaigns. She is co-author of *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate*. Jenny is an assistant professor at Kilns College in Bend, Oregon (US). She is also on the advisory board of Christianity Today Women and on the board of directors for The Justice Conference, and serves as the Lausanne Movement Catalyst for Freedom and Justice Network.

POVERTY AND ACCESS GAPS

Nora Hughes, Yolande Cooke

Poverty: From Today to 2050

In 1948 the aspirational Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed with great hope. It included statements about eradicating extreme poverty, and since that time, historic strides have been made in poverty reduction. Between 1829 and 2018 the prevalence of extreme poverty across the globe fell from 76 percent to 10 percent, but it has not been eliminated. Over 700 million people still live in extreme poverty, including one in five children. [1]

While we celebrate the strides made in poverty reduction, we must reckon with the reality that progress has apparently slowed between 2005 and 2021.[2] The WB estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified this problem by helping to push more than 70 million people worldwide into extreme poverty.[3] MPI estimates that the pandemic will set poverty reduction back by three to ten years. [4]This regression has been compounded by the effects of wars in Ukraine and Sudan and by China's slowed economic growth. These global crises make the WB's goal of reducing extreme poverty to less than 3 percent by 2030 seem out of reach.[5]

As Jesus Christ said, 'You will always have the poor with you' (Matthew 26:11). Not only has this been the case, but the definitions of poverty have changed over time, indicating an inability to accurately capture the contradiction of poverty existing in a world with enough for all. First, poverty was defined as living on USD 1/day (now increased to USD 1.90). Based on that number alone, the World Bank (WB) estimates in 2023 that 1 billion people live on less than USD 1/day (abject poverty), and 8 percent of the world's population lives on USD 2.15 (extreme poverty).[6]The measurement of poverty, while often measured by income, does not fully describe the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Without adequate measurements for the multiple dimensions of poverty to help us understand its nature, we are less capable of implementing effective policies and interventions.[7] Given the limitations of an income-based standard for poverty, development agencies are leaning toward indicators that measure more than one dimension of poverty. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) has been developed to provide a fuller picture of the complex dynamics of poverty so that more meaningful interventions can be developed. It consists of ten indicators that span health, education, and standard of living, revealing that a poor person in one part of the world is deprived differently than a poor person in another region. Moreover, it shows how one indicator can significantly impact other indicators to cause spiraling cycles of poverty.[8] As important as it is to have this broader understanding of poverty's causes and effects, work is still needed in understanding the integrative nature of poverty.

> ***"Over 700 million people still live in extreme poverty, including one in five children."***

Maryann Broxton, ATD Fourth World USA, views poverty as a 'lived experience' and not just about 'cause and consequence'.[9] Therefore, we can posit that the church has an opportunity, even a mandate, to engage holistically in poverty's human, lived issues. We must ask ourselves, 'Is poverty an issue on God's heart, and ought it therefore to be on ours? If so, what should we do? What is the church's role given its assignments in Matthew 25 and the Great Commission?'

Examining The Complexities of Poverty

Given the current state of poverty worldwide, we believe that future interventions to reduce poverty must include or at least analyze many additional factors currently used in the MPI, as shown in Illustration 1. Moreover, the complex interconnectedness of these causes of poverty must be taken into account.

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST?

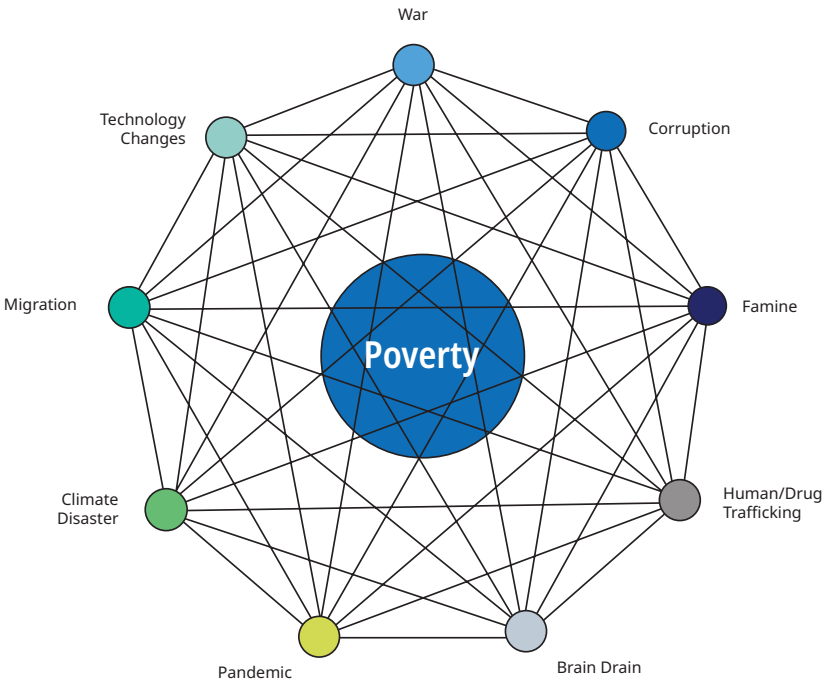


Figure 1: Interlinked Elements Driving Poverty's Complexity

War: One of the most destructive man-made vices is war, which has immediate and long-term effects on its survivors. Amrita Rathi of the American Psychological Association advises that 'death, injury, sexual violence, malnutrition, illness, and disability are some of the most threatening physical consequences of war, while post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety are some of the emotional effects'.[10]

Additionally, wars in one country impact those living in other countries.[11] UNICEF reports that the war in Ukraine and the resulting increase in food and energy prices means that children will be disproportionately disadvantaged and at greater risk of child marriage, trafficking, violence, exploitation, and abuse.[12] Combined with persistent global inflation, this could result in a growing proportion of people experiencing poverty being priced out of access to basic needs, which, according to the World Economic Forum (2023), can fuel unrest and political instability.[13]

Corruption: National-level corruption occurs when government officials use their authority for private gain in the designing and implementation of public policies.[14] Corruption can occur in government, business, and other institutions originally designed to serve people.

Lauryn Defreitas of the Borgen Project notes that corruption includes bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and fraud and identifies 'weak legal systems, bad governance, a lack of transparency, and poverty' as key contributors to corruption.[15] These structural failures negatively affect people's lives by, among other things, reducing funding to alleviate poverty, reinforcing education inequalities, and misaligning investment in national infrastructure such as clean drinking water and housing.

Famine: Oxfam (2023) defines famine as 'the most serious food insecurity situation, in terms of scale and severity. [. . .] When more than 20 percent of households cannot eat, acute malnutrition exceeds 30 percent, and death and starvation are evident, we can no longer talk about a humanitarian 'emergency' situation but a famine.'[16] As a part of Christ's charge to the church, how can the church seek to mitigate famine and provide for millions in the throes of severe hunger?

Human/drug trafficking: Human trafficking is compelled service for someone else's profit.[17] It typically has two primary forms: labor or sex. In the developed world, we can see examples of human trafficking around us in the faces of those who care for our elderly, work as maids, wash dishes in our restaurants, or do other types of manual labor. Drug trafficking also contributes to poverty.[18] Nick Croft of *The Guardian* aptly described this relationship: 'Poor development fuels conflict, which fuels the drug trade, which fuels conflict, which

fuels poverty.'[19] Illegal drugs offer a lucrative job opportunity in a poor country with little opportunity. In this way, poverty and the drug trade become a life and death choice: sell drugs and have money for your family, or don't sell drugs and die in poverty.

Brain drain: The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'brain drain' as the situation in which many educated and skilled people leave their own country to live and work in another.[20] For example, Mayanja, a Ugandan government economist, highlights that in Uganda, only 69 percent of healthcare jobs in 2015 could be filled, because many Ugandan-trained doctors migrated to countries with higher wages.[21]

Stark and Fan state that understanding the multiple effects of brain drain is crucial to resolving the issues. For instance, contrary to assumptions, many countries find that unemployment rate rises proportionately with the level of one's education.[22] There are simply no jobs for a highly educated person, showing the fallacy of measuring national education coverage rather than education that results in productivity, thus holistically reducing poverty.

Pandemics: As noted above, the World Bank estimates that three to four years of progress was lost, as 97 million more people live on less than USD 1.90/day.[23] The COVID-19 pandemic is one extreme example of issues that may occur again. UNICEF proposes a multifaceted process to tamp down potential pandemics, which includes improving healthcare overall by prioritizing trained healthcare workers; effective surveillance and response systems; building confidence in healthcare systems; vaccine programs; and strengthening logistics and supply.[24]

Climate disasters: Natural disasters of all varieties are increasing. In analyzing the cost of disaster losses nationally, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction reported in 2022 that even though richer countries have suffered the most extensive financial losses from disasters owing to their higher-value assets, poorer countries suffer much more significant losses than their economic wealth. This fact was exemplified in two of the most expensive disasters in 2022: Hurricane Ian caused 130 deaths and displaced 40,000 people in the USA, while floods in Pakistan caused direct damages estimated at more than USD 15 billion, killed more than 1,700 people, displaced 8 million people, and will cause long-term economic hardship.[25]

Migration: People leave their country of origin for many reasons, including war, climate disasters, and lack of opportunity. The International Migration Report (2020) puts the situation in perspective by stating that 96.5 percent of people globally live in their country of birth, meaning that the other 3.5 percent are migrants.[26] Migration affects not only those seeking a safer, better life, but also those countries overwhelmed by the cost of facilitating economically poor migrants.

Technology changes: Rapid technology development has exacerbated the 'digital divide' between those with access to technology and those without. Initiatives like One Laptop per Child (OLPC) have attempted to reduce that divide.[27] However, as with OLPC, many fail because they do not understand the supportive environment required to facilitate their success. Further, the increasing incorporation of artificial intelligence in every area of life will dramatically shift the marketplace landscape in years to come, reshuffling work opportunities in low income brackets, causing many to fall into poverty.

The United Nations maintains programs and processes to promote science, technology, and innovation across multiple platforms and countries.[28] However, it is government-led and does not seem to include significant technology companies. Jeffrey Sachs outlines four hindering binds: 'the lack of market demand, the tendency towards increasing returns to scale, the ecological barriers to diffusion of technology, and the human forcings which are probably doing disproportionate damage to the poor world'.[29]

Opportunities and Challenges for the Great Commission

Faced with the complexity of poverty, the church struggles to effectively execute its mission: to care for and make disciples of all mankind. As complex and grave as it may be, global poverty is not outside of the reach of our caring and creative God. The question is still before us: 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' We believe that the church must

rise up and work together in partnership, responding, 'Here we are. Send us!'

What, we might ask, can the church do? What is Jesus' challenge to us? With his parable of the talents in mind (Matt 25:14-30), we might consider, 'What has he given us?' Directly following this parable, Jesus confronts us with a scene of the heavenly throne room where the Son of Man divides the sheep from the goats. In welcoming the sheep, he says, 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me' (Matt 25:35-36). The actions Jesus honors are seemingly small things done with love and consistency.

If we believe that this matters to God, then it should matter to us. The next step is to discern how to act. How can we work together? What models are holistic and break through the complexity? To effectively address global poverty, we must understand its complexities and devise holistic solutions. In this unique time of assessing our progress, we would do well to:

See the physical and spiritual as one. As we read the gospels, we see Jesus' commitment to the poor. While poverty will cause suffering for as long as we are in the world, Jesus leads us with many examples of his care for us. We all too often have separated the physical from the spiritual. We tend to view missions as primarily evangelism, imagining poverty reduction and social work to be lower priorities in God's eyes. But that does not align with the image of Jesus in Scripture. He cared for the whole person—the outcast, the sick, the poor. A careful reading of Matthew 25:31-46 is sobering. His expectation is that his people will live lives characterized by compassion. Do we see our task as Jesus sees it?

When our fellow humans are in dire straits, and we do little to change the situation, our souls are also poor. We must repent and acknowledge that, as the people of God, we have not loved as God has loved.

Close critical understanding gaps in the church. We cannot solve a problem that we cannot see or understand. We must invest our time and resources into better understanding the dynamics of poverty both globally and in our own communities, and we must equip our members with this understanding. It can be hard to know where to start when trying to combat poverty in real-world communities, without bringing about negative unintended consequences. Promoting examples of fruitful and reproduceable initiatives is invaluable in helping people move from theory to action. Notable examples of this include macro- and micro-business education[30] and technology acceleration.[31]

Create measures of success based on analytical models. Contemporary analytical approaches, such as game theory, can help navigate the complexity of poverty allowing organizations to create measurable initiatives, communicate the need (example: reverse 'doomsday clock'[32]), and demonstrate effective reduction of root causes and successful end results.

'Creationize' climate issues instead of politicizing them. One of Lausanne's contributions in this area is its Creation Care Issue Network, which brings together Christians from around the world. We must work together on the premise that 'Stewardship of God's creation (creation care) is a clear biblical command and an integral part of what it means to follow Jesus as Lord.'[33] United in this calling, we can create technology and build awareness in a way that leads with biblical truth, not political alliances, and in this way we can mitigate climate-related causes of poverty.

Collaborate to reduce redundancies and cross-purposes. With the rapid development of new technologies, the church can develop timely, relevant information to support decision-making. This enables us not only to understand the crisis, but also to assess the best approach and identify our potential partners. A macro-organization such as Lausanne is well-positioned to gather and distribute valuable ideas and data in a timely way across national and denominational lines. Our efforts would also benefit from a secure, continually updated database identifying Christian organizations, their strengths, and capacities to facilitate partnerships that unite our shared mission.

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST?

Our challenges are opportunities. Father God has created us to have a more significant impact in our world. The problems, as outlined above, have overwhelmed our global secular systems and seem unsolvable. However, none of this surprises God. He has created us for this moment in time. He cares for the smallest details and the larger picture. He searches for the lost sheep without neglecting the sparrow that falls. Complexity does not overwhelm Him. He placed us in this time and in each of our unique positions 'for such a time as this'.

While this paper is not exhaustive, we hope that it serves the church well in living up to its mission. May this call inspire us, not overwhelm us. We hope that these connections can spur the church to find effective avenues for bringing God's message of whole-person hope into the lived spaces of people in poverty.

Resources

- International Bulletin of Mission Research: Volume 47, Issue 2: Migration and World Christianity https://journals.sagepub.com/action/doSearch?AllField=poverty&SeriesKey=ibmd
- International Bulletin of Mission Research, Poverty. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23969393221138343
- Mission Frontiers Magazine: Article by Steve Saint, son of Nate Saint, jungle pilot killed in 1956 by Waodani Indians (Aucas) http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/projecting-poverty-where-it-doesnt-exist
- Partnership Brokers Association: Excellent training, coaching, and consulting in multi-stakeholder collaboration www.partnershipbrokers.org
- World Relief: An excellent report on the effects of the pandemic and poverty, "COVID-19 Impact on the World's Poor." https://worldrelief.org/covid-report/.34
- Asmus, Barry and Grudem, Wayne. *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2013).
- Beisner, E. Calvin. *Prosperity and Poverty, The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).
- Corbett, Steve and Fikkert, Brian. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013).
- Fikkert, Brian and Mask, Russell. *From Dependence to Dignity: How to Alleviate Poverty through Church-Centered Microfinance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).
- Hong, Yohan. *A Theological Understanding of Power for Poverty Alleviation in the Philippines: With Special Reference to US-Based Filipino Protestants in Texas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022).
- Kandler, Kurt and Bradsher, Bethany. *If You Really Want to Help: Redefining the War on Poverty* (Dubai: Kne Publishing, 2023).
- Kim, Micah. *Missional Fidelity of MoveIn: An International Christian Mission Movement among the Unreached, Urban Poor* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023).
- King, David D. M. *Reclaiming the Radical Economic Message of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022).
- Kresta, David E. *Jesus on Main Street, Good News through Community Economic Development* (Atlanta, GA: Cascade Books, 2021).Pattison, Bonnie L. Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023).
- Pattison, Bonnie L. *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin, Princeton Theological Monograph Series* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023).
- Poverty through Church-Centered Microfinance (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).
- Platt, David. *A Compassionate Call to Counterculture in a World of Poverty* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015).
- Plummer, Robert L. Editor. *Rich in Good Deeds: A Biblical Response to Poverty by the Church and by Society* (Faith & Work) (Dallas, TX: Fontes Press, 2022).

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST?

- Schirrmacher, Christine and Schirrmacher, Thomas. *The Oppression of Women*: Violence – Exploitation – Poverty, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020).
- Walton, Steve (editor) and Swithinbank, Hannah (Editor). *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 2019)

Endnotes

1 "Ending Poverty." The United Nations Global Issues. https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty.

2 Ibid.

3 "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course." World Bank Group (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2022). https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity. Accessed May 26, 2023.

4 UNDP, OPHI. *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty.* (New York: 2022).

5 "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course." World Bank Group (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2022). https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity. Accessed May 26, 2023.

6 "Poverty and Inequality." The World Bank. https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/themes/poverty-and-inequality.html. Accessed April 29, 2023.

7 "HLPF Side Event Considers How to Define Poverty with Those Left Furthest Behind." SDG Knowledge Hub. https://sdg.iisd.org/news/hlpf-side-event-considers-how-to-define-poverty-with-those-left-furthest-behind/.

8 UNDP, OPHI. Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: *Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty.* (New York: 2022).

9 "HLPF Side Event Considers How to Define Poverty with Those Left Furthest Behind." SDG Knowledge Hub. https://sdg.iisd.org/news/hlpf-side-event-considers-how-to-define-poverty-with-those-left-furthest-behind/. Accessed, May 1, 2023.

10 Amrita Rathi. "Psychological Impact of Victims of War and Conflict." APA at the United Nations. https://www.apa.org/international/united-nations/un-matters/rathi-war.pdf. Accessed May 10, 2023.

11 "1 year on - the global impact of the war in Ukraine." World Economic Forum. March 2, 2023. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/ukraine-crisis-food-energy-poverty/.

12 "The impact of the war in Ukraine and subsequent economic downturn on child poverty in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." UNICEF Regional Brief. October 2022. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/24706/file/The%20impact%20of%20the%20war%20in%20Ukraine%20and%20subsequent%20economic%20downturn%20on%20child%20poverty%20in%20eastern%20Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia.pdf.

13 "1 year on - the global impact of the war in Ukraine." World Economic Forum. March 2, 2023. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/ukraine-crisis-food-energy-poverty/.

14 S. Gupta, H. Davoodi, R. Alonso-Terme. "Does Corruption Affect Income Inequality and Poverty?" Economics of Governance 3, 23-45 (2002). https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s101010100039. Accessed May 1, 2023.

15 L. Defreitas. "How Corruption in Developing Countries Impacts Poverty." The Borgen Project, Blog. April 4, 2023. https://borgenproject.org/corruption-in-developing-countries/.

16 "Hungry in a World of Plenty: Millions on the Brink of Famine." Oxfam. https://www.oxfam.org/en/hungry-world-plenty-millions-brink-famine.

17 "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf. Accessed May 1, 2023.

18 *Isabella Gonzalez Montilla.* "The Link Between Drug Trafficking and Poverty." The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/drug-trafficking-and-poverty/. Accessed May 1, 2023

19 Nick Crofts. "Drugs and development – caught in a vicious cycle." The Guardian. April 7, 2011. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/apr/07/drugs-development-caught-vicious-cycle-policy.

20 "Brain drain." Cambridge Dictionary. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/brain-drain. Accessed May 26, 2023.

21 R. S. "What educated people from poor countries make of the 'brain drain' argument." The Economist. https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/08/27/what-educated-people-from-poor-countries-make-of-the-brain-drain-argument? Accessed April 30, 2023.

22 Oded Stark and C. Simon Fan. "Losses and Gains to Developing Countries from the Migration of Educated Workers: An Overview of Recent Research and New Reflections." MIREM (Italy: European University Institute, 2007). https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/7983/MIREM_AR_2007_02.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed May 1, 2023.

23 Carolina Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, Ruth Hill, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, et al. "COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality." World Bank. https://blogs.worldbank.org/development-talk/covid-19-leaves-legacy-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality. Accessed May 25, 2023.

24 "How to improve primary healthcare to prepare for pandemics." UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/stories/how-to-improve-primary-healthcare-to-prepare-for-pandemics. Accessed May 26, 2023.

25 "The Invisible Toll of Disasters." UNDRR. https://www.undrr.org/explainer/the-invisible-toll-of-disasters-2022. Accessed April 30, 2023.

26 "World Migration Report 2020." IOM UN Migration. (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2019).

27 "One Laptop per Child." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Laptop_per_Child. Accessed May 1, 2023.

28 Carolina Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, Ruth Hill, Daniel Gerszon Mahler, et al. "COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality." World Bank. https://blogs.worldbank.org/development-talk/covid-19-leaves-legacy-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality. Accessed May 25, 2023.

29 Jeffrey Sachs. "Science, Technology & Poverty: Five ways to mobilize development in low-income countries." International Atomic Energy Agency Bulletin. https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/magazines/bulletin/bull44-1/44105890710.pdf. Accessed, May 1, 2023.

30 See Micro Business Center International for an example of this approach: https://mbcinternational.org/en/.

31 See Bluefields Aceledora in Sao Paulo, Brazil for an example of this: https://bluefieldsdev.com.

32 "2023 Doomsday Clock Announcement." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.* January 24, 2023. https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/. Accessed May 13, 2023.

33 "Creation Care Issue Network." The Lausanne Movement. https://lausanne.org/networks/issues/creation-care.

34 "COVID-19 Impact on the World's Poor." World Relief. March 15, 2022. https://worldrelief.org/covid-report/.

Authors

Dr Nora Hughes holds a Ph.D. in human and organization systems, MS in organization, and a BS in business. She has consulted and worked with many major corporations, governments, and mission agencies. In addition, as CEO of Business 4 Blessing, Inc., she has taught missional business in many countries around the world.

Dr Yolande Cooke holds a Ph.D. in international development, BSc in poverty reduction/development management, and BBA in international marketing. She seeks to bring kingdom of God principles into the business sphere. She is the programme officer at the University of the West Indies, Barbados, where she works on technology transfer.

MALE AND FEMALE AS FULL GOSPEL PARTNERS

Mimi Haddad, Leslie Segraves, Terran Williams, Anne Zaki

Imagine a sports team fighting for the championship. Would the coaches choose to send to the field only half their team? Who would bench trained and needed players in the face of its greatest challenge? Yet often some Christians do just that. Many underutilize godly and gifted players, even though we are engaged in a battle infinitely larger and more consequential than a sports contest. What if completing the Great Commission needed the full partnership of God's godly daughters laboring alongside God's godly sons?

As is articulated in The Manila Manifesto, the Lausanne Movement affirms 'that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good.'[1]

> ***"...the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God's people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good."***

The Cape Town Commitment further affirms women and men in partnership: 'Women and men are thus equal in creation, in sin, in salvation, and in the Spirit.' Lausanne recognizes 'the enormous and sacrificial contribution that women have made to world mission, ministering to both men and women, from biblical times to present.'[2] These statements are intended to encourage men and women to partner together in mission. Despite the breadth of global Christianity that these affirmations represent, many men and women do not enjoy the blessings intended for participation in global mission today when this partnership is broken or neglected.

While the shared leadership of men and women has sadly sparked division in the church, there is no dispute in affirming that both men and women have a:

- Shared **origin** as God's image-bearers.
- Shared **mandate** to govern creation.
- Shared **enemy** (Satan).
- Shared **Fall.**
- Shared **redemption.**
- Shared **Holy Spirit** who calls and gifts.
- Shared **legacy** in shaping the early Christians.
- Shared **Commission** to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach in Christ's authority.
- Shared eternal **destiny**.

From our image-bearing origin to our global commission and beyond, men and women form God's whole "dream team"!

Current Global Reality: Men and women are reaping the harvest

Three billion people have yet to hear the name of Jesus Christ. When both men and women share the gospel, God moves! The Spirit of God is using women to serve in fruitful Great Commission ministries alongside their co-laboring brothers despite some limitations that Christian women encounter:[3]

The Middle East: Reports suggest that one of the fastest growing churches in the world is the Iranian church. Local leaders attribute growth in this persecuted context to the substantial number of brave women evangelizing and co-leading within a house church model.[4] One ministry reports that about half of all the church and ministry leaders are women.[5]

China: In previous decades, the unofficial church exploded in numbers as Spirit-gifted men and women preached and oversaw house churches. For many years, more than half the church leaders ('co-workers') were women. But recent testimonies from Chinese Christian women report that the growing influence of teachings about church policy and structure from outside of China has in some cases restricted women from joining their brothers in leadership.[6]

Southern Africa: One local Zambian church had a vision to plant churches across their nation. When they prayed for workers, they did not expect God to send . . . men and women. Many women, some disabled, walked or hobbled long distances telling of their call from God to plant networks of churches. The countercultural obedience of these sisters moved the gospel to unchurched areas in Zambia.[7]

South Asia: Local believers sent out both men and women into a dangerous, remote area. Now a previously unengaged, unreached people group has gospel access, and the first group of baptized believers is gathering.[8] In another area, some report a movement of over 4,000 women equipped as disciple-makers have planted churches in 20,000 villages. With strong DNA of multiplication, many house church streams have reached fifth, eighth, or even twelfth generations of daughter churches.[9]

Southeast Asia: Begun during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020-2021, a movement of over 2,000 women equipped as Disciple-Making Movement leaders have led thousands to Christ.[10]

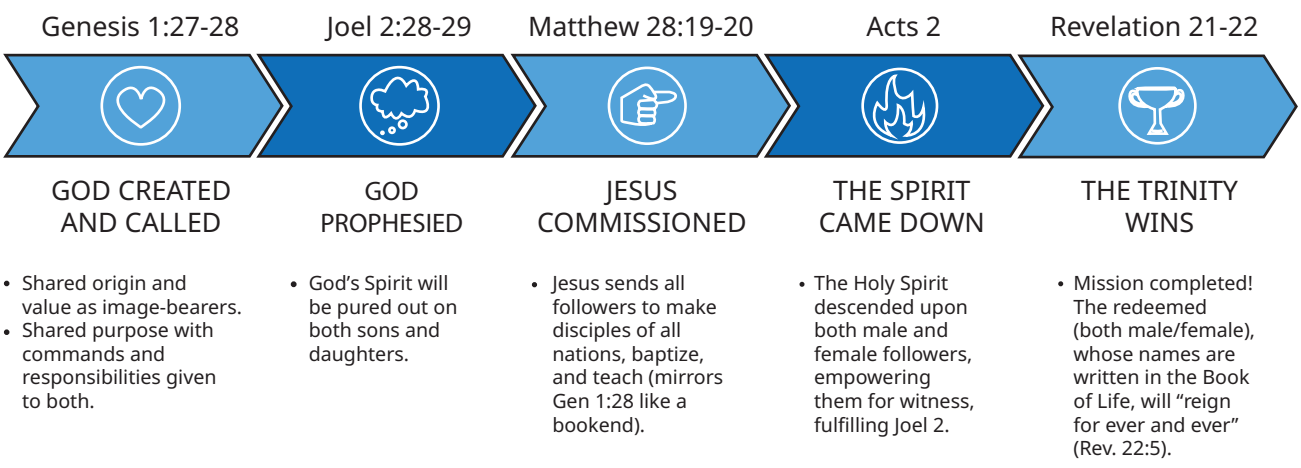
These pioneering women join their brothers to reflect a deep biblical tradition.

- Like Miriam, many serve in leadership teams alongside men.[11]
- Like Deborah, many guide God's people with gifts of wise conflict resolution, prophetic discernment, and strategic delegation.[12]
- Like Huldah, many are chosen by God to discern the present priorities for God's people.[13]
- Like the Samaritan woman, many are instrumental in bringing the gospel to their villages.[14]
- Like Mary Magdalene, many have received Christ and go out to witness.[15]
- Like Lydia, many are chosen by God, and they open new areas and their homes to gospel messengers.[16]
- Like Priscilla, many care for churches, disciple believers, and raise up more teachers.[17]
- Like Junia, many 'are outstanding among the apostles'.[18]

Thousands of women and men come to faith every day around the world. Many echo the callings and giftings of their biblical sisters. These biblical and current examples reveal God's intent for female and male image-bearers to serve as his dream team.

Challenges from Today to 2050

Despite many exciting advances in global evangelism, we recognize that church growth is not



keeping up with population growth.[19] At the time of this writing, 86 percent of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus have never met a Christian. [20]

Men and women should be encouraged to partner together, whether informally or formally to take the gospel to the unreached and lost. Both male and female disciples need to be equipped and empowered to share, to demonstrate, and to proclaim the gospel because there are places where men cannot reach women, and places where women cannot reach men.[21]

> ***"Men and women should be encouraged to partner together, whether informally or formally, to take the gospel to the unreached and lost."***

Issues related to men, women, and the family pose significant challenges to Great Commission efforts, but in Christ, each of these challenges offers incredible opportunities for gospel advancement.

Critical Theory and Secular Feminism

Though labels may change, we will continue to see the proliferation of ideologies that erode God's vision of male-female partnership. For example, Critical Theory (coming from the 1920's Frankfurt School and linked to Marxist ideology) divides the world according to power relations, often pitting groups against each other as 'guilty oppressor' or 'oppressed victim.'[22] Applied to gender, this errant school of thought tells women to rise up against and above men who are 'oppressors.' In some forms of secular feminism, differences between men and women are erased, and women are called to be completely independent from men—even hostile to them. These ideologies all fall short of God's dream for the reconciliation of men and women who, different in some ways from each other, are meant to function in harmonious and interdependent partnership (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:11).

Secular Forces

Secularism deeply challenges God's design of male and female. Individualistic philosophies, self-focus, and the idol of convenience lead to a worldview where feelings trump external truth. This ideology takes a heavy toll on women and girls.

- Mind-body dualism attacks the definitions and the reality of biological gender. 'Secular thought assumes a body/person split. [. . .] This dualism has created a fractured, fragmented view of the human being.'[23]
- The language of 'reproductive rights' slyly exploits women through a multi-billion-dollar industry that globally kills around 73 million babies per year[24] (and victimizes women) through abortion.
- The LGBTQ agenda has erased distinctions and protections of biological women including: biological gendered restrooms, sports, prisons, pronouns, and defined legal categories.[25] This ideology has taken root in the West, and the West pushes it worldwide.

In the face of these global obstacles, the church has the opportunity and responsibility to live out a kingdom ethic that points to the power of a redeemer who can offer beauty, harmony, holiness, and shared mission between male and female.

The Power of Collaborative Opportunities

Throughout redemptive history, God's plan reveals men and women working together in God's global mission. The trajectory of Scripture starts with a powerful blessed alliance between men and women given dominion over the earth, and the Bible ends with the servants of God (the redeemed) reigning together for ever and ever.[26]

Encouraging men and women to partner together produces remarkable results in the church as it has in secular society. One comprehensive study[27] shows that when senior management teams in companies consist of only males, they make good decisions 58 percent of the time. If women are added to those teams, the likelihood of making good decisions jumps to 73 percent.[28] One scholar stated, 'I've made the business case that integrated leadership will separate tomorrow's

successful organizations from those that will be left behind.'[29]

The 30% Solution postulates 'real change starts to take hold in organizations once a critical mass of women has 30 percent or more of the seats on the senior leadership teams and Board of Directors.' At the conclusion of the Fourth UN conference on the Status of Women in 1995, 189 nations accepted the 30% Solution as the way forward to 'guide the full empowerment and advancement of all women and girls around the world.'[30]

The church would do well to recognize the benefits of empowering men and women to work together for the sake of advancing the gospel. The question is whether we will make use of the strengths and opportunities of men and women together in mission.

Conclusion

Jesus once asked a man, 'Do you see this woman?' (Luke 7:44). He asks Christians the same question today. Thankfully, women and men are differentiated by biology rather than by God's gifting and calling, and if we view one another as mutual partners, we will share the joy of faithful gospel collaboration.

Due to the urgency of the gospel and Jesus' prayers for multiplied laborers, it is time for Christians to welcome the partnership between men and women more fully. It is time to embrace our sisters together with their brothers as equal teammates. If the Holy Spirit has gifted them, then let us wholeheartedly embrace the mutually beneficial partnership of men and women for the Great Commission.

Endnotes

1 *The Manila Manifesto.* The Lausanne Movement (1989). https://lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto.

2 *The Cape Town Commitment.* The Lausanne Movement (2010). https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ct-commitment.

3 Elizabeth Lane Miller, Eva Brown, Helene Fisher, and Rachel Morleys. Invisible: *The Gender Report* 2022 (Open Doors International, 2022), 3.

4 *Sheep Among Wolves Vol II.* Directed by Dalton Thomas and Joel Richardson (Frontier Alliance International, 2019).

5 Lana Silk, CEO of Transform Iran

6 Interview with authors. As catalysts for Male/Female Partnership, Chinese women approached us at a Lausanne conference and exclaimed, 'We have given our blood for Christ in our nation. But now foreign books and outside theology have entered and taught that women should not lead. We want to obey Christ, but we now no longer know who we are.' See also, Alexander Chow's article in *Christianity Today*, 'The Remarkable Story of China's Bible Women'.

7 Interview with author, April 2023. More stories of women church planters in other parts of Africa can be found at https://www.harvestersministries.com/en/meet-the-women-planting-churches/.

8 Chad and Leslie Segraves. 'Partnership in the Church.' 30 November 2020. https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/485698372.

9 Interview with author, April 2023.

10 Interview with author, April 2023.

11 Exod 15:20–21; Micah 6:4

12 Judg 4-5

13 2 Kings 22:14–20

14 John 4:4–42

15 John 20:11-18

16 Acts 16:9–10, 14–15, 40

17 Acts 18:24–26; Rom 16:3–4; 1 Cor 16:19

18 Rom 16:7. About Junia, John Chrysostom wrote: 'To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is!'

19 Kent Parks. Finishing the Remaining 29% of World Evangelization. https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-05/finishing-the-remaining-29-of-world-evangelization/.

20 'Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020: Society, Religion, and Mission' (2013). *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37(3), 78. https://doi.org/10.1177/239693931303700308.

21 Ibrahim Ouf. 'Egypt appoints female imams to help fight extremism.' *The Arab Weekly*. 3 May 2017. https://www.thearabweekly.com/egypt-appoints-female-imams-help-fight-extremism. For further reading, see also: Amira Sayed Ahmed. 'Female preachers officially find their way to Egypt's pulpits.' *Al-Monitor*. 24 February 2017. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/02/egypt-female-preachers-pulpits-ministry-endowments.html#ixzz81qOwQuzZ. Farah Rafik. 'Al-Azhar Grand Imam Appoints Female Advisor for the First Time in Egypt's History.' 21 September 2022. Egyptian Streets. https://egyptianstreets.com/2022/09/21/al-azhar-grand-imam-appoints-female-advisor-for-the-first-time-in-egypts-history/.

22 Critical Theory rose from the Frankfurt School of Germany in the 1920's. It continues to drive ideologies of cultural Marxism and divide people across cultures and nations. See Paul Kengor's book, The Devil and Karl Marx pp. 345-402, to see a robust, academic study on Critical Theory.

23 Nancy Pearcey. *Love Thy Body* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 14.

24 'Abortions Worldwide This Year.' Worldometer. https://www.worldometers.info/abortions/. 'Abortions.' Worldometer. 25 November 2021. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion.

25 Everett Piper. 'A nation of misogynists: Feminists' gains lost in the blink of an eye.' *The Washington Times*. 23 April 2023. https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/apr/23/nation-of-misogynists-feminists-gains-lost-in-blin/.

26 Rev 22:5

27 'Hacking Diversity with Inclusive Decision-Making.' Cloverpop. https://www.cloverpop.com/hubfs/Whitepapers/Cloverpop_Hacking_Diversity_Inclusive_Decision_Making_White_Paper.pdf.

28 If the team consisted of a diversity of genders, ages, and places of upbringing and tertiary study, the number climbs to 87 percent.

29 Rebecca Shambaugh. 'Where Are the Women? The 30 Percent Solution.' LinkedIn. 6 April 2016. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/where-women-30-percent-solution-rebecca-shambaugh/.

30 Carol Henry. 'The 30% Solution – Balanced Leadership.' *Carol Henry Coaching*. 26 June 2020. https://carolhenrycoaching.com/2020/06/26/the-30-solution-balanced-leadership/.

Authors

Dr Mimi Haddad serves as president of CBE International. She serves in leadership of the Evangelicals and Women Study Section at the Evangelical Theological Society. Mimi is an award-winning author, having contributed to over fifteen books, most recently: Helping the Church Understand Biblical Gender Equality, History Matters: Evangelicals and Women, and 'Human Flourishing: Global Perspectives' in Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives (IVP, 2021).

Dr Leslie Segraves is co-founder/president of 10/40 Connections. She serves as a pro-life apologist with LTI. Additionally, Leslie and her husband served as catalysts with Lausanne's "Men and Women in Partnership" network. They now serve DMM's with 24:14 through "Men and Women Working Together." They launched the platform Serving Shoulder to Shoulder, which theologically and practically equips men and women to run together to finish the Great Commission. She co-authored Engaged in Love and War: Awakening Commitment and Courage.

Terran Williams created an intensive two-year church planter course that is available in the US, the UK, and South Africa. He is a seasoned church planter, author, and leader of Signal Church in the Cape Town city center. His book, How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy, has been an Amazon bestseller.

Dr Anne E. Zaki is an Egyptian professor of preaching and practical theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. She has also worked as a psychologist and counselor since 2000. Dr Zaki has been in the process of ordination in the Presbyterian Church in Egypt since 2008.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Dave Deuel, Marla Hale, Nathan John, Kiem Kiok Kwa

Of an estimated 8 billion people in the world today, 1.3 billion have disabilities. About 80 percent live in the majority world. This means that roughly one out of six people in the world has some form of disability. Addressing this need requires a complex mission strategy to reach and engage people with disabilities. This population has no demographical boundaries. They are present in all people groupings, speaking all languages, and populating all cultures. Even those who live in largely evangelized people groups remain significantly un-reached. What is disability, and how can we reach people who are affected by it?

Defining disability is challenging because the term represents a broad, complex, and diverse idea. A person can have a physical, sensory, developmental, or intellectual disability, and even experience mental health problems or combinations of disabilities in varying degrees. It may help to think of disability in terms of functionality, although it needs to be acknowledged, consistent with the WHO definition that environmental and social barriers contribute the impairment a disability. People with disabilities can face social segregation leading to isolation. Sadly, stigma and physical barriers—not disability itself—prevents many from going to church. How far does stigma go in creating social barriers?

Some societies or cultures perceive disability as shameful because they consider the disability to be the result of a person's personal or parental wrongdoing, karma, or bad luck. Consequently, family members may be reluctant to bring their loved one with disability to church activities. But the church is called to be a loving community that welcomes everyone. All people need to hear and spread the good news of God's love and salvation in Christ.

Supporting people with disabilities and their families to participate in church has missiological implications. Caring for them includes tangible expressions of the love of God to those who are often absent from, hidden from, or overlooked by, the church. With greater awareness, visibility, and inclusion, people with disabilities can become active members and contribute to the body of Christ. In other instances, this could mean giving hope and strength to care-worn family members. In all ways, we show and share the love of Christ.

> ***"Supporting people with disabilities and their families to participate in church has missiological implications."***

Encouragingly, people with disabilities have made progress in church participation over the last several decades. Whereas we once treated them primarily as recipients by offering care to them, we have increasingly recognized the need to participate in church *with* them. We progressed from segregating special ministries to full side-by-side church fellowship. Today, we witness a growing awareness of people with disabilities in all church and mission leadership roles, receiving ministry from them—beyond fellowship to shared ministry participation. As Joni Eareckson Tada has said, 'Disability ministry is not disability ministry unless the disabled are ministering.'[1]

People with disabilities need to hear the gospel and grow spiritually. The church should include and welcome them, for they too are created in God's image and have dignity. Yet, they are more likely to experience physical and social barriers to full inclusion and participation. The church must encourage and support them to actively participate as well as serve as co-workers in fulfilling the Great Commission.

What will it take to include people with disabilities fully into church life and mission? Reaching and engaging them will require multiple strategies: everything from biblical training on disability to physical ramps! Scripture teaches us that the church must bring in, build up, and send out people with disabilities.

Bring in: Including people with disabilities

Jesus' parable in Luke 14 contains what is often referred to as the Luke 14 disability mandate (14:15-24), which envisions people with disabilities sitting at the banquet table. The mandate echoes Jesus' call to go out and make disciples of all nations (Mathew 28:18–20). However, reaching people with disabilities can be challenging as they are often a hidden population, especially in societies where disability is considered shameful for the person as well as their family.

We need to reach out to people with disabilities with the love and good news of Jesus Christ and bring them into the church. The means and methods should be as diverse as the persons and their families, though at its heart, it is the outpouring of Christian love and compassion. Such compassionate outreach has been part of our Christian tradition for the past two millennia. Christians should be aware of and increasingly engaged in such compassion ministries.

Therefore, the ways in which we minister to people need to be contextualized. For example, in places where disability care and services are hardly available, the church can provide such services. In other contexts where disability care and services may already be provided, churches can seek to build meaningful friendships with people with disabilities in their community.

However, many people with disabilities—and their families and care givers—live isolated from the wider society. Often, the disability means that they are not able to physically come to church. Thus, God's people bringing the church to them can help to bridge that gap. For example, one way to take the church to them is via vocational care workers in health, education, and social services who are in regular contact with people with disabilities. These care workers can be equipped to provide the necessary spiritual care.

Welcoming people with disabilities and their families into the church is but a precursor to the great banquet where 'the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame' (Luke 14:15–24) are 'us'. Not us and them! It will grow the church, because ministry to all, including those with disability, contributes to the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

What a difference it would make in our world when people with disabilities who are hidden or marginalized find eternal hope in Christ. Like we do, they would hear about Jesus and receive the spiritual care we all long for and need. This would mean fulfilling a significant part of the gospel going out to the ends of the earth.

Build up: Actively engaging people with disabilities in the church

Although some churches and Christian agencies have reached out to people with disabilities, they have not always been successful at building inclusive communities and churches where people with disabilities are actively engaged in church life and ministry. We need to aim for a church where can talk about "us" and "our" ministry: people with and without disability all one in Christ.

Welcoming and Nurturing Their Gifts

It is estimated that between 10 and 24 percent of a population have a disability. Yet, church surveys of North America and Australia indicate a much lower percentage of people with disabilities in the church.[2] Clearly when those with a disability are not included in the faith community, churches are incomplete representations of the body of Christ and lack the spiritual gifts that these believers could contribute. By this measure, the church itself is disabled! Thus, it is not only a matter of reaching people with disabilities with the gospel but also including them in the church, building them up in discipleship, and providing opportunities for them to actively engage in the life of the body of Christ.

It is the church's role to respond to the spiritual needs of people with disabilities. As the church provides spiritual care and discipleship for anyone, so they should disciple people with disabilities and their families enabling, equipping, and empowering them to use their gifts.

People with disabilities have unique experiences and perspectives with which they can enrich the church's understanding of God, the kingdom, and the good news. Therefore, their engaging presence will strengthen the church community. By including people with disabilities, the church:

- Creates a more diverse and vibrant faith community that values and celebrates the unique gifts of all its members, where 'the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor' (1 Cor 12:12–31).
- Will be a prophetic voice in societies which often draw their strength from power and prestige.
- Presents a more welcoming and inclusive environment for other types of differences such as ethnicity and class and reaches out to a diversity of people in society.
- Completes the scope of the Great Commission by including all people.

Barriers in the Church

Although many churches have improved on including people with disabilities in the church, sadly there are still many that, perhaps unintentionally, exclude them. One reason is that their facilities and programs are inaccessible. But not only may there be physical barriers, they also may have attitudinal barriers which hinder people with disabilities from experiencing belonging to the church. That's why the ongoing challenge is to raise disability awareness in local churches and to equip them to welcome people with disabilities, as they would anyone else. By actively exploring how to do this, they can create a more accessible and welcoming church environment for all.

Although engaging with people with disabilities may start out of compassion, churches also need to know the biblical and theological foundations for such ministry. Moreover, they need practical ministry skills to appropriately reach out to people with various/specific disabilities, as well as leadership skills to build up the church in disability ministries. Additionally, there is a need for pastoral counselling training and care for family members and caregivers of people with disabilities.

Therefore, to equip the church in building up people with disabilities, we need robust theological education and training. Courses in disability theology, missiology, and ministry are slowly becoming available, but this area is still underdeveloped in many parts of the world. This is where partnerships can be developed. Churches and individuals with greater resources—personnel, training programs, finances, or specialized abilities—can partner with those who have less. Some churches may have finances but not personnel, while others may have suitable training programs which can be contextualized for other places. Many ministries are uniquely positioned as platforms where needs and resources in various communities around the world can be made known, resources shared, and partnerships forged. Leaders connected within their communities or region are well positioned to do this. These partnerships could support the gospel going out to people with disabilities and building them up for individual spiritual growth and ministry participation.

Send out: Enabling people with disabilities to take part in His mission

Everyone should have a role to play in ministry and mission, including people with disabilities.[3] The Great Commission includes people with disabilities, for all are to respond to the command to 'go and make disciples.' After all, they are commissioned, called, and gifted! Yet, people with disabilities are often overlooked in missions despite having unique giftings, experiences, and perspectives that enrich Christian witness and help fulfill the Great Commission. Why is it so important to enable people with disabilities to be part of local church ministry and missions?

Too Critical to Overlook

First, including people with disabilities in all aspects of Christian ministry is a powerful witness to an unbelieving world. Seeing the church's love and inclusion on display demonstrates that the church lives what it teaches. For example, including people with disabilities in mission can break down cultural, class, and societal barriers that prevent other people from hearing the gospel message.

Second, including people with disabilities in mission helps us share the love of Christ to other people who may feel excluded or ignored, such as refugees, migrants, and the poor. The common experience of being marginalized from society but finding their identity in Christ in the face of disability can speak powerfully to all those who experience stigma for other reasons.

Third, people with disabilities can most effectively raise awareness and address barriers that they face in accessing the gospel, such as physical or sensory limitations. People with disabilities involved in mission help us ensure that we use creative and alternative media to communicate the message to those who are deaf, blind, non-verbal, or have a physical or intellectual disability. This makes the gospel message more accessible to everyone. For example, an average 80-year-old may have some hearing deficits but will benefit from accommodations made for the deaf. When we adapt media—through visual presentations, multimedia, or simplified gospel presentations—it increases access to the gospel for everyone. The gospel can then go out to the ends of world more effectively.

Making the gospel more accessible in creative ways can also facilitate gospel communication across language and ethnic divides. This is where current technology can be of great assistance. Many types of resources can be shared online, so that communities which may have fewer resources can also benefit. On the flipside, communities in the majority world, which may have similar honor-shame cultural dynamics, can share their projects with each other and so build up their ministries. For example, speech-to-text software can help to adapt messages so that those with hearing impediments can see them. We can now make and share training videos easily and inexpensively using a smartphone. We can also creatively and wisely use these technological tools so that some people may hear the message (1 Cor 9:22–23).

Finally, people with disabilities are uniquely placed to reach out to others with disability. People with disabilities often have networks and communities that are not reachable by traditional methods. By including people with disabilities in Christian ministry and mission, we can reach a broader range of people and spread the gospel message to others who may have previously been overlooked.

Ongoing Challenges

All of us, with or without disabilities, must take an active role in mission. We are making progress in facilitating the missional call of people with disabilities. However, an ongoing challenge for many mission organizations and churches is that they feel ill-equipped to send out people with disabilities. They are concerned about the personal risk involved for a person with disability to go on mission, or they feel ill equipped to support their additional needs. They may even fear mission failure due to the disability barriers. How can we equip mission organizations to send out and support gospel workers with disabilities?

We need to help mission organizational leaders become more disability confident. Meaningful first steps might be raising awareness of physical and digital accessibility within organizations, supporting leaders in developing policies or guidelines for disability inclusion, and training them in practically assisting workers with disabilities in the mission field.[4]

The Way Forward

Reaching people with disabilities for Christ, building them up in the body of Christ, and sending them out as mission workers has significant potential for fulfilling the Great Commission. It requires a collective effort from local churches, mission organizations, and vocational workers, but most importantly people with disabilities, for they will play a critical

role in helping the church and mission organizations understand how to support them and minister alongside them. Additionally, we need to acknowledge their leadership potential in the local church and in Christian organizations which may require focused leadership development.

Only together can we further the Great Commission. As the global church comes to a better understanding of the needs and resources available to people with disabilities, it can develop a web of partnerships. The church needs these partnerships for this work.

Jesus' authority and personal presence, mediated through his Word and Spirit are our primary resources. The church is the conduit for reaching out, building up, and sending out. The Christian community, whether the church or fellowship groups, both local and—where technology allows—international are central.

If we (those with and without disabilities) labor together we can close the mission loop in which those with disabilities who are reached will then reach others in the next 27 years (until 2050). We believe that the church can reach out to the 1.3 billion people with disabilities, include them fully in its fellowship even if remotely, and send them out to serve. This State of the Great Commission Report is our time capsule to be opened in 2050. May they look back at our 2023 report and ask why the need to talk about 'us' and 'them'? It's just "us"! The results are up to all of us in Jesus' church.

Resources

- Anon. 'Mission to the Disabled and Mission of the Disabled.' *Luke's Journal* 19, no. 2 (September 2014): 24-26.
- Benjamin T. Conner. *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness: Exploring Missiology through the Lens of Disability Studies.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.
- Brent Burdick. 'The Lausanne Global Classroom on Disability Concerns.' The Lausanne Movement. https://lausanne.org/lausanne-global-classroom/disability-concerns-episode.
- Dave Deuel. 'Developing Young Disability Ministry Leaders: The Story of the Lausanne Disability Concerns Network.' Paper presented at the International Conference of Disability Studies and Intercultural Theology, 2-3 September 2021, Haus am Dom, Frankfurt Germany. In *When Heads Roll - Learning from the Experience Potential of the Others - Satires on Everyday Life in Church and Society* (publication forthcoming).
- Dave Deuel. 'Developing Young Leaders with Disabilities: A Ministry Beyond Our Wildest Dreams.' *Lausanne Global Analysis* 5, no. 1 (January 2016). https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2016-01/developing-young-leaders-disabilities.
- Dave Deuel. 'Inclusive Mission: God is Removing Obstacles and Calling Us to Join Him.' *Mission Mobilization Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 2021): 76-82. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a57c6678fd4d21c8fc7e568/t/60e49663112f326b813450fa/1625593463536/MMJ1_2.pdf.
- Dave Deuel. 'Let's Ask the Right Questions about People with Disabilities in Missions.' *Joni and Friends Blog.* September 29, 2020. https://www.joniandfriends.org/lets-ask-the-right-questions-about-people-with-disabilities-in-mission/.
- Dave Deuel. 'Spiritual Care (2 parts): Online Classes for Spiritual Care to People with Disabilities.' The Joni Eareckson Tada Disability Research Center at Joni and Friends. (forthcoming). courses.joniandfriends.org.
- Dave Deuel. 'Taking Church to People with Disabilities: A New Initiative for the Lausanne Disability Concerns Network.' *Lausanne Global Analysis* 12, no. 2 (March 2023). https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2023-03/taking-church-to-people-with-disabilities.
- Dave Deuel and Nathan John (eds.) *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasures*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019.
- Deanna Richey. 'Mission Possible: The Role of Member Care in Mobilizing Workers with Disabilities.' In *Disability in Mission:*

The Church's Hidden Treasure, edited by Dave Deuel and Nathan John, 133-46. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019.

- Disability Ministry Leadership infographic. https://lausanne.org/content/disabilities-an-infographic.
- Joni Eareckson Tada. *Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry*. Agoura Hills, CA: Joni and Friends, 2012. https://www.joniandfriends.org/ministries/christian-institute-on-disability/beyond-suffering/.
- Joni Eareckson Tada. 'Ministry among People with Disabilities.' *Lausanne Occasional Paper* #35B (2004). https://lausanne.org/content/ministry-among-people-disabilities-lop-35b.
- Nathan John and Dave Deuel (eds.). 'Ministries of People with Disabilities: "All In".' *Lausanne Occasional Paper* #69 (2019). https://lausanne.org/content/lop/disability-concerns-lop-69.
- Wen Pin Leow (ed.) *Enabling Hearts: A Primer for Disability-Inclusive Churches*. Disability Ministry in Asia Series. Singapore: Center for Disability in Asia, 2021.

Endnotes

1 Nathan John and Dave Deuel (eds.), 'Ministries of People with Disabilities: "All In",' *Lausanne Occasional Paper* #69, https://lausanne.org/content/lop/disability-concerns-lop-69.

2 Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, 'Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study' *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014), 83-102.

3 Nathan John and Dave Deuel (eds.), 'Ministries of People with Disabilities': Regarding Specific Application to Mission, Dave Deuel and Nathan John (eds.) *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019).

4 For a description of how people with disabilities and their families are receiving support on mission see Deanna Richey, 'Mission Possible: The Role of Member Care in Mobilizing Workers with Disabilities,' in *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure*, ed. Dave Deuel and Nathan John, 133-46 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2019).

Authors

Dave Deuel is academic dean emeritus for The Master's Academy International, senior research fellow emeritus and strategic alliance SME for the Joni Eareckson Tada Disability Research Center, and co-catalyst for the Disability Concerns Network in the Lausanne Movement. He has served on state governor's advisory councils for California and New York as state officer and policymaker.

Marla Hale has lived and served in Asia for 20 years, where she enjoyed working with people with disabilities and their families. She has initiated and spearheaded various projects and programs in parent support, inclusive education, foster care, and training for churches and ministry leaders. She is passionate about disability theology and ministry, enabling and connecting others, and global mission.

Nathan John is a medic who has worked in health, development, and disability in East Timor, PNG, Nepal, and India. He helped establish a network of Christian organizations and churches in South Asia to promote church disability inclusion. Nathan co-leads the Lausanne Disability Concerns Network. Personally, Nathan has a beautiful daughter with a profound disability.

Kiem Kiok Kwa has been teaching in seminaries in Singapore in the areas of mission, contextualization, ethics, and Asian theology. She sees disability ministry as a meaningful way for the church to do ministry and engage in society.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE?



INTRODUCTION

The preceding century has seen a rise of more products, more people, more energy, more debt, more work, more expectations. This burden of more has led the world and the church to begin to ask, 'What is sustainable?'

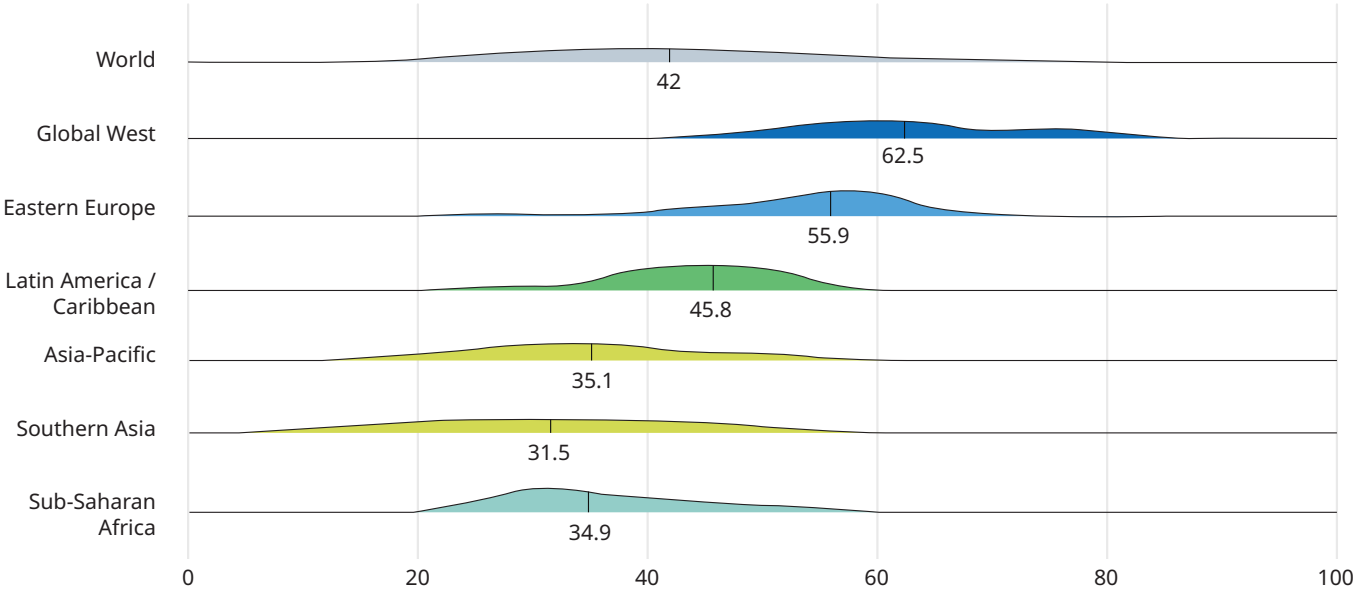
The following section explores the context shifts of sustainability in the world and Christianity including cultural influence, creation care, debt ratios, and health.

CREATION CARE

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION INDEX

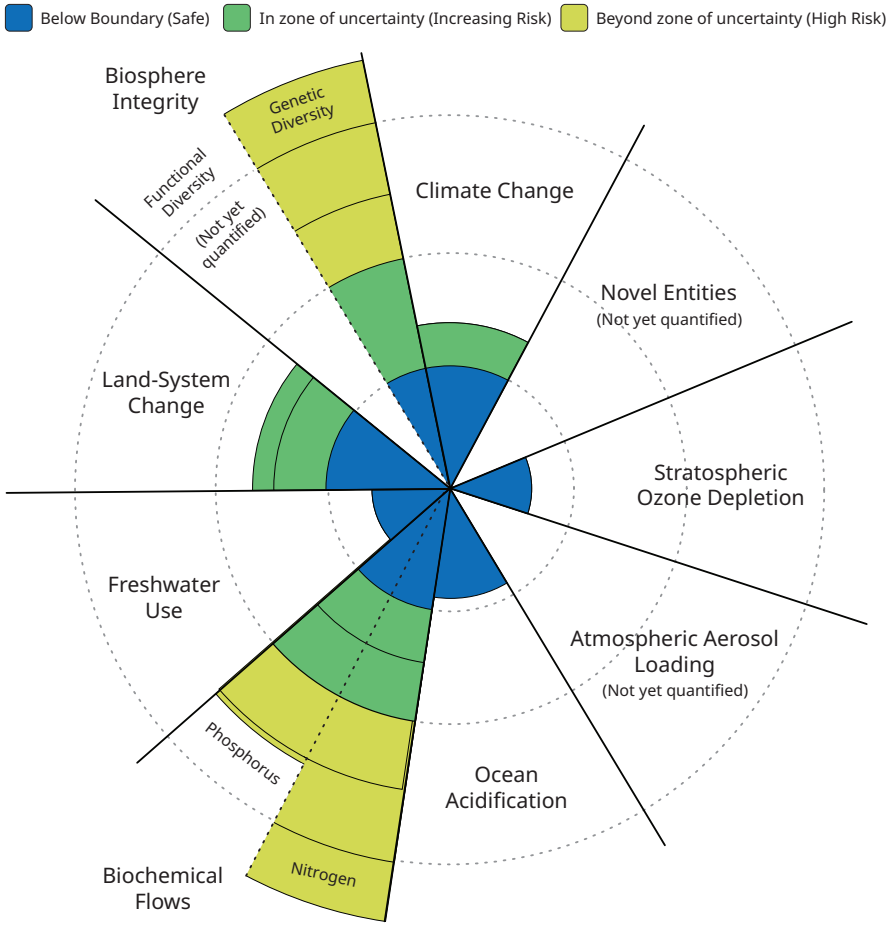
Numbers shown are regional medians: 0 = Lowest Environmental Performance, 100 = Highest Environmental Performance.

Environmental Performance Index uses 40 performance indicators measuring climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality.



Source: Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, "Environmental Performance Index Report," 2022

CLIMATE CHANGE RISK



Source: Steffen et al., "The nine planetary boundaries," Stockholm Resilience Center, 2015

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Environmental Performance Index, and other environmental analysis, consistently show that wealthy democracies demonstrate a high commitment to all areas of sustainability. Denmark ranks the top-performing country on the EPI, with United Kingdom, Finland, and Malta ranking 2nd-4th.

The lowest scoring countries on the EPI include India, Myanmar, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Pakistan due to prioritization of economic growth over sustainability, struggles with civil unrest, poverty, or ineffective governance.

Wealthy democracies demonstrate a high commitment to all areas of sustainability.

Sustainability efforts aim to steward God's creation in its fullness. Analysis of the change in planetary boundaries since 1950 show high risk in areas of Biochemical Flows and Biosphere Integrity.

CREATION CARE

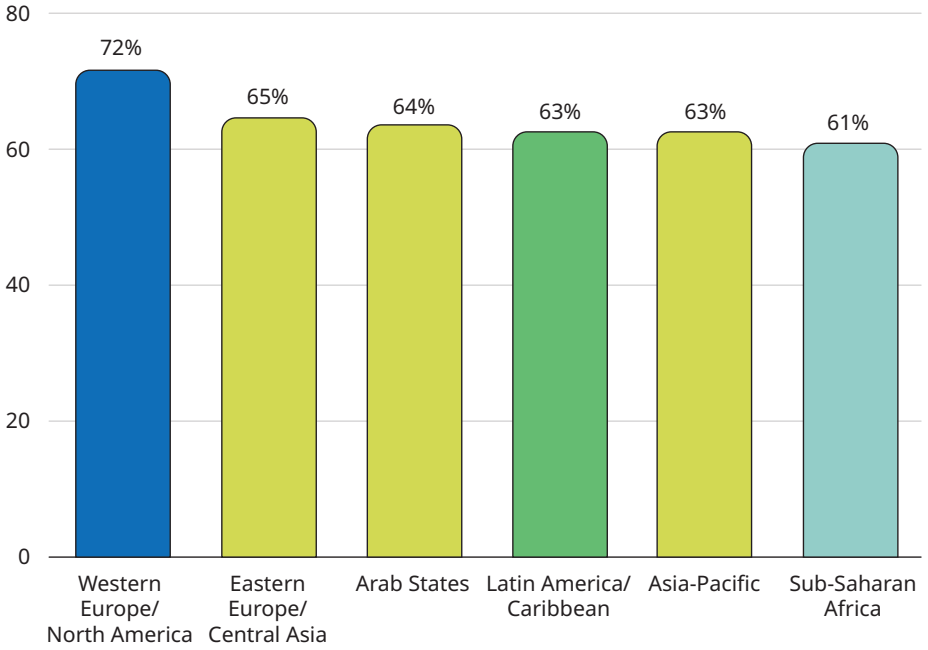
CLIMATE CONCERN

Global attention to climate change has dramatically increased since the 1980s. In 2020, the global publication volume on climate change nearly matched the publication volume on Christianity.

When considering public beliefs, the global west holds the highest percentage of people (72 percent) who believe climate change is an emergency, with a smaller percentage of people in other regions believing that climate change is an emergency.

Similar trends appear when observing perceptions of generational impact of climate change, with the notable exception that a larger percentage of Latin Americans believing climate change will harm future generations.

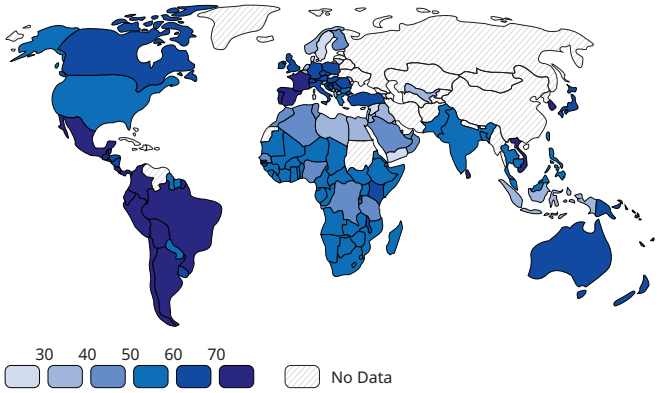
PUBLIC BELIEF THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN EMERGENCY



Source: University of Oxford, "Peoples' Climate Vote," 2020

PERCEPTION OF GENERATIONAL IMPACT

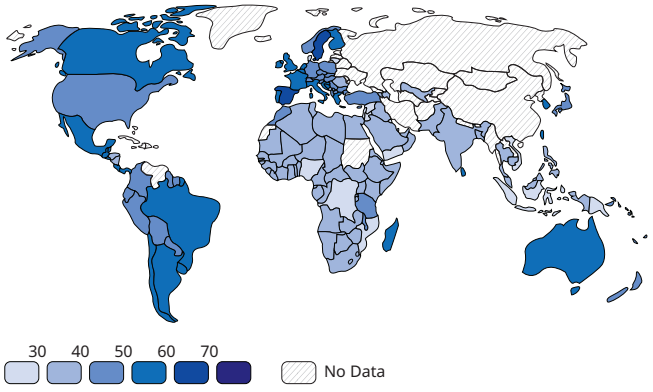
% who think climate change will harm future generations "a great deal"



Source: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 2022

PERCEPTION OF HUMAN FAULT

% who think climate change is mostly caused by humans

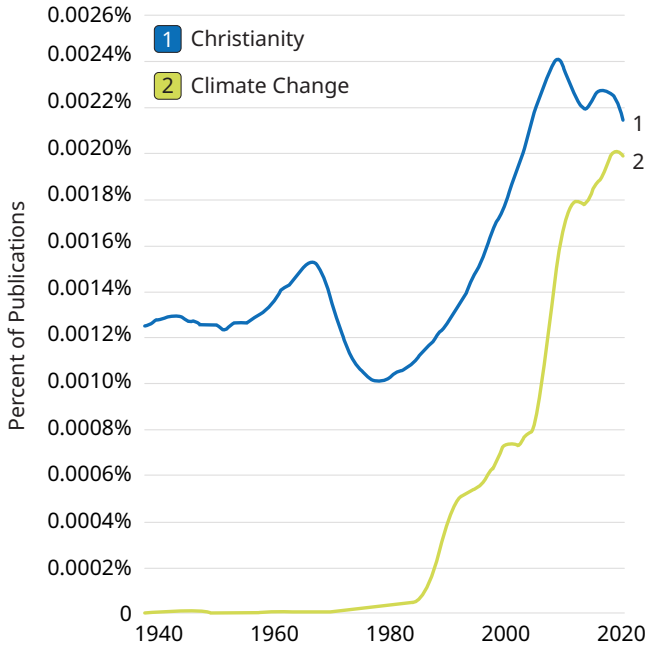


Source: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 2022

HUMAN FAULT

There is a clear increase in consideration of climate change globally, lead by the global west. However, when considering whether climate change is mostly caused by humans, from the Americas to Africa, the global percentage who hold this belief decreases. However, no matter the belief in cause, stewardship of God's creation is a clear biblical command and an integral part of what it means to follow Jesus as Lord.

GLOBAL PUBLICATION VOLUME



Source: Google NGram, English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

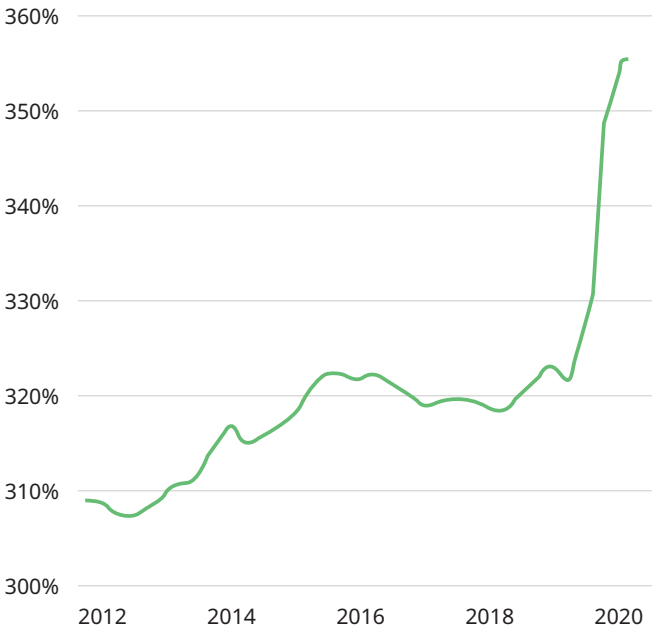
GLOBAL DEBT RATIOS

TOTAL GLOBAL DEBT



Source: The Institute of International Finance; Axios Visuals

GLOBAL DEBT AS SHARE OF GDP



Source: The Institute of International Finance; Axios Visuals

RISE OF DEBT

Global debt as a percentage of global GDP has moved up from roughly 100 percent in 1970 to well over 350 percent in 2020 - and the rate of increase is accelerating.

GOVERNMENT DEBT

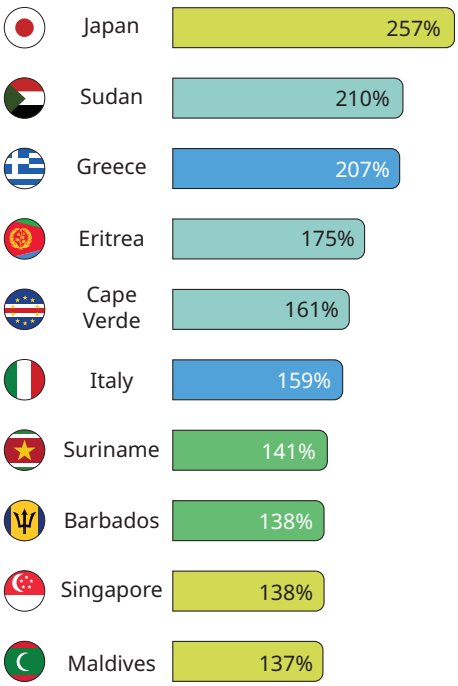
Global government debt rose more than 10 percent in 2022 driven by the U.S., Japan and China, but with the vast majority of countries continuing to increase borrowing.

ACCUMULATION

The accumulation of public debt since 2007 is largely attributable to governments facing two major events: the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

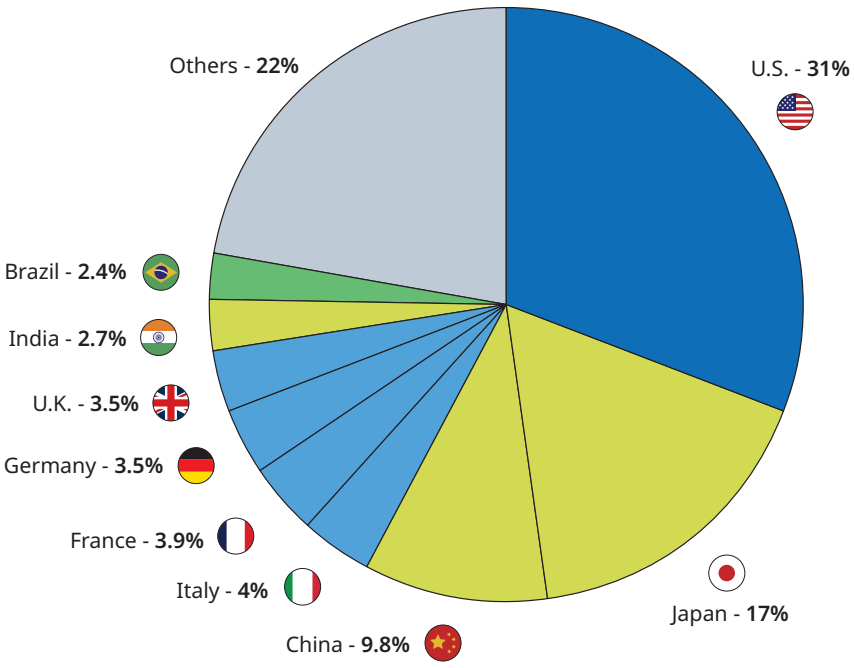
NATIONAL DEBTS

% of GDP



Source: World Economic Outlook Report, Oct. 2021

% OF TOTAL GLOBAL DEBT

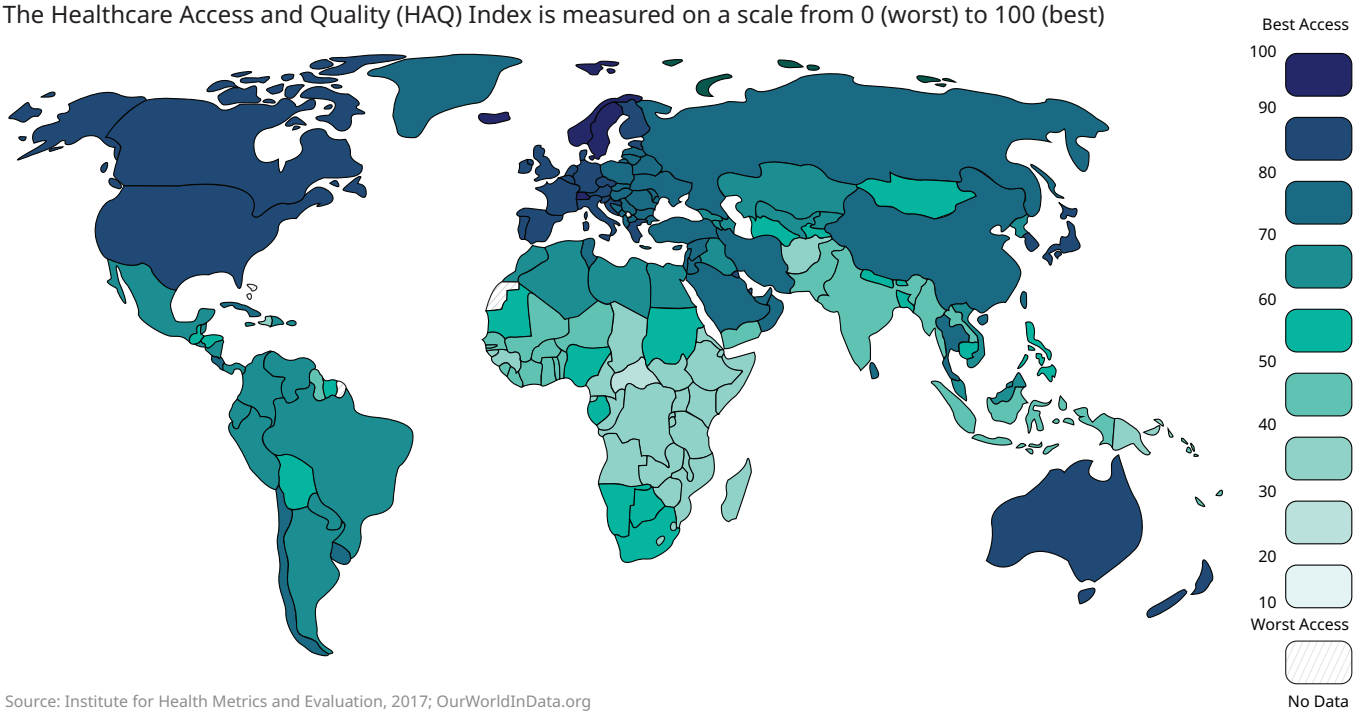


Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF); Visual Capitalist, 2019

GLOBAL HEALTH

GLOBAL ACCESS TO HEALTH

The Healthcare Access and Quality (HAQ) Index is measured on a scale from 0 (worst) to 100 (best)



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2017; OurWorldInData.org

GLOBAL ACCESS

Global access to health is uneven across the world, with the global west having the most. The places where the church is growing the fastest are the places that have the least.

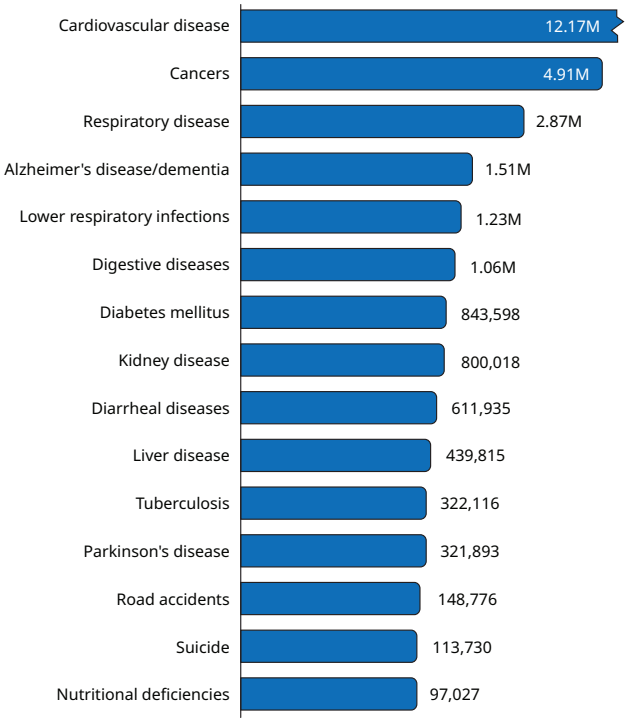
LOWEST ACCESS

Six of the ten countries with lowest access to health care are in the African region. Africa is also one of the fastest growing regions, thus increasing access is critical.

PREVENTABLE DISEASE

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death globally. The Centers for Disease Control and Preventio say 80 percent of premature cardiovascular disease is preventable.

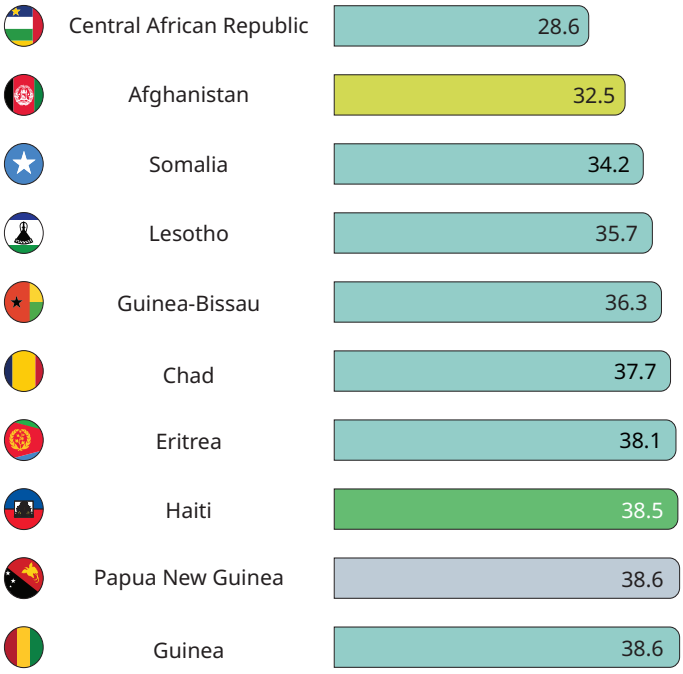
TOP CAUSES OF HEALTH-RELATED DEATH



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2017; OurWorldInData.org

LOWEST HAQ INDEX

HAQ = Healthcare Access and Quality Index, 0 (worst) to 100 (best)



Source: World Economic Outlook Report, Oct. 2021

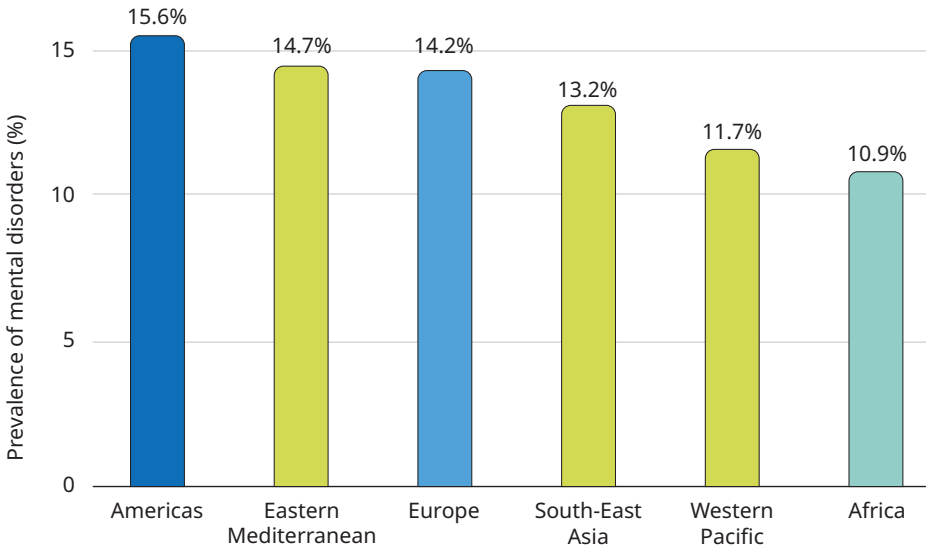
MENTAL HEALTH

INCREASING NEED

Mental Health conditions are a universal need with a total of 970 million, or one in eight, global individuals living with a mental health condition. However, access to care is not a universal privilege. With only 2 percent of health budgets dedicated to mental health services, there is limited care available in general, and especially for those individuals with low- or middle-class incomes.

Recorded depression rates have dramatically increased since the 1800s parallel to the rise of publication interest in psychology and decline of publication interest in Christianity.

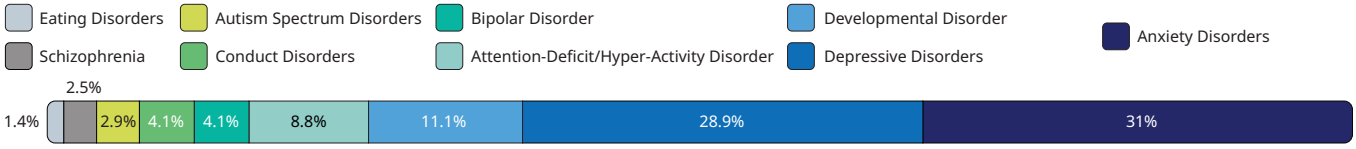
PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019

% OF MENTAL DISORDERS

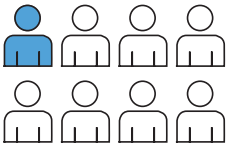
% of 970 million people living with mental disorders



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019

MENTAL HEALTH STATS

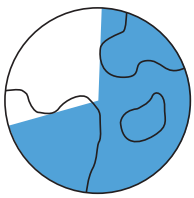
WIDESPREAD



1 in 8

live with a mental health condition.

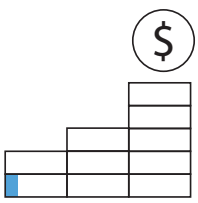
UNDER-TREATED



71%

of people with psychosis do not receive mental health services.

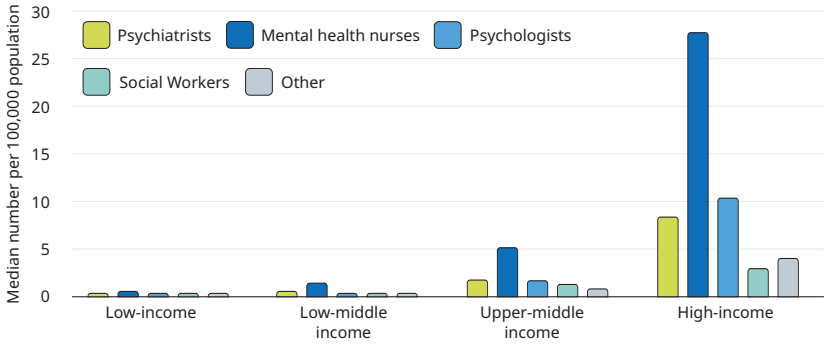
UNDER-RESOURCED



2%

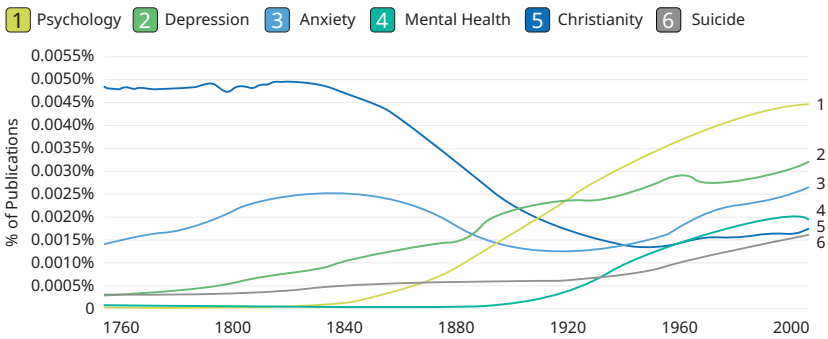
of health budgets on average go to mental health.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES



Source: World Health Organization, "World Mental Health Report," 2022

RISE OF MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS



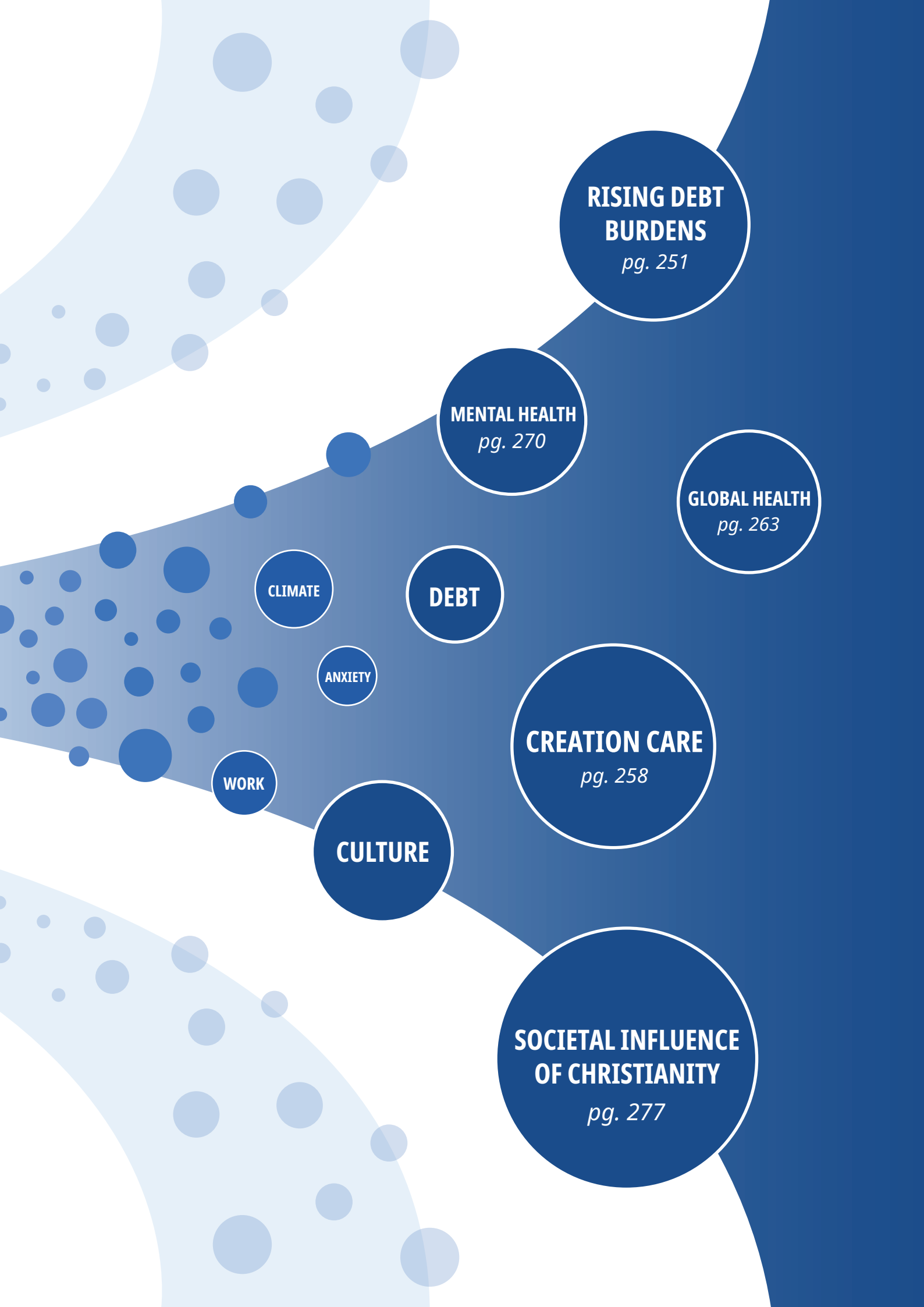
Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019; World Health Organization, 2021

Source: Google NGram, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

UNDERSTANDING

SUSTAINABILITY




RISING DEBT BURDENS
pg. 251
MENTAL HEALTH
pg. 270
GLOBAL HEALTH
pg. 263
CLIMATE
DEBT
ANXIETY
CREATION CARE
pg. 258
WORK
CULTURE
SOCIETAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY
pg. 277

RISING DEBT BURDENS

Bob Doll, Timothy Wong

The Burgeoning Debt Crisis

Global debt as a percentage of global GDP has moved up from roughly 100 percent in 1970 to well over 250 percent today. And the rate of increase is accelerating (See Chart 1). Global government debt rose more than 10 percent in 2022 driven primarily by the U.S., Japan and China, but with the vast majority of countries continuing to increase borrowing. Debt service costs increased by more than 15 percent as interest rates rose. The accumulation of public debt since 2007 is largely attributable to the two major economic crises governments have faced – first the global financial crisis, and then the COVID-19 pandemic.

The post-crisis wave of debt buildup has been unprecedented in its size, speed, and reach in emerging market and developing economies. Similar waves in the past half-century led to widespread financial crises in these economies. Accordingly, policymakers must remain vigilant about the risks posed by record-high debt levels.

In 2020, the world observed the largest one-year debt surge since World War II, with global debt rising to USD 226 trillion as the world was hit by a global health crisis and a deep recession. Debt was already elevated going into the crisis, but now governments must navigate a world of record-high public and private debt levels.

Debt dynamics, however, differ markedly across countries. Advanced economies and China accounted for more than 90 percent of the USD 28 trillion debt surge in 2020. These countries were able to expand public and private debt during the pandemic thanks to low interest rates, the actions of central banks (including large purchases of government debt), and well-developed financial markets. But most developing economies are on the opposite side of the financing divide, facing limited access to funding and often higher borrowing rates.

The shocks experienced in recent years have had a severe impact on low and lower-middle income developing countries. This not only impacts the past but also poses a future threat. The world's poorest nations, home to a significant portion of the global poor, are at risk of facing a lost decade. This would be a humanitarian disaster and a significant moral failure for the global community, especially developed nations. Urgent action is needed, starting with addressing the looming debt crisis.

> ***"In 2020, the world observed the largest one-year debt surge since World War II."***

According to the IMF, approximately 15 percent of low-income countries are already in debt distress, and an additional 45 percent are at high risk of experiencing the same. Among emerging markets, about 25 percent are also facing high risk and borrowing conditions resembling defaults. Countries like Sri Lanka, Ghana, and Zambia have already defaulted, and many more are likely to follow suit.

Unfortunately, leading economies such as the U.S. have their own debt problems to grapple with. Federal expenditures grew 35 percent in 2022 and are projected to grow by another 35 percent in 2023. Relative to the size of the U.S. economy, interest costs in 2030 will reach 3.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), exceeding the previous post-World War II high of 3.2 percent of GDP, which was recorded in 1991. Within 10 years, net interest costs will exceed federal spending on crucial programs like Medicaid and defense (See Chart 2). Spending for net interest will become the largest 'program' in the U.S. federal budget within the next 30 years, outpacing spending on Medicare and Social Security. Within ten years, the U.S. federal government will spend more on interest costs than it has historically spent on R&D, infrastructure, and education combined. Rising interest payments

can crowd out other priorities in the federal budget and lead to a cycle of higher deficits, growing debt, and even more interest payments in the future.

The U.S. national debt is higher as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than at any time since World War II and is on course to breach that record. This does not mean there is no proper time to borrow. In fact, deficit spending helped to prevent an economic catastrophe and support the country through a pandemic in the recent COVID-19 crisis. However, even this justified borrowing comes with some consequence, and much of the recent borrowing before and since the COVID crisis was enacted for political rather than purely economic justification.

In the developed world especially, deficits are caused mainly by predictable structural factors: an aging baby-boom generation, rising healthcare costs, and a tax system that does not bring in enough money to pay for what the government has promised its citizens.

Consequences of Debt Burden on Governments

What are the main consequences of the growing debt burden?

- Decreased savings and income
- Higher interest costs
- Lack of flexibility
- Risks of a new crisis

High debt levels:

- Threaten economic vitality
- Place a strain on the budget
- Create geopolitical challenges and risks
- Make responding to new emergencies more challenging
- Are unfair to younger and future generations

The interest on debt immediately reduces the money available for other spending programs. Advocates of certain benefits will call for a reduction in spending in other areas as it increases. A growing debt burden becomes a big problem for everyone in the long term.

If long-term fiscal challenges remain unaddressed, the economic environment weakens as confidence suffers, access to capital is reduced, interest costs crowd out key investments in our future, the conditions for growth deteriorate, and nations are put at greater risk of economic crisis. If long-term fiscal imbalances are not addressed, the future economy will be diminished, with fewer economic opportunities for individuals and families and less fiscal flexibility to respond to future crises. As federal debt mounts, governments will spend more of their budget on interest costs, increasingly crowding out public investments. As more federal resources are diverted to interest payments, there will be less available to invest in areas that are important for economic growth.

The fundamental problem with government debt is that it requires future taxes that slow economic growth and reduce potential welfare. Calls for intergenerational justice capture this concept, but only imperfectly, as they do not specify the nature of what is just or lay bare the essential tax issues. While some policy analysts characterize the public financing choice as between taxes and debt, the reality is that the choice is between taxes today and taxes tomorrow – and taxation has efficiency costs that are detrimental in all but the most extreme cases.

Governments borrowing money means that more treasury securities are issued and compete against securities issued by the private sector. The government's need to borrow will eventually exceed the savings available, and even though more households and businesses are purchasing treasury securities, national savings will reach a low point in comparison to the size of the federal debt. Treasury securities with high interest rates will make saving more appealing than investing for businesses. The private sector will stop seeking investments that can generate growth due to the incentive to save. This includes the lower amount of capital available once individuals stop investing in securities offered by businesses due to trea-

sury securities being more attractive. This lack of investment will result in low productivity and create an environment where work produces little value and wages decrease.

Federal borrowing competes for funds in a nation's capital markets, thereby raising interest rates and crowding out new investment in business equipment and structures. Entrepreneurs face a higher cost of capital, potentially stifling innovation and slowing the advancement of new breakthroughs that could improve lives. Growing debt also has a direct effect on the economic opportunities available. If high levels of debt crowd out private investments in capital goods, workers would have less to use in their jobs, which would translate to lower productivity and, therefore, lower wages. Higher interest rates resulting from increased federal borrowing would make it harder for families to buy homes, finance car payments, or pay for college or even put food on the table. Fewer education and training opportunities stemming from lower investment could leave workers without the skills to keep up with demands of a more technology-based, global economy.

Christian voices in the public square generally warn against the potential damages from too much debt, saying things like, 'Intergenerational justice demands that one generation must not benefit or suffer unfairly at the cost of another.' There is also a strong plea to avoid reductions in government programs that benefit the poor.

Consequences of Debt Burden on the Church

In the U.S. and many other (especially developed) parts of the world, giving to churches has fallen, often significantly. The generation that was most generous is passing away. This generation gives as much as half for typical evangelical ministries — locally, nationally, and globally. In his book, *The Great Evangelical Recession* by John S. Dickerson, the author argues, 'From young, thriving and conservative ministries to established evangelical mainstays of all stripes, the financial strain of the Great Evangelical Recession is beginning to show in desperate funding pleas from all manners of ministries.'[1] While there are many causes, debt and its consequences is certainly one of them.

Some Christian commentators maintain that indebtedness is viewed as a judgement of God on rebellious nations (eg, Deuteronomy 15:6-7 and Deuteronomy 28:43-44). Jesus says, in the parable of talents in Matthew 25:29, 'For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.' The point of the parable, reflecting a truth regarding the kingdom of God, is summarized in verse 29 (as well as in Matthew 13:12) and indicates that those who have productive assets and use them wisely will be given more while those that do use productive assets wisely will have their asset confiscated. Ultimately, the parable is not about asset returns and the distribution of wealth in a capitalist system. Rather, the spiritual truth communicated is that the kingdom of God will be given to those with spiritual insight, and who understand the intention of the master, while those who do not understand the master's intention will not be allowed to participate in the kingdom. The point is not about debt, assets, and their use, but rather about understanding the master and obeying his wishes. Nevertheless, the parable explicitly uses the concept of debt to make this spiritual point. In the process, we are led to understand that wise use of debt for productive purposes and its repayment can be likened to God's intentions with regard to His kingdom.

> ***"Intergenerational justice demands that one generation must not benefit or suffer unfairly at the cost of another."***

Addressing Debt Burden

We need to understand these issues if we are to seek the 'welfare of the city' (Jeremiah 29:7). The consequences and timeline for excessive government debt include: more debt issuance, higher inflation, financial repres-

sion, increased taxes, and spending restraint (reduced benefits).

The only way to lower deficits is to implement higher rates and reduce federal spending. This situation will result in a lower disposable income whether high tax rates reduce their paycheck and incentive to work, or whether a future administration cuts expenses by reducing social programs or other 'entitlement' benefits.

Monetary policy has appropriately shifted focus to rising inflation and inflation expectations. While an increase in inflation, and nominal GDP, helps reduce debt ratios in some cases, this is unlikely to sustain a significant decline in debt. As central banks have raised interest rates to prevent persistently high inflation, borrowing costs rise. In many emerging markets, policy rates have already increased and further rises are expected. A significant tightening of financial conditions is heightening the pressure on the most highly indebted governments, households, and firms. If the public and private sectors are forced to deleverage simultaneously, growth prospects will suffer. The uncertain outlook and heightened vulnerabilities make it critical to achieve the right balance between policy flexibility, nimble adjustment to changing circumstances, and commitment to credible and sustainable medium-term fiscal plans. Such a strategy would both reduce debt vulnerabilities and facilitate the work of central banks to contain inflation.

Robust macroeconomic, financial and structural policies can help countries strike the right balance between the costs and benefits of debt accumulation. Such policies are also critical to help reduce the likelihood of financial crises and alleviate their impact, if they erupt. Although many emerging market and developing economies have better policy frameworks now than during previous debt waves, there remains significant room for improvement.

The war in Ukraine is adding risks to unprecedented levels of public borrowing while the pandemic is still straining many government budgets. The situation highlights the urgent need for authorities to undertake reforms, including governance reforms, to improve debt transparency and strengthen debt management policies and frameworks to reduce risks.

Becoming Informed

Many educators have been advocates for increasing the awareness about the issues of debt and consumption. This approach to learning is slowly having an impact as the concept of voluntary simplicity has become an integral part of many people's philosophies of living. The idea that consumerism makes life easier is increasingly challenged when individuals learn the impact that debt accumulation can have on their welfare.

Christian voices on the public policy issue of government debt must be better informed on the basic economics of debt and its consequences. That requires a foundational understanding of how scripture views debt. Scripture figures debt as sin which implies that debt avoidance is important. Debt acquisition is not neutral. It is not merely a practical tool of economic policy that can be rationally used whenever advantageous. Debt brings economic consequences that must be dealt with, and hence debt avoidance is advisable. Scripture also figures the reality that debt must be repaid. That repayment is not likely to be neutral in its economic effect. Long-run productivity and economic growth are affected by intergenerational redistribution.

"Christian voices on the public policy issue of government debt must be better informed on the basic economics of debt and its consequences."

Given that Scripture figures in multiple ways the detrimental effects of debt accumulation, then debt reduction deserves more careful attention by Christian commentators. The current fiscal situation in many advanced economies is not sustainable with long-term debt to GDP ratio forecasts rising to historic levels. Structural deficits must be reduced, requiring primary surpluses on balance over time.

Impact of Debt

Money is something we deal with every day. We are either working to earn money, spending money, planning how to spend money, or using something on which we have spent money. The way we spend our money is an expression of our faith. We spend our money, time and thoughts on the things which are most important to us. However, many churches do not talk about personal finances unless there is a need for increased giving. Yet, the spiritual impact is clear:

- Financial challenges can ruin marriages.
- Vocational choices can too often be about money.
- Consumerism can be an addiction
- People feel like they cannot be generous givers because their debt is overwhelming. Overwhelming debt can make people feel isolated, embarrassed and alone. Debt can make people feel depressed and powerless.

Christians often talk about the physical and the spiritual as if they are two separate entities – but they are connected. Being worn down physically has an adverse spiritual effect. When we are weakened by lack of sleep, illness, or hunger, it affects our spiritual outlook and ability to make wise decisions. In the same way, we cannot compartmentalize our financial management from our spiritual life. Not only can we get a clear picture of our spiritual priorities from our financial habits, but the decisions we make with our resources also impacts are own spiritual sensitivity. As our debt grows, it impacts our ability to hear and respond to God in these four ways:

- Debt makes us feel poorer than we are

  Pastor Mark Batterson said, 'When God blesses you financially, don't raise your standard of living. Raise your standard of giving.' That is difficult when you live in a culture that is always encouraging you to live beyond your means. You do not want to end up in a position where your financial perspective and God's are entirely at odds. He may have blessed you with an income that allows you to bless others, and there is a problem if you leverage that income in a way that makes you feel impoverished.

- Debt discourages generosity

  The natural consequence of always feeling financially strapped is that we do not have the breathing room necessary to be generous. Instead of feeling the joy of giving sacrificially, we find ourselves in a position of giving out of obligation and insufficiency. Outstanding debt infringes upon our ability to give freely and openly.

- Debt affects our view of God's provision

  In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encourages us to pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3). In the same way that God daily distributed manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-36), Jesus encourages us to look for His daily provision in our lives. After all, God does not always provide everything in advance. What happens if you already owe tomorrow's allotment of bread to someone else? Suddenly God's provision seems inadequate. We find ourselves having to ask God for twice as much bread tomorrow because of the decision we made yesterday. If God does not provide, it feel like He has let us down.

- Debt can make obedience difficult

  Every Christian wants to be able to respond to promptings and conviction. If moved by a global, national or local tragedy, Christians want to give when they feel led. Debt can create dissonance. It is another factor that needs to be taken into account when you feel led to meet someone else's need. Imagine feeling a very distinct call to the mission field or to join a ministry where you need to raise your own support. No matter how badly you want to be obedient, you are still responsible to the credit card company, retail establishment, or bank that you owe money to. Too much debt can become a chain that holds you in place and an impediment to following God's call. You want to avoid using credit cards for things that lose their value once you own them,

or at least pay your credit cards off monthly so that they do not accrue into a mountain of debt that limits your freedom and negatively impacts how you perceive your worth.

Freedom from Debt

How you spend your money is an indication of how you integrate your faith into every aspect of your life. Getting out of debt means intentionally deciding not to define yourself based on what you own. That's not to say that spending is inherently wrong, or that treating yourself to some nice things is bad. But how much you buy depends on how much you can afford, and that is a reflection of your values. It is amazing how content we can be living a very simple life if we would only make the effort to do it.

> ***"Getting out of debt means intentionally deciding not to define yourself based on what you own."***

People who have fought their way out of debt say not owing money gives them a sense of joy, freedom and gratitude to God. They live out their understanding that everything they have is a gift from God. With that understanding comes thankfulness and peace, along with a sense that God will provide for them in good times and bad. Everything that we have, including our money and possessions ultimately comes from God, not our own efforts. When you realize this, it suddenly became a lot easier to escape from the grasp of consumerism and quit trying to fill the void by accumulating more stuff.

Financial freedom will also result in the ability to contribute financially to the work of God's kingdom. The global body of Christ can play a significant role in offering a solution by simply exercising better stewardship of financial resources. The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary estimates that the total personal income of Christians globally is USD 53 trillion as of mid-2022. Giving to Christian causes is USD 896 billion or 1.7 percent of total income. This is well below the 10 percent tithe suggested in scripture. Of this amount, only USD 52 billion is given to global foreign missions. There is a great need for greater financial resources to be released to complete the great commission.

Potential Future Implications

From a financial standpoint, the world in which we live may be unsustainable, and financial current financial systems may not stand. Several key implications for the great commission follow:

Reliance on Volunteers & Discipleship

With less economic growth and higher taxes due to the debt crisis, the church (and related ministries) will need to rely less on paid professionals and more on trained volunteers. The key is faithful men and women who have found life in Christ. Could it be that the solution is disciples, not dollars? We need to awaken, and nurture spiritual gifting in non-staff servant leaders as we see to accomplish the 'good works' God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Some financial problems are not a shortage of funds, but a shortage of commitment.

Fresh Inroads

As emerging countries struggle with the impact of the debt crisis and result in greater hardships for their citizens. for example, the 10/40 Window refers to a geographical region between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude, spanning across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This region is characterized by significant challenges, including poverty, political instability, and limited access to basic services. The debt crisis in the 10/40 Window has emerged as a critical issue with severe implications for these countries. The 10/40 nations also have a high concentration of unreached people groups, and collectively represent the final frontier for world missions.

The debt crisis in the 10/40 Window has serious consequences for the citizens living in these countries. It can lead to reduced social spending, inadequate healthcare systems,

compromised education, and diminished infrastructure development. Moreover, the debt burden hampers the ability of these nations to respond to other pressing challenges, such as climate change, conflict resolution, and poverty eradication.

Can the global body of Christ rise up in a coordinated manner to offer sustainable solutions funded by the generous giving of the saints in the developed world? Generous missions giving and strategic mobilization of kingdom resources could generate fresh inroads for the gospel in some of the poorest and least reached nations of the world.

Call to Steward Resources

As the church becomes obedient in stewarding its resources, God will pour out greater blessing upon her, resulting in a virtuous cycle of provision and blessing flowing to the nations. As God says in Malachi 3:10, "'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!".' May it be so!

Resources

- *Risks and Threats from Deficits and Debt*, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget https://www.crfb.org/papers/risks-and-threats-deficits-and-debt
- *Global Waves of Debt - Causes and Consequences*, World Bank Group https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/279031577823091771-0050022019/original/GlobalWavesofDebtfullreport.pdf
- *The Global Outlook for Government Debt Over the Next 25 Years: Implications for the Economy and Public Policy*, Peterson Institute for International Economics
- https://www.piie.com/bookstore/global-outlook-government-debt-over-next-25-years-implications-economy-and-public-policy

Endnotes

1 John S. Dickerson, The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church... and How to Prepare. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013).

Authors

Bob Doll is Chief Investment Officer at Crossmark Global Investments. Prior to joining Crossmark in 2021, Bob held similar roles at other large asset management firms, including serving as Senior Portfolio Manager and Chief Equity Strategist at Nuveen and Blackrock, President and Chief Investment Officer at Merrill Lynch Investment Managers, and Chief Investment Officer at Oppenheimer Funds, Inc. Bob serves on a number of boards including the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Cairn University, Christianity Today, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Kingdom Advisors, The Lausanne Movement, Movement.org, New Canaan Society, and Word of Life Fellowship.

Timothy Wong is Managing Director and Regional Head for DBS Group Research. Based in Singapore, he oversees a 70-strong team of Economists, Strategists and Investment Analysts spread across six offices in the Asia. Under his leadership, DBS Vickers research team has picked up numerous awards, making it the top award winning broker in the FT/ Starmine Asian Awards and the Singapore Business Times/Starmine Analyst awards in 2012

CREATION CARE

Dave Bookless, Jasmine Kwong, Seth Appiah-Kubi, Jocabed Solano

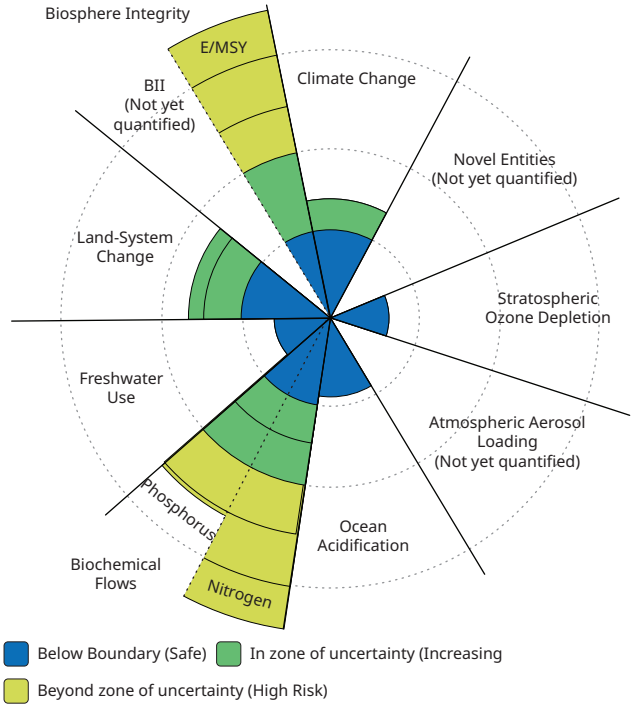
Sometimes it takes a major shift in human society for God's church to rediscover biblical truths that have been overlooked. It was only in the age of exploration and empire that Western Christians recovered an understanding of world missions. Trade and conquest were deeply problematic and often sub-Christian, but they opened the eyes of Christians in Europe and North America to the millions of people in other lands who needed Jesus.

Today, our context includes a world of exploding human consumption, pollution, and waste. The planetary boundaries within which God designed life to flourish are under threat, leading to existential threats to human society and life on earth. This article will briefly outline some of these threats to sustainable living, examine the profound biblical questions they pose, and look at some case studies of Christian responses around the world.

The Context of Creation's Groaning

Human-induced climate change dominates media coverage and governmental initiatives concerning environmental issues. For example, the Sixth Assessment Report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that, 'human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming.'[1] In plain, yet chilling, language the report demands, 'deep, rapid and sustained global greenhouse gas emissions reduction' to avoid 'abrupt and/or irreversible changes'[2] to earth's ability to sustain human and other life. As climate scientist and evangelical Christian professor Katharine Hayhoe says, 'Climate change has already caused widespread and substantial losses to almost every aspect of human life on this planet, and the impacts on future generations depend on the choices we make NOW.'[3] For Christians, this is an urgent issue of justice and also begs the question, 'What is the good news we proclaim whilst we are destroying God's good creation?'

Sadly, however, climate change is only one of multiple environmental challenges we face in the twenty-first century. Researchers increasingly use the concept of 'planetary boundaries'[4,5] to describe nine areas of human impact upon natural systems.[6]



Source: "Planetary Boundaries," Stockholm Resilience Centre, University of Stockholm, accessed May 16, 2023, https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html; Credit: J. Lokrantz/Azote based on Steffen et al., 2015

Figure 1. The nine planetary boundaries

The boundaries use a traffic light system to indicate whether current human impact is 'green' (a safe operating area for humanity), 'amber' (zone of uncertainty and risk), or 'red' (high risk to human thriving). It can be seen that climate change is currently in the 'amber' or warning zone, whereas 'Biochemical flows' and 'Biosphere integrity' are both deeply into the red danger zone. In brief, 'Biochemical flows' refer to the use of nitrogen and phosphorous in agricultural fertilizers and their impact on soil and water quality. 'Biosphere integrity' concerns the loss of species and habitats worldwide (biodiversity loss). The support systems on which all life depends including oxygen from plants, pollination from

insects, healthy food, clean water and a stable climate are rapidly deteriorating due to humanity's accelerating impact. To illustrate this, it is estimated that of all mammals on earth 96 percent are livestock and humans, and only 4 percent are remaining wild mammals.[7,8] This poses serious theological and missiological questions regarding the future of human life, human population and consumption, and God's purposes in and for creation.

The Content of the Great Commission

The environmental threats we face this century matter because belief in God as Creator is a fundamental tenet of Christian faith. They force us to ask not only 'What is the state of the Great Commission?', but 'What is the Great Commission?' To put it simply, is Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations simply a call to rescue people from a dying world? In that case, the state of the planet is either irrelevant or simply an incentive to evangelise faster. Alternatively, does the Great Commission include creation care itself as part of the proclamation of the Gospel and essential to 'making disciples'?

The Lausanne Movement gave a clear answer to this question at the Third Lausanne Congress in 2010. The Cape Town Commitment asserts that, 'we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says "Jesus is Lord" is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.'[9] The Great Commission has always been about making disciples, rather than converts, and disciples are those who allow Jesus to be Lord in every dimension of their lives. The Cape Town Commitment is clear that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, 'includes the earth' which was created, is sustained and will be redeemed by and through Christ. Therefore, to fail to care for creation is to fail to allow Jesus to be Lord.

Moreover, The Cape Town Commitment goes further in giving a concise definition of biblical mission including creation care: 'Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, and for society, and for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.'[10] These three dimensions of mission identified by the Lausanne Movement – the spiritual, the social, and the creational – provide a helpful framework by which to measure the effectiveness of missions and therefore, 'the State of the Great Commission.' If our task is to make disciples of Jesus, who is Lord of all Creation (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:15-20), and who teaches us to pray for God's Kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10), then fulfilling the Great Commission includes justice for all people and the flourishing of all creation. We need adequate metrics to measure not only people groups reached, languages the Bible is translated into, and churches planted, but also to measure social and ecological impacts of our missional activity.

> ***"The Cape Town Commitment asserts that, 'we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth."***

Of course, the danger of including the social and creational dimensions of mission is losing our focus on evangelism. This was the mistake of the 'social gospel' movement of the early twentieth century. It is still present amongst those who focus only on climate and poverty without preaching the saving message of Jesus Christ. Yet, the mistake we evangelicals have often made is to react so strongly against this danger that we ignore the biblical mandate to care for the poor and for creation. In doing so, we reject the full Lordship of Christ, because to say 'Jesus is Lord' includes his Lordship over society and creation. As has been argued elsewhere,[11] the key to avoiding losing our focus is to ensure that all our missional activity, 'spiritual', social and creational, is focused on Jesus Christ, rooted in Scripture,

and fully integrated in demonstrating the whole gospel for the whole world.

The following case studies illustrate ways in which Christians in different global contexts are integrating creation care within their fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Missional Case Study: Indigenous Perspectives on Mission and Creation

In indigenous understanding and experiences, talking about the Great Commission and the missionary task of the church means thinking about the importance of all relationships, including the sense of community in, with, and from the environments where we live. Everything is connected in this awareness of belonging within community territory. The sense of belonging that we have towards the land offers a holistic dimension and perspective regarding salvation and living out the gospel. Therefore, not including this perspective in our experience of faith and life is to reduce the scope of the gospel, which includes all creation in Christ's salvific work. These relationships include the relationship between all creation and its Creator, which many indigenous people understand to be a great mystery. Our way of living with mystery, in the midst of life's ambiguities, keeps us humble, helps us recognize that we are from the earth, we are creation's younger brothers and sisters, and creation has a lot to teach us about how to walk well on the earth so that we can all live well.

From their worldviews, indigenous peoples propose a life of reciprocity and complementarity — life perspectives that allow us to fertilize our faith experience and missiological and theological work. Also, the way we live in and interpret the world (including theology and mission) and our relationships in the community of creation is through our territories. Indigenous perspectives can help us recover the deeply biblical connections between people, land and faith which we see in Scripture. Indigenous peoples also offer a way for the Euro-centric church to return to a theology and mission based on particular relationships to a particular space, which helps us see how our theology does have an impact on the earth.

Missional Case Study: Development vs. Environment

The Atewa Forest lies 90 kilometers north of Ghana's capital, Accra. It contains unique and rich biodiversity, including 1100 plant species, 77 percent of Ghana's butterflies and 30 percent of Ghana's bird species, and is recognised as a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area (GSBA). It also holds the headwaters of three river systems providing water for millions of people and for industry. In addition, it has great cultural, historical, and spiritual significance to indigenous communities of the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Kingdom.

As an emerging economy, Ghana needs development finance. In 2019, the Ghanaian government entered into a USD $2 billion loan agreement with China to mine Atewa for bauxite (for aluminum), destroying much of the forest, in exchange for rail and road building. This created a challenge for A Rocha Ghana, a Christian organisation working to protect biodiversity and build sustainable livelihoods. How should we respond to actions that will have devastating consequences on critical ecosystems and impact negatively on communities' livelihoods? Does keeping quiet taint our confession of faith as Christians working in conservation? Should quick profits, little of which will benefit local communities, triumph over long-term green development?

A Rocha Ghana listened to local people, who had not been consulted, conducted careful scientific research to gain evidence, and began a 'David vs. Goliath' campaign against the proposed destruction of Atewa Forest. Through public campaigning, political advocacy, international pressure, and finally legal action against the government of Ghana, a small Christian organisation has stood up for people and planet against powerful political and economic forces, drawn global attention to Atewa, and has, so far, delayed the implementation of the forest's destruction. Seth Appiah-Kubi, Director of A Rocha Ghana states, 'This is a practical demonstration of our faith in the God of creation and our role as stewards of God's earth.'

Missional Case Study: Mission Agencies and Creation Care

As creation care gains traction in both urgency and importance, mission agencies are actively incorporating care of creation in their missiology and practice. OMF International, for example, has long been exploring how creation care is part of integral mission, and created their own statement on the theological basis for creation care in 2014. For those in OMF this means that, 'regardless of our ministries and contexts, we can care for creation not only in what we do, but as who we are.'[12]

Expressions of creation care are different across OMF because of each person's unique ministries and contexts. In Mongolia, some are embracing the opportunity to respond to the challenge of air pollution and its impact on human health and livelihood. In another part of Asia, some are involved in research on water quality in seagrass and mangrove regions. This research has been a gateway for local communities to experience the beauty of God's creation within their surroundings. In the UK, others are integrating creation care not only in practical ways – such as reducing energy consumption in buildings – but also in how they mobilize people to engage in God's mission. All in all, OMF continues to strive towards living out creation care as a posture, rather than merely as a program.

OMF is only one of several mission agencies with a keen desire to integrate creation care. As such, several of these agencies, including OMF, are now part of the recently formed Mission Agencies & Creation Care (MACC) Network under the umbrella of the Lausanne/WEA Creation Care Network (LWCCN). While each agency is at a different point in their creation care journey, MACC is a valuable space to explore specific topics, to share resources and strategies, and to pray for one another.

Conclusion

The call to respond practically and urgently to our multifaceted ecological crisis is not simply topical. It is deeply biblical, rooted in God as Creator, Jesus as Lord and Saviour of creation, and the Holy Spirit who sustains and renews the earth. Creation care is, therefore, not just a pressing context for mission. Creation care is also integral to the content of the Great Commission. We are called to make disciples who live out the truth that Jesus is Lord of all creation. Without this, we risk ineffective evangelism in failing to address today's deepest questions. Without this, we risk Business as Mission simply baptising a system that destroys the planet. Without this, we fail to witness that Jesus is Lord of all. But, as Christians around the world are discovering in exciting new ways, when Christians take the earth seriously, people take the gospel seriously. In Romans 8:19, we read 'Creation is waiting for the children of God to be revealed.' As those adopted as God's children, the global church, creation is waiting for us! Are we ready to respond to our Great Commission to share God's good news for all creation?

> ***"Creation care is, therefore, not just a pressing context for mission. Creation care is also integral to the content of the Great Commission."***

Endnotes

1 "AR6 Synthesis Report: Headline Statements, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" (section A.1), accessed May 31, 2023, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/resources/spm-headline-statements.

2 Ibid (section B.3), Accessed May 31, 2023.

3 Katharine Hayhoe, March 20, 2023, https://twitter.com/KHayhoe/status/1637875896433385481?lang=en.

4 Johan Rockström et al., "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity", Nature 461, no. 7263 (2009): 472-75.

5 Will Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," Science 347, no. 6223 (2015): 736-46.

6 "The Nine Planetary Boundaries," Stockholm Resilience Centre, University of Stockholm, Accessed May 31, 2023, https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html.

7 Yinon M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips, Ron Milo, "The Biomass Distribution on Earth", Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, (2018), Accessed June 1, 2023 https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1711842115

8 36% humans, 60% livestock, 4% wild mammals, accessed 1 June, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/21/human-race-just-001-of-all-life-but-has-destroyed-over-80-of-wild-mammals-study.

9 "The Cape Town Commitment", Accessed June 2, 2023, https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p1-7

10 Ibid.

11 Dave Bookless, "A Missional Theology of Creation Care", Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Missio Nexus 59(2) (2023): 13-18

12 Jasmine Kwong, "Posture Over Program: OMF's Journey into Creation Care", Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Missio Nexus 59(2) (2023): 24-28.

Authors

Revd Dr Dave Bookless is a Lausanne Catalyst for Creation Care and Head of Theology for A Rocha International (www.arocha.org). He is a missiologist, theologian, pastor, writer and lecturer, born in India, living in multiethnic Southall, London, and seeking to live out biblical sustainable values in an urban setting.

Jasmine Kwong is a Lausanne Catalyst for Creation Care and a Creation Care Advocate with OMF International (www.omf.org) She is also on the Board of Christians in Conservation in the Philippines, an affiliated project of A Rocha International. She is based in the Philippines and has particular passion for community food-related issues and marine conservation.

Dr Seth Appiah-Kubi is National Director of A Rocha Ghana. He holds a PhD in finance and is a Chartered Management Accountant, with 15 years' experience in conservation and securing natural resources for communities. He serves on national and international conservation committees and forums relating to biodiversity, climate and natural resources.

Jocabed Solano is a Lausanne Catalyst for Freedom and Justice, Director of Memoria Indígena and a missionary with United World Mission. She is from the Gunadule Indigenous nation and is a Panamanian citizen. Her focus is recognising the good news of Jesus interweaving in the stories of indigenous peoples.

GLOBAL HEALTH

Martha Mwendafilumba, Michael Soderling, Annelies Wilder-Smith

Pursuing Wholistic Health

Cultural changes have brought the world to a pivotal time in history. One example of such groundbreaking changes occurred in 1978 at a meeting in what is now Almaty, Kazakhstan. A declaration derived from the principles proposed during this gathering, which involved delegates from 134 governments and representatives from 67 United Nations organizations. The declaration was titled 'Health for All by the Year 2000'.[1] The word 'health' in this case was based on the definition used by the World Health Organization using the following definition: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.[2] This statement was developed to combat the commonly held belief at the time (and arguably still today) that health simply meant one was not ill.

Considerable progress has been made toward this goal, though an immense amount of work remains. We will not be commenting any further than to say the situation may be even more complex than before because of the effects of climate change, the growing crisis of displaced persons, and the geopolitical divisions and politicization of health and ongoing socioeconomic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, a Western system of healthcare (more accurately described as a disease management system) is the dominant form of dealing with 'dis-eased' humans. It is the system being pursued by (or, one could say, forced upon) most if not all parts of the globe. It is a system that disintegrates the human body and reduces the patient's health complaint to the least by understanding and treating symptoms. It relies on a quick diagnosis (which, of course, is sometimes necessary) and the application of therapy, so that the healthcare provider can proceed to the next case as efficiently as possible. The engine that propels this system is based on a business model that leaves almost no room for true care for the whole person. It is an expensive system that the majority of the countries cannot afford to implement. Even in the most developed countries, such as the United States, it is hardly affordable for many to receive high-quality healthcare.

This large gathering in Almaty in 1978, in fact, was preceded by a gathering of a meager size in 1964. Some 18 participants from nine nationalities, mostly medical missionaries, met to discuss healing in a Christian context and to answer the question, 'Is the church still called to ministries of health, healing, and wholeness?' The resounding answer was, *yes!*

> ***"Is the church still called to ministries of health, healing, and wholeness? The resounding answer [is] yes!"***

Numerous global consultations followed in various contexts, and those consultations led to the formation of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) in 1968 within the World Council of Churches (WCC).[3] From their offices located in Geneva, members of the CMC met regularly with members of the World Health Organization and had a leading role in the development of what became known as primary health care (PHC). A thorough explanation and promotion of PHC was the centerpiece of the Almaty gathering. The embrace and implementation of PHC principles have had varied uptake globally. For all the talk of the importance of PHC in the US, for example, it is still the reality that the system there is primarily focused on disease treatment, not on prevention and health promotion. Rather than being a healthcare system, it is in reality a disease-management system.

While significant advances have been made in the treatment of disease, there remains a significant deficit in treating the whole person.

Emerging technologies are making a cure for cancer more likely, while at the same time the levels of depression and suicide rates are at all-time highs in some parts of the world. Much confusion exists regarding what it means to be and identify as a human being. While technology has made great strides in addressing communicable diseases, it can also be the agent for isolation and loneliness as many seek connection and relationship in the virtual world. The COVID-19 pandemic only accelerated this already developing problem.

Interestingly and more to the point of this paper, closely between those two forementioned gatherings in 1964 and 1978, another meeting occurred in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. As most readers are aware, this meeting had world evangelization as its focus. This was indeed a pivotal point in the history of the global church. While many in attendance were comfortable believing that the Great Commission had been achieved since all nation states could be seen to have a church, it was Dr. Ralph Winter who pointed out that it is not nation states to which we should give our attention but to the *ethne* ("people groups" in Greek) of the world, of which there were an estimated 13,000. This fact sent massive ripples throughout the Christian world and led to numerous and ongoing projects whose focus can be described as finishing the task of world evangelization. The Lausanne Movement is a direct descendant of that gathering. Great gains have been made in reaching the *ethne* of the world. It is now estimated that around 7,000 such groups remain without a witness to Jesus.[4] This comprises more than 40 percent of the eight billion people on this planet. The low hanging fruit has been picked, and the remaining fruit seems just out of reach. What, you might ask, does this have to do with our theme of global health? The remainder of this paper will make the connection clear.

Global Health and the Great Commission

Global health, the focus of this report, is a term not well understood by most. It is not a topic that is often discussed in many of our churches. It may be of interest within mission agencies, though even within those institutions there would typically not be an explanation of what they mean by the term. There would likely be a vague understanding that it has something to do with medical care in developing countries (*eg* treating patients in clinics and hospitals run by dedicated Christian healthcare professionals). Some may have knowledge of community health efforts being made around the globe. Others may see more of a link with the discipline of public health. Some may even hear it as a term that relates to the health of the planet. We therefore argue that global health is a little understood term that calls for a clear definition, at least for the global church.

We seek to establish within the church the link between health and the rich Hebrew word *shalom*. The Greek equivalent would be *eirene*. Both words are typically translated as 'peace', which we commonly interpret to mean an absence of conflict. The ancient Hebrew concept of peace, rooted in the word *shalom*, means wholeness, completeness, soundness, health, safety and prosperity, and balance, carrying the implication of permanence.[5] In other words, it is a wholeness of mind, body, and spirit in one's social context. Dr. Daniel Fountain said it best: '*Health cannot be defined.* It is not simply an object for analysis. To render it such is to think secularly about health. Health is life, a gift we receive, an endowment we are to develop, and a journey we are to pursue. We can observe and analyze much along the way. We can manipulate and improve certain aspects of health and life. But we can never comprehend the whole'.[6] In that same work, Dr. Fountain develops what can be seen as an *understanding* of what health is from a biblical perspective.[7]

Here a biblical example will help us add to our knowledge an understanding that broadens our intellectual model for what health is and how the church is called to the ministry of health, healing, and wholeness. For 12 years the woman in Luke 8:43–48 (also in Matthew 9:20–22 and Mark 5:25-34) had been bleeding. She had spent all she had on doctors who were unable to cure her. By this time she was as much an outcast as any leper. Isolated from her family and community, and quite possibly nearing death from extreme anemia, she was desperate, so much so that she risked every-

thing to touch the hem of Jesus's cloak, believing it would take away her physical disease. And though physical cure was indeed what happened, it was not going to be the end of the story. Jesus called her out. Undoubtedly with great fear and trembling, perhaps thinking she might be stoned to death for her action, she came forward to explain herself. Can you imagine the relief she had felt when Jesus simply said, 'Daughter (restoration of her mental health and social standing), your faith has healed you (physical cure). Go in peace (*eirene* or *shalom*)'? This is healthcare. This is caring for the whole person in the way that Jesus did in his earthly ministry.

The model Jesus demonstrates to us is what we call Whole Person Care (WPC), an integrated form of care that takes into consideration all aspects of what it means to be a human, that we exist in bodily form with a mind and eternal spirit. To treat one aspect of human 'dis-ease' while ignoring the whole is a reductionist approach which in many cases may not truly heal the individual. Is a holistic model of care like WPC being accomplished anywhere in the world?

Historically, hundreds if not thousands of mission hospitals were built in the most difficult regions of the world, many of which persist in their mission to this day. We cannot be sure of the numbers, but many hundreds of these hospitals have closed, have moved away from their original mission focus, or have even been taken over by governments that are not interested in the original intent for which the hospital was built.

There are increasing numbers of Christian community health efforts than ever before (though, again, there are no known statistics on the numbers). In addition, there are many individuals dedicated to bringing the Word to many of the least-reached peoples on the planet through healthcare outreach. Many of the largest sending agencies have numerous healthcare professionals in the field. However, we have yet to find one that fully comprehends the potential of WPC in reaching unreached people groups.

Challenges in Global Health

So far this article has given a very brief picture of the present reality. The world is spending enormous resources in the pursuit of its vision of universal health by using an incomplete understanding of health and taking a reductionist approach to caring for people. There is a growing focus on social determinants of health (SDOH) and even an acknowledgement of the importance of religion as a determinant of health. These are good trends that are to be celebrated, yet they still fall short. The church and her representatives continue to care for the most marginalized and least reached peoples, although her efforts, too, may be limited by a reductionist approach. The church has too often sought to fit herself into the efforts of the world (*eg* Sustainable Development Goals), rather than being the standard by which all others measure their efforts.

We come now to the key element of this report that asks the question: What do we believe to be the most complex global health challenge that the church faces? Is it the persistent lack of access to quality healthcare by the world's most marginalized? Is it that preventable diseases are still killing millions each year? If we believe that health is related to integrity of our whole being—mind, body, and spirit—functioning well in our context, then the greatest challenge that the church faces is the fact that around 40 percent of the world's population does not have the opportunity to achieve such health of the whole person. Why 40 percent? That is the portion of the world that has no access to the good news of Jesus the Messiah.[8] The most important aspect of human health is the status of our eternal spirit. If more than three billion people have no access to God's shalom through a relationship with his Son Jesus and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then they cannot experience true health.

We are calling for a great convergence to happen within the church—a convergence of those efforts that seek to accomplish the Great Commission with those who focus on the Greatest Commandment. The former,

such as WPC, tends to avoid good works, since it is seen as a distraction from the primary goal of seeing a church amongst all people groups. The latter at times is only focused on healthcare provision in the way of the world, devoid of the ultimate desire to see all come to a saving knowledge of Jesus the Messiah. We do not claim that this convergence is not happening, but we do claim that it is not the dominant approach used by the majority of those seeking to reach the unreached *ethne* with the good news. We are calling for a response to both the Greatest Commandment (to love) and the Great Commission (to go out to the whole world).

Opportunities for Global Health

Imagine the radical impact the body of Christ could be making if it had a well-developed theology of health that was then being put into practice in the form of true whole person care. Imagine the radical impact our churches could be making if they saw themselves as healing communities not only within their own structure but also in the surrounding communities. If just 10 percent of our churches were functioning as true WPC centers (or we could use the term Christ-Centered Primary Healthcare Centers) while using a team-based approach, the impact would be transformational not just for the communities they serve, but for those individuals involved. Other potential future possibilities are as follows:

- Seminaries have a theology of health integrated into their curriculums, which train church leaders who model healthy living and help their members do the same.
- Christian health science schools have a strong theology of health fully integrated into their curriculum, providing the world with WPC practitioners.
- Churches serve as leading organizations in their community with regards to caring for the present mental health needs.
- Christian healthcare services have a correct understanding of what is most important for helping people live healthy lives, namely that the spiritual well-being of a person is of primary importance.
- The witness of the church in providing WPC has an influence over the secular models of disease management and guides them toward a more holistic approach.
- The church engages more fully with implementing WPC as they work among unreached people groups, leading to greater numbers of movements to Jesus.
- Those Christ-centered entities worldwide (eg hospitals, clinics, and community development organizations) that are serving in the neediest regions are equipped with a strategy to build sustainability and avoid unhealthy dependency on external resources.
- Short-term health outreach efforts have the goal of working themselves out of a job.

From Today to 2050

The challenges to seeing the formation of this great convergence will be formidable, but opportunities abound and will not necessarily require the development of any new organizations. Potential challenges include the following:

- Complacency in the church hinders the momentum and fosters ongoing neglect toward her essential calling to truly care for the whole person.
- Seminaries and bible colleges cannot see beyond their past identities to understand what they need to become for the future.
- Health science programs are reluctant to truly develop and implement WPC into their programming, often fearing the accrediting bodies.
- The global church in general does not see the value in research and does not invest in it.
- The strong forces of Westernization and globalization promote an unhealthy lifestyle and diet and seek to enlarge the dominance of a form of healthcare that is no more than disease management.

- The power and influence of a West-dominated health and healthcare movement throughout the world will be difficult to confront.
- Ongoing economic challenges in the low and low middle income countries (LMICs) impede progress on health parameters.
- Hostile contexts—on a local, national, and global scale—snuff out hopes of growth and transformation toward WPC.

Opportunities are numerous:

- Christian networks have global reach to bring the mission of WPC to reality.
- Partnerships can be formed between theological, biblical studies programs and Christian health science programs to help each other integrate a fully biblical understanding of health into the DNA of their schools and programming.
- Christian hospitals can form a global association to network, discuss struggles, and share emerging and best practices for their callings.
- Best practices for short-term healthcare outreach efforts can be embraced and implemented on a greater scale, providing community empowerment that restores dignity and purpose to the community beyond short-term relief.
- Local churches have the opportunity to be a significant provider of PHC using Christ-centered, team-based approach for WPC in their communities.
- BAM (Business as Mission) workers can partner with hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare providers to think outside the box about sustainable healthcare services in the neediest areas.
- Individuals working in WPC can collaborate for more impact.
- In all of the above, the advancement of WPC can significantly advance the cause of the gospel for every person, disciple-making churches for every people and place, Christlike leaders for every church sector and kingdom impact in every sphere of society.

Such radical changes on so many levels will require resources. What will be needed to continue thinking about and then doing what is proposed?

Of the income earned by Christian families, 98.3 percent goes toward household needs (housing, food, cars, etc.), while 1.7 percent is given to any Christian cause. Of this 1.7 percent, 82 percent goes to local churches and organizations, 12.2 percent to local or national outreach, and 5.8 percent to global foreign missions. Of this 5.8 percent, only 1.8 percent is spent on reaching unreached people groups. In other words, for every 100,000 USD that Christians earn, only 1.70 USD is given toward reaching unreached peoples.[9] This must change.

Very little research has been done by the church related to her efforts in helping people become healthy. Until recently, no academic journal had existed with a focus on global health from a biblical worldview. The *Christian Journal for Global Health* has filled this gap.[10] We are not aware of a global health research institute founded and functioning from a biblical worldview, though one is being developed at William Carey International University.[11]

Resources toward mobilization include the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course.[12] This course has had a tremendous impact on mobilizing thousands to cross-cultural work but has minimal exploration of the role that Christian healthcare outreach has played in introducing the gospel into otherwise closed *ethne* groups. The Christian Global Health in Perspective course now fills that gap.[13]

Numerous Christian organizations and networks exist globally.[14] In addition, there is the Africa Christian Health Associations Platform, which is comprised of some 44 members.[15] In India we have the Emmanuel Hospital Association with more than 20 members.[16] Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) in the UK and, internationally, the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) and IHS Glob-

al train healthcare professionals how to witness Christ to patients.[17] Healthcare Christian Fellowship International serves the similar purpose with numerous branches globally.[18]

Within the Lausanne Movement, numerous resources exist at the Health for All Nations page, including an excellent Global Classroom on this topic.[19]

We encourage forming several pilot programs that seek to embody the principles we promote in this paper. These programs could include the following mandate:

- Train and empower sending agencies that are willing to equip and send WPC teams, both short-term and long-term, to unreached *ethne* locations. We would prefer at least half of these to be sending agencies formed in and based out of a majority world context.
- Enlist churches that are willing to explore the biblical foundations for WPC, whose members will then implement it in their churches using a team-based approach.

Proactively build partnerships between seminaries and Christian health science schools, so that they together explore the biblical foundations for a theology of health, and then integrate that theology of health into the core of their programs.

In sum, the vision of global health is a vision of seeing the shalom of Christ experienced amongst all ethne. Amen, and may it be so.

Endnotes

1 "Primary Health Care: Report of the International Conference of Primary Health Care," World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, September 6–12, 1978, https://www.unicef.org/media/85611/file/Alma-Ata-conference-1978-report.pdf.

2 "Constitution," World Health Organization, May 31, 2019, https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution.

3 Access to the reports from these consultations are available upon request to mjsoderling@gmail.com.

4 https://joshuaproject.net/global/progress

5 Susan Perlman, "What Is Shalom: The True Meaning," Inherit, August 27, 2018, https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/inherit/what-is-shalom-the-true-meaning (emphasis added).

6 Daniel Fountain, Health, the Bible, and the Church (Wheaton, IL: The Billy Graham Center, 1989), 52.

7 A ten-point summary can be found in "What Is Health?" Health for All Nations, https://www.healthforallnations.com/about-what-is-health.html.

8 https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics

9 https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/giving.

10 https://journal.cjgh.org.

11 https://www.wciu.edu/.

12 https://www.perspectives.org/.

13 https://www.cghiperspective.com/.

14 https://www.healthforallnations.com/resources-links.html.

15 https://africachap.org/.

16 https://eha-health.org/.

17 https://icmda.net/; https://www.ihsglobal.org/.

18 https://www.hcfglobal.org/

19 https://lausanne.org/networks/health-for-all-nations

Authors

Martha Mwendafilumba is the co-catalyst for Lausanne Movement Health for All Nations Network. Martha has worked for the government of Zambia, then in the NGO sector with CARE International, Global Network for Women and Children's Health, World Vision, and lately the Centre for Infections and Disease Research Zambia. Martha interacts regularly with the Zambian government in technical committees and participates in developing guidelines, policies, and training manuals for health workers. She is also a board member and the Africa regional president of Nurses Christian Fellowship International (NCFI).

Dr Michael Soderling received his MD from the Medical College of Wisconsin and finished his residency in OB/GYN in 1991. After 10 years of private practice in Wisconsin, he and his family moved to full-time cross-cultural work in Guatemala, where he co-founded and continues to serve as CGO (chief governance officer) for Salud que Transforma (Transformational Health, a Guatemalan C-FBO). Since 2010, Michael as director of Health For All Nations, a global network of mission leaders and organizations dedicated to re-engaging the church with health and wholeness. In addition, he is the CGO for William Carey International University.

Dr Annelies Wilder-Smith is a professor of emerging infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Visiting Professor of infectious diseases research at the Lee Kong Chian School of medicine. She is a world-renowned expert in travel and Tropical medicine. She is the past president of the International Society of Travel medicine (ISTM), and the past president of the Asia Pacific Society of Travel medicine and she was also the former chair of the Regional ISTM Conference in Singapore.

MENTAL HEALTH

Karen Bomilcar, Esther Malm, Edmund Ng

God's Desire for Shalom

We are always surrounded by needs, but if we are to proclaim the gospel in the manner that Jesus modeled to us, then it makes sense for us to identify the most serious needs in the world today, both the obvious and the hidden ones, and attend to them for the purpose of the Great Commission. One of the greatest challenges facing the church is to address the needs of people everywhere regarding health and wholeness (shalom). When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, he went around the community to minister to the felt needs of the people (Matt 14, 15:29–39; Luke 19; etc.).

This was at the very heart of Jesus' ministry on earth as shown by his integration of preaching, teaching, and discipling, complemented by his works of healing and deliverance. Jesus practiced care of the whole person—body, soul, and spirit—in the individuals' social context. He invites his disciples to continue this form of ministry. Mental health care is one of the most pressing needs in every continent. The state of our mental health interfaces with many aspects of what makes us human and how we deal with the challenges of daily life. With the increase in environmental, social, political, professional, and spiritual issues, the number of people facing emotional issues has grown globally. These problems naturally impact a person's spirituality as well as their sense of self and others. So essentially, the mental health field has wide implications in every sphere of society.

In this report, we define mental health as the state and quality of our emotional, mental (psychological), and social well-being.[1] As such, poor mental health refers to the poor state or quality of one or all areas of our wellbeing. In fact, mental health and mental illness are phrases that brings a lot of stigma and trepidation across nations and the church. Mental health is not the same as mental illness. Chronic and poor mental health can lead to a mental illness. A friendlier term for mental illness is 'psychological disorder', which places more value on the human being. The phrase 'mental health challenges' in this article is used to describe a broad range of symptoms and conditions that are experienced as a result of acute and chronic emotional and mental strain due to uncontrollable stressors and experiences in our lives. Such challenges can range from common and daily experiences such as relationship conflicts, burnout, loneliness, anxiety, depressive symptoms, or pervasive sadness, to professionally diagnosed disorders which are severe and chronic forms of mental health challenges such as clinical depression and bipolar disorders.

> ***"One of the greatest challenges facing the church is to address the needs of people everywhere regarding health and wholeness (shalom)."***

Mental health challenges are human challenges. All humans experience a degree of mental health trouble at some point in life. In some situations, the strain of life and/or diagnosed disorders can lead some to cry for help through the use of poor coping mechanisms including addictive behaviors, self-harm, and sometimes attempts to end the suffering through suicide. Poor mental health does not discriminate by creed, level of spirituality, educational status, skin color, socioeconomic status, or demographic criteria.

Prevalence Worldwide

A mental health meta-analysis of 174 surveys in 63 countries from 1980 to 2013 revealed that globally, about one in five adults experienced a mental health difficulty or disorder over a 12-month period, while 30 percent of all people will suffer from a mental disorder at some point in their adult life.[2] A 2022 WHO

report on mental health at work[3] estimated that globally 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety at a cost of USD 1 trillion per year in lost productivity.

Similarly, reports of increasing mental health challenges are evident across all other parts of the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, in all age groups. In a meta-analysis of 36 surveys across 12 African countries where studies of the prevalence of psychological disorders between 1984 and 2020 were conducted, anxiety-related mental health challenges, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and conditions associated with substance use were reported as most prevalent in those countries in comparison to more severe clinical disorders.[4]

The Pan American Health Organization of 48 countries and all regions in the Americas shows that South America generally has higher proportions of disability due to common mental illness, while Central America has a larger proportion of disability due to bipolar, childhood onset disorders, and epilepsy.[5] In addition, the USA and Canada suffer a high toll of disability from schizophrenia and dementia as well as from devastating rates of opioid-use disorder. In another global study (1990-2019) that examined prevalence rates of 12 mental health disorders and indices that capture overall burden of disease, there was a consistent pattern of increased prevalence and global burden of mental health disorders over the decade with varying rates within regions. For example, in Europe, Western Europe reported higher rates of reported disorders compared to other European regions. Also, Australasia reported the highest prevalence rates of mental disorders across the 204 countries and territories examined.[6]

As reports of mental health conditions continue to rise globally, the causes can be similar across regions, though varying in types when the Global South is compared to the Global North. For example, in the Global South, the increase in reports has been in part due to increased public awareness, while many barriers to mental health care remain, including stigma, limited access, high costs, and insufficient government funding.[7] Also, while many developing nations in the past decade have joined initiatives by the World Health Organization via the Mental Health Gap Action Program (mhGAP) to increase education, awareness, advocacy, and care,[8] progress toward these goals has still been slow when compared to progress in the Global North.

While the above-mentioned concerns are still present in the Global North (*eg* among indigenous people groups), it appears that they are not present there to the degree that they are in countries across the Global South. Overall, inequities including health care resources and access, limited education, abuses of power, and financial inequities continue to be the common roots of poor mental health and mental health challenges experienced globally.

The number of people struggling with their mental health has increased over the past years in every region of the world. In the past three years, we've seen a unique spike in reported mental health challenges around the globe due to the direct and indirect impact of COVID-19. A more recent meta-analysis of 35 studies in South Asia[9] during the COVID-19 pandemic shows a high prevalence of 34 percent for depression and 41 percent for anxiety. If South Asia is taken as representative of Asia, more than 1.5 billion people out of the total Asian population of 4.7 billion have been struggling with depression or anxiety. In Africa, the Middle East, Oceania, and the Americas, anxiety and depression also spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic due to loneliness, unemployment rates, and a prolonged sense of uncertainty.[10]

> ***"The number of people struggling with their mental health has increased over the past years in every region of the world."***

In addition to these post-pandemic repercussions, economic hardships, famines, natural disasters, geopolitical conflicts, and civil disorders continue to bring about a greater onslaught of mental health problems in our world, including a higher rate of suicides. Sys-

temic societal disorders in the form of childhood neglect, sexual abuse, or abandonment, also continue to generate more trauma and shame,[11] which in turn will manifest in higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems.

Mental health challenges of all kinds can become chronic without awareness and early intervention. Also, increased stress, increased strain from caregiving, and the overall financial, emotional, relational burden of ill-health will continue to increase. Beyond care of persons with mental health challenges, the prolonged care of persons with physical ailments (including neurological, communicable, and noncommunicable diseases) will also increase the likelihood of mental health challenges.

Current and Future Gaps Regionally

The lack of material and human resources remains an obstacle in many parts of the world. The 2020 WHO Mental Health Atlas states that the number of mental health workers per 100,000 people in South-East Asia is only 2.8, compared with the global median of 13.0. In addition, 2020 saw only a meager USD 0.10 per capita of government expenditure in

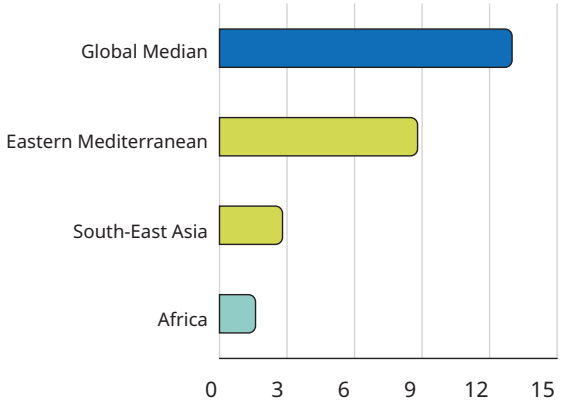


Figure 1: Number of Mental Health Workers per 100,000 People

these countries on mental health, compared with the global median of USD 7.49.[12] Eastern Mediterranean (8.8 per 100,000 people) and Africa (1.6 per 100,000 people) also fell below the global median for mental health workers. In these regions, government expenditure on mental health per capita in 2020 were USD 12.08 and USD 0.46 respectively.

This mismatch between the rising mental health challenges and inadequate personnel and resources to meet them will create huge societal needs everywhere, but particularly in the regions of Asia, Africa, South America, Oceania, and the Mediterranean countries. It also means that attending to these needs can be an easy and effective avenue for Christians to impact the lives of the people in our communities.

The Church Is Not Immune

Unfortunately, the influence of separating our faith from the rest of our lives, as well as an oversimplification of complex situations and phenomena, has permeated our church ideologies and practices, and this in turn has influenced how we perceive and treat mental health challenges.[13]

Despite the paucity of research on the mental health of pastors, missionaries, and ministry staff, we recognize that many pastors struggle with a variety of mental health challenges and need support for overall well-being in order to care for and effectively serve their congregations. A 2020 study by Lifeway Research[14] showed that 23 percent of pastors in America acknowledge they have personally struggled with a mental health challenge.

In addition, a 2020 Gallup Survey[15] found that 19 percent of churchgoers in America reported that their mental health was less than excellent, meaning that they had some mental health challenges. This exposes a significant need for support, but sadly, the Lifeway study also showed that 49 percent of pastors say they rarely or never speak to their congregation about mental illness or mental health in general.

Overall, the church still experiences a lot of uncertainty when dealing with mental health issues, and the stigma plaguing mental health in society as a whole is still nourished within Christian circles. If the church were equipped with a robust, biblical view of health and what it means to be human, it could be a protagonist in offering vital mental health care in the face of this great global need.

Role of the Church

A biblical understanding of what it means to be human necessitates a wholistic view of health in which mental, physical, and spiritu-

al concerns are bound together. This unity of parts affects every aspect of our lives and our mission in the world. Theological reflection is much needed in this integration. We must take careful stock of our views of church, leadership, discipleship, and the Christian life.

In places where health systems are weak or overloaded, the church can be the first place where people go for help. But if religious stigma, limited understanding, and unwillingness to seek understanding of mental illness close us off to people in need, the opportunity is lost, and we fail to fulfil the Great Commission. We also sacrifice the opportunity to serve them as Jesus would. If we are blind to the suffering of people facing mental health challenges, they will be deaf to our message of hope.

The way the church welcomes people with mental health challenges is also important to the Great Commission. Various forms of abuses of power and of people in the church continue to threaten the credibility of the work of authentic ministers, missionaries, and ministries. We may never know the magnitude of the negative impact such shameful discoveries have on the Great Commission. However, many victims of such abuse experience lifelong psychological disorders which impact their daily livelihood, social relations, and faith in God. While God and his work remain sovereign, abuse of any kind strikes a critical blow to the unity of the body, soul, and spirit. News of these abuses can also produce disillusionment toward God, the church, and the Great Commission.

Within our own walls, poor theology in these areas can take a serious toll on people's mental health. As humans, we were created by God for communion—to live in interdependent community while recognizing our limitations and possibilities. Church cultures that encourage productivity and activism but deny the importance of rest, spiritual practices, and self-care also neglect whole person care and contribute to the deterioration of mental health instead of promoting integral care. The stigma surrounding mental health for pastors, ministers, missionaries, and staff continues to stand between these workers and the care they and their families critically need. The accompanying lack of such resources and support will limit their own capacity to support congregants who are in need.

Challenges and Opportunities for Great Commission Efforts

As of 2023, the world population is 8 billion, suggesting that about 1.6 billion people are struggling with mental health challenges. The immense need for mental health care offers us ripe fields and an effective avenue to serve people in the community as we present the good news. To meet this need, we must attend to three main areas of growth in our churches.

1. Mental Health Literacy and Capacity: Even if a church recognizes caring for mental health as within the scope of our Commission, too often it is ill-prepared to respond. Despite the enormous need for emotional and psychological healing, too few Christian workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for such work. We must equip ourselves with basic Christian counseling knowledge and skills and invest in continuing education to keep abreast with people's needs. With greater mental health literacy, we will know more about our human nature in the way we think, feel, and behave. This will benefit us both in our own mental health self-care and also in ministering to others. Several practical steps can aid greatly in this effort:

- Schedule an annual mental health awareness week in our churches.
- Offer regular short courses on mental health.
- Motivate members to learn more on mental health through free online Christian teaching.[16]
- Embrace a multidisciplinary approach in both physical and mental health care, as we already do in our approach to spiritual care and formation.

2. Mental Health Services: We must thoughtfully incorporate new ministries within our churches to address the prevention of and care for mental health concerns. Below are practical examples of how churches can offer mental health services in their communities:Set up

recovery/rehabilitation programs that support people in need rather than shun them.

- Carry out one-to-one counseling and ministry to help people with emotional and mental health challenges both in church settings and in the community. With this, we must understand when to provide referrals to appropriate mental health professionals, like we already do with physical medical conditions.
- Offer support groups focused on grief, effective marital relations, singleness, conflicts, divorce, addictions, parenting, etc.
- Conduct free community talks on mental health topics and follow-up with those with specific needs.
- Offer debriefing, trauma, and grief intervention services in disaster relief and recovery outreaches.
- Increase and/or partner with medical care service providers to provide early childhood intervention and other community resources, as this will reduce stress (and eventual mental health conditions) and the burden of disease.

3. Church Culture Renewal: Without a robust, holistic understanding of what a person is and needs—ie Christian anthropology—education and resources will be of limited use. We may even sabotage our own efforts through church cultures that encourage productivity and activism while denying the importance of rest, spiritual practices, and self-care. A corrective to this includes:

- Reflecting on how Scripture interacts with our emotions and how these riches can be nurtured by the community of faith in its reading, teaching, worship, conversations, and relationships to strengthen people emotionally.
- Embracing mental health wellness as a lifestyle habit among Christians worldwide, promoting openness and honesty of our needs.
- Increasing opportunities for mentoring and accountability for ministers outside of the communities they serve. This provides ministers spaces in which they can step out of their care-giving roles in order to receive the care and connection they need. This added accountability can also reduce the likelihood for abuse and abusive behaviors.
- Honoring the testimonies and particular wisdom of those who minister out of their own brokenness. While we aim for mental wellness, we also recognize that in our fallen condition, not everyone will become well or fully recover. The peculiar grace such people experience as they pursue Christ in their pain often makes them uniquely suited to carry out the Great Commission in spaces of brokenness.

Hope for Our Great Commission Efforts

Despite the various global challenges in the field of mental health, there are many things to be hopeful about in the next 30 years, including the following:

- An abundance of freely-accessible resources are now available online for equipping Christians in mental health literacy as an additional ministry skill for world evangelism.
- Many Christians are awaking to the reality that theology and psychology are not necessarily opposing fields. Many psychological views are rooted in the Bible. When firmly anchored in biblical truth, the insights of psychological study can enhance our evangelism and discipleship across the world.
- Christians are investing in the training of many Christian mental health professionals globally. This will continue to enhance holistic and culturally competent mental health care.
- God's word for whole health is true even in the midst of the current mental health crisis. Our mental health matters to God, so he will grant us wisdom to grow and support one another.

Recommended Resources

Cook, Christopher C.H., Isabelle Hamley (eds). *The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

McMinn, R. Mark. *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

McMinn, R. Mark, D. Clark Campbell. *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic Press, 2007).

Ng, Edmund. *Discovering God's Word Psychologically: Eastern and Western Perspectives* (KL: GGP Publishing, 2018).

Swinton, John. *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2020).

World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030* (Geneva: WHO, 2021).

Endnotes

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "About Mental Health." https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm.

2 Steel, Zachary, Claire Marnane, Changiz Iranpour, Tien Chey, John W. Jackson, Vikram Patel, and Derrick Silove. "The Global Prevalence of Common Mental Disorders: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis 1980-2013." *International Journal of Epidemiology 43*, no. 2 (2014): 476-93. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyu038.

3 World Health Organization. "Mental Health at Work." September 28, 2022. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work.

4 Greene, M C., Tenzen Yangchen, Thomas Lehner, Patrick F. Sullivan, Carlos N. Pato, Andrew McIntosh, James Walters et al. "The Epidemiology of Psychiatric Disorders in Africa: A Scoping Review." *The Lancet Psychiatry 8*, no. 8 (2021): 717-731. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00009-2.

5 Pan American Health Organization. The Burden of Mental Disorders in the Region of the Americas, 2018 (Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2018).

6 GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. "Global, regional, and national burden of 12 mental disorders in 204 countries and territories, 1990–2019: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019." The Lancet Psychiatry 9, no. 2 (2022): 137-150.

7 World Health Organization. "Barriers to Mental Health Care in Africa, 2022." October 12, 2022. https://www.afro.who.int/news/barriers-mental-health-care-africa.

8 World Health Organization. mhGAP: Mental Health Gap Action Program: Scaling up care for mental, neurological and substance use disorders (Geneva: WHO Press, 2008).

9 Hossain, Md Mahbub, Mariya Rahman , Nusrat Fahmida Trisha, Samia Tasnim, Tasmiah Nuzhath , Nishat Tasnim Hasan, Heather Clark, Arindam Das, E Lisako J McKyer, Helal Uddin Ahmed, Ping Ma. "Prevalence of anxiety and depression in South Asia during COVID-19: A systematic review and meta-analysis." Heliyon 7, no. 4 (2021) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06677.

10 Dragioti, Elena, Han Li, George Tsitsas, Keum Hwa Lee, Jiwoo Choi, Jiwon Kim, Young Jo Choi et al. "A large-scale meta-analytic atlas of mental health problems prevalence during the COVID-19 early pandemic." Journal of Medical Virology 94, no. 5 (2022): 1935-1949. DOI: 10.1002/jmv.27549.

11 Edmund Ng. Shame-Informed Counseling and Psychotherapy, Eastern and Western Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2021), 77-82.

12 World Health Organization. Mental Health Atlas 2020. 52.

13 Lausanne Movement. "Health for All Nations." https://lausanne.org/networks/health-for-all-nations.

14 Aaron Earls. "Mental Health Declines Among Americans, Except Weekly Churchgoers." December 11, 2020. https://research.lifeway.com/2020/12/11/mental-health-declines-among-americans-except-weekly-churchgoers/.

15 Megan Brenan. "Americans' Mental Health Ratings Sink to New Low." December 7, 2020. https://news.gallup.com/poll/327311/americans-mental-health-ratings-sink-new-low.aspx.

16 One such resource is Safe Space Community, https://www.safespacecom.org.

Authors

Dr Karen Bomilcar is a psychologist with a master´s degree in theology (Regent College, Canada). She currently works in a public hospital in São Paulo, Brazil, and serves as one of the catalysts for the Lausanne Movement's Health for All Nations Issue Network. Karen is also a published author of books and articles and teaches on spirituality, health, and counseling at Seminário Teológico Servo de Cristo and at Centro Cristão de Estudos in Brazil.

Dr Esther Malm is an associate professor of psychology and a licensed marriage and family therapist. She was a member of the YL 2008 conference in Abuja, Nigeria. Esther seeks to inspire and empower Christ-followers to exude excellence in all things, serve their family as the first ministry field, and promote mental health care.

Dr Edmund Ng is a business CEO and licensed psychotherapist in community service. He seeks to equip Asian Christians with mental health literacy through Safe Space Community for Asians (https://www.safespacecom.org). For 12 years, Edmund served as founding president of the Malaysian and Asian Christian Counselors Associations. He authored *Shame-informed Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2021) and several other Christian books and journal articles.

SOCIETAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

Cossi Augustin Ahoga, Judith Johnston, Matheus Ortega

The Fullness of the Great Commission

Christian witness can best be described within the context of the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18–20 which says, 'go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' Influence of and participation in the common good can arguably be described within the context of Jeremiah 29:4–7, which says, '[. . .] Build houses and settle down [. . .] Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'

John Stott said that a truly Christian understanding of evangelism and social action is to view social action as a partner of evangelism, and that there are two fundamental instructions of Jesus — a great commandment, 'love your neighbour' and the great commission, 'go and make disciples.'[1] Both directives give primacy to social action and evangelism being mandates for all Christians, and is supported by Jesus' professed mandate in Luke 4:18–19.[2]

Christian witness in society is evident when there is kingdom impact in every sphere of society. What does that look like? This is what we will explore in the following pages:

- Current societal reputation of Christianity
- Christian witness through Influence and participation in the common good
- Opportunities and barriers within spheres of society

Historic Influence of Christianity

The influence of Christianity may vary according to individual views and experiences, or whether one is in the Global West, Global South, or Global East. In general, Christianity has a long history in the West and has profoundly influenced the culture, politics, and values of many Western countries. In the Global South, Christianity has more recently emerged as a key part of culture. In either case, the reputation and influence of contemporary Christianity struggles in contemporary society.

The word reputation refers to a moral honorability, to the way of living that impacts one's relationships and context. We use it in this article because the meaning of the Great Commission refers to the model of Jesus Christ that his followers should embody to showcase to society what Christianity represents.

Western Christianity has strongly contributed to different definitional elements of Western culture including, "(...) democratic freedoms and scientific-technical progress, on the one hand; moral concern and a fundamental conception of human dignity and equality between men and women, on the other hand.'[3] However, with the advent of the humanism of the 15th century, followed by the Enlightenment movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, and especially with the industrial revolution of the 19th century, the influence of the churches of the West decreased in many aspects of public life.

In recent decades there has been a decline in regular religious practice, an increase in secularization, and a growing diversification of beliefs and values. Some Western countries have adopted secular policies that seek to further separate religion from the state and public institutions. Today, in the West, the principle of heteronomy, which attached everything to the law of God, is being replaced by the logic of autonomy, characterized by three essential elements: subjectivation, differentiation and rationalization. The current context in the West has brought about the emergence of 'a new type of human who thinks, knows, feels, reacts in a radically different way from

their counterparts of the past [. . .]. One could almost say that this is a new human species that operates according to other criteria of judgment, other paradigms of thought, and inhabits a different world.'[4]

In the countries of the South where Christianity has only existed for a few centuries, its growth seems impressive. Indeed, newspapers and statistics announce the creation of several churches per day in Africa. In Latin America, according to José Antonio, Christianity is the popular religion.[5] These descriptions suggest that the Great Commission remains effective in these parts of the world. However, this numerical growth does not fully account for the challenges of contextualized integration of the faith into tradition cultures. Today, Christianity is being viewed in the South as an alienating Western religion. For example, the pan-African "Kemite" movement is rebelling against Christianity and is developing, both ideologically and academically, a revaluation of culture and traditional beliefs.

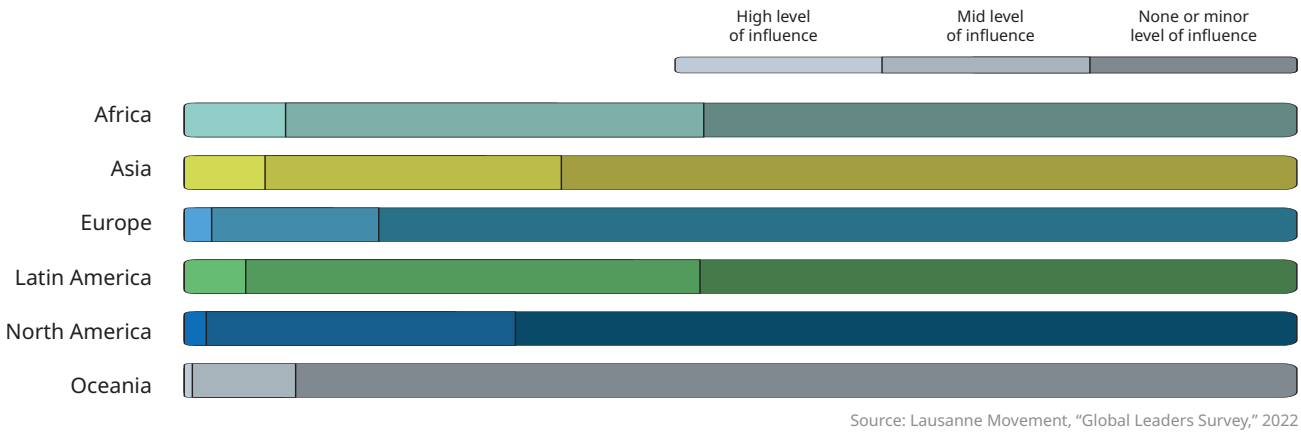
There are at least three reasons for this challenge. First, the historical legacy of slavery, which led to the 'inferiorization' of the souls of Blacks.[6] Second, colonialism, which attacked the languages of the "barbarians."[7] Third, Christianization, which did not honor the culture of the colonized and destroyed the little that remained of their traditional heritage. The failure of policies and the results of poverty are additional factors aggravating the situation.

Current Influence of Christianity

Rev. Joseph W. Handley, Jr. calls for deeper collaborative engagements to accelerate disciple making in the world today. He argues that a 'collaborative, communal approach to leadership that empowers multiple centres of influence as well as a diverse array of leaders is better suited to addressing the issues before us during this era of a globalized world'. In identifying the problem faced by the church he cited issues such as 'loss of credibility,' 'diminishing of moral character (Protestantism)' and 'the Evangelical community being a disgrace of God's character.[8] A Barna study was quoted as showing that only about 20% of Believers are involved in disciple making.[9]

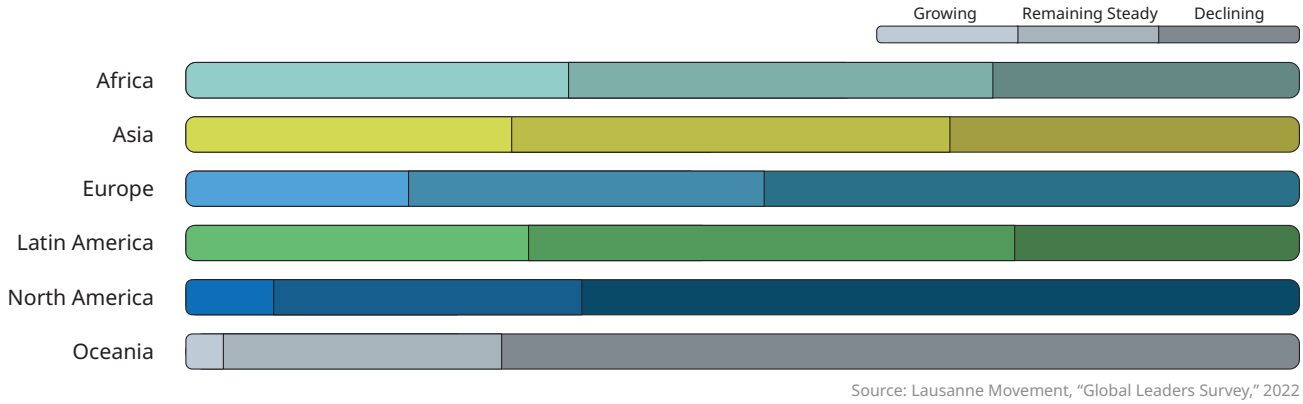
In 2021, the Lausanne Movement conducted multiple listening calls throughout its regional networks and issue groups, and discipleship was noted as one of the top three gaps with respect to the state of the Great Commission. In that conversation, evangelical leaders emphasized the importance of discipleship and training for ministry leaders and workers.[10]

Recent surveys of 1500 global evangelical leaders conducted by Lausanne reveal that the influence of the Christian church on the broader culture is largely non-existent, with 50-85 percent of respondents across five major regions of the world indicating none or minor levels of influence (see Figure 1). This is true across the Education, Media, Government, Technology, Finance, Business, Entertainment and Athletic Sectors of societies across the world.11 In Euro-Eurasia and North America, the Christian church's influence is perceived to be declining (see Figure 2).



Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

Figure 1: In your context, how much does the Christian church influence broader culture?



Source: Lausanne Movement, "Global Leaders Survey," 2022

Figure 2: In your perception, do you believe the influence of the Christian church in your region is:

Opportunities within Spheres of Society

Our world is in crisis. Pandemics, poverty, war, climate change, corruption, and injustice are issues presented daily in our news. The world's current economic model is failing due to finite resources and the increasing social divide. Furthermore, cities are expecting 2.5 billion additional people by 2050, with 90 percent of this increase taking place in Asia and Africa.[12] How then will people live? Will there be enough food, jobs, housing, education, or health care for everyone? Let us take a moment to reflect on the state of our world:

- 1 billion people live in slums.[13]
- 820 million people are going hungry.[14]
- 773 million adults are illiterate, most of whom are women.[15]
- 99 percent of people breathe air that contains high levels of pollutants.[16]
- 1.8 billion people suffer from living in high-risk flood zones.[17]
- 103 million people are forced to flee their homes yearly, 43 percent of whom are children.[18]
- 777 thousand girls under 15 years give birth each year.[19]
- 3 out of 10 of all pregnancies end in induced abortion.[20]
- 700 thousand people die by suicide every year.[21]

The opportunity to influence society lies exactly in the midst of such challenges. The centre of gravity of Christianity is continuously shifting southward, expanding to poorer countries, underlying a pressing need for long-term holistic models of evangelism and community development.[22]

Models of Evangelism and Community Development

How then do we address the problem of waning or non-existent Christian witness in society? Robert Linthicum has surmised that the church does ministry in the (community) in three distinct ways: in, to and with. [23]

The church 'in' the (community) has little or no involvement in the community; it is "in" but not "of" its community. This then would not be the church that is salt, brining savour to, influencing, or impacting the community.

The church 'to' the (community) decides what the needs are and what they will do to provide for the community – prescriptive and diagnostic without evidence.

The church 'with' the (community) is incarnational, it comes alongside the people and works with them by listening, discovering the issues that affect them, and brings the ministry of the church out and into the community. It is the prophetic voice in the (community) and a compassionate and caring community bringing hope to the people of the (community).

As we look to the model Jesus set, the church should aim to be 'with' the community, loving their neighbor as themselves.

Additional models are available to aid with ef-

fective impact. One such model, Appreciative Inquiry, a change management tool, provides an approach that can be used to impact communities and nations. It is an extreme departure from deficit-based change to a positive, strengths-based change approach, and represents a fundamental shift in the world of sustainable development. Appreciative Inquiry uses a 4-D Cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny – see Figure 3) that allows a body (organization or community) to identify its positive core strengths and introduce concrete steps to achieve its goals. It is an approach to change that cultivates hope, builds capacity, releases collective appreciation and imagination, and brings about positive change. It is based on the simple idea that human beings move in the direction of what they want to discover. Appreciative Inquiry deliberately asks positive questions in and about the community to determine its potential for future development.[24]

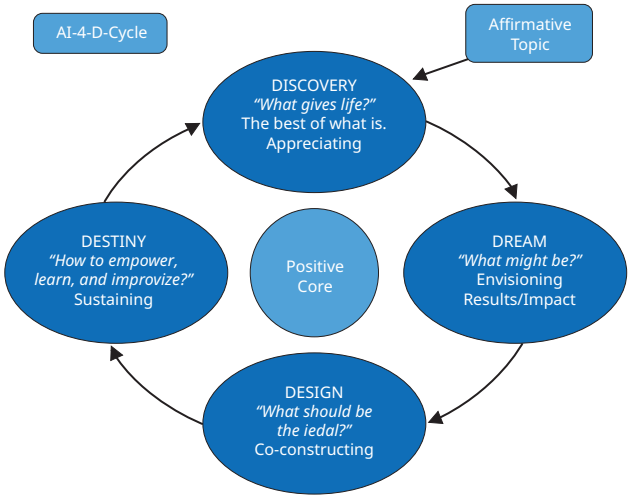


Figure 3: Appreciative Inquiry Model

From Today to 2050

In relation to 2050, what is needed to overcome the current perception, or reality, of the lagging influence of the Christian church in global society? The following are presented for consideration:

First, there is a key role for Christians to play in society – to transform lives. This surely means addressing issues of poverty, social justice, health care, environment, human rights, and material needs, but that is not all. There is something further that Christianity can offer that nothing else can: to give people a reconnected spirit, a renewed mindset, and a restored dignity. Acts of love and compassion are not easily measured with KPIs (key performance indicators), yet they have a profound human and eternal effect. They are what make Christianity go beyond the impact that mere development aid or philanthropy can ever achieve. They are the never-obsolete ingredients of the Great Commission.

Second, there is an opportunity arising out of illiteracy and connectivity. Currently, there are 773 million illiterate people in the world, and many more who can, but don't read. This underlines the need to supply people with quality education, but also a fantastic opportunity for Christians to engage in or create audio-visual communication. The success of the series, The Chosen, the largest crowd-funded media project of all time shows that hundreds of millions of people all around the world can hear about Christ through a filmed series.[25] There are 18 billion phones in the world (more than humans) and more than 5 billion internet users worldwide.[26] There is clearly an opportunity for Christians to use technologies and their creative minds to announce Christ to all corners of the earth.

Third, there is an opportunity that lies within intergenerational relationships and discipleship.[27] Christianity has expanded significantly in some parts of the world over the last decades. Church leaders need to be intentional in listening to, understanding, and discipling emerging generations. They should support and mentor them now to build deep roots of character, integrity, and relevance so that they may lead like Josiah, teach like Timothy, prophesy like Jeremiah, and change the world like the Disciples. A critical barrier to overcome for Christianity to thrive is the lack of communication and collaboration between generations. In many contexts, the leadership baton has not been passed in a timely or healthy way. This is an effort that must come both ways, with the hearts of the parents turning to their children, and the hearts of the children turning to their parents.[28]

Fourth, collaboration between ministry and marketplace, and use of strategic tools that will create lasting impact in every sphere of society.

Conclusion

Christians in all areas of society are called to the Great Commission. This means not only proclaiming the Good News, but also forming and instructing people to be like Jesus. There is no way we will be able to reflect Christ in all spheres of society if we do not look outward to address the pressing issues of this world, make use of and engage in creative means of communication, and connect our generations, cultures and denominations towards a common goal of making Christ known. Through the prayerful, prophetic presence of the believer engaging society in every sphere of society, we trust and pray that Christ will be known in every sphere of society.

Endnotes

1 John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 27.

2 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

3 Philippe, Portier and Willaime Jean-Paul. *Le Christianisme Et La Modernité Européenne.* Récuser Le Déni. Fondation pour l'innovation politique (Décembre 2018).

4 Bruno Mori. « 13. L'effondrement de la religion en Occident », , *Pour un christianisme sans religion. Retrouver la « Voie » de Jésus de Nazareth*, sous la direction de Mori Bruno. Karthala, 2019, pp. 93-102.

5 Lindhardt, Martin and Thorsen, Jakob Egeris, Christianity in Latin America: Struggle and Accommodation, (Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity), 167–187. Accessed May 2023.

6 More information in https://www.lesresumes.com/litterature/jean-claude-carriere-la-controverse-de-valladolid-resume-personnages-et-analyse. Accessed May 5, 2023.

7 This recalls the "glottophagy" of Louis-Jean Calvet (1974), who, in his book: Linguistics and Colonialism, "violently denounces the eating of languages, more exactly the tendency of French colonialism to fight African languages".

8 Joseph Handley, "The Great Collaboration: Catalyzing Disciple Making for the Global Church," Evangelical Review of Theology 47, no. 2 (May 2023), 101-107.

9 Barna, Leadership, Archived Research, New Research on the State of Discipleship ... Breaking Down Discipleship, https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/, Dec 1, 2015.

10 "The Evangelical Church Interacting between the Global and the Local: An Executive Summary of the Analysis of Lausanne 4 Listening Calls," Lausanne Movement, Accessed June 5, 2023, https://lausanne.org/l4/global-listening/the-evangelical-church-interacting-between-the-global-and-the-local. The dominant themes that emerged within the category of the first question on the remaining gaps were 'need for discipleship', 'reaching younger generations', 'love and unity', 'diversity in leadership', 'churches not engaging with the outside world', 'the remaining unreached people groups (UPGs)', 'advance of Isl am and need for Muslim evangelism', 'environmental crisis and creation care', 'lack of cross-cultural missions', 'lack of contextualization', and 'need for marketplace and workplace ministries'.

11 Lausanne Great Commission Team Survey of 1500global evangelical leaders, 2023.

12 "68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, last modified May 2018, https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html.

13 "Urban Development," The World Bank, last modified Apr 3, 2023, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview.

14 "Richest 1% bag nearly twice as much wealth as the rest of the world put together over the past two years," Oxfam International, last modified, January 16, 2023, https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years.

15 "Literacy," UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Last modified May 2023, https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy.

16 "Air Pollution," World Health Organization, accessed May 2023, https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab_1.

17 "Urban Development," The World Bank, last modified Apr 3, 2023, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview.

18 "Figures at a Glance, 103 million forcibly displaced people worldwide," UNHCR, accessed May 2023. https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance#:~:text=At%20least%20103%20million%20people,employment%20and%20freedom%20of%20movement.

19 "Adolescent and young adult health," World Health Organization, last modified April 28, 2023, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions.

20 "Abortion," World Health Organization, accessed May 2023. https://www.who.int/health-topics/abortion#tab=tab_1.

21 "Suicide," World Health Organization, last modified June 2021, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide.

22 "Looking Forward: An Overview of World Evangelization, 2005-2025," Lausanne Movement, last modified 2004, https://lausanne.org/content/looking-forward.

23 Gaspar Colón, "Incarnational Community-Based Ministry: A leadership Model for Community Transformation," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 6, no 2 (2012), 11-12. https://www.andrews.edu/services/jacl/article_archive/6_2_fall_2012/02-shortarticles/jacl_6-2_colon.pdf.

24 David Cooperrider, "What is Appreciative Inquiry?" 2012, accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.davidcooperrider.com/ai-process/.

25 "Story about life of Jesus emerges as largest crowdfunded entertainment project in history," Fox News, last modified January 2019, https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/story-about-the-life-of-jesus-largest-ever-crowdfunding-campaign-for-a-tv-show.

26 "Number of internet and social media users worldwide as of January 2023," Statista, accessed January 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/.

27 'Effective intergenerational cohesion enables leaders to understand, empower and lead people. There are more generations mixing in the workplace, in communities, families and households than ever before. Understanding their differences and nuances is key to creating cohesive communities.' "The Generations Defined," McCrindle Research, accessed May 13, 2023, https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/the-generations-defined/.

28 Malachi 4:5

Authors

Dr Cossi Augustin Ahoga born in Logozohê (Benin), is a theologian, economist, and anthropologist. He studied at the National University of Benin, Vaux-Sur-Seine in France, Gloucestershire in England, and SATS in South Africa. He worked in the GBU for 32 years and directed Presses Bibliques Africaines (PBA) for 12 years. Today, he is a Scholar-researcher and President of the Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire des Réalités Endogène (LIRE-Afrique). He was the editor of the first reference book published by PBA, "From the Temple to the City: When the African Church Thinks About Development," published in 2019.

Dr Judith Johnston is a Community Development Specialist, Curriculum Developer and Writer. She completed her doctorate in Transformational Leadership in 2014, specializing in City Transformation, and has since focused her attention on developing strategies for poverty alleviation and wealth creation in underserved communities. She is currently working on a collection of essays reflecting on society, government, and the human condition.

Matheus Ortega is a Brazilian writer and sustainable urban development professional. He holds a MSc in International Development from the London School of Economics and has worked with international bodies such as the UK Government, World Bank, UN and C40 Cities. In 2021 he launched his first book, "Kingdom Economy" in Portuguese, which addresses how Christianity responds to the issue of wealth, poverty and inequality in this world. Matheus is 35, married to Bruna, and the father of Levi (6) and João (2). His great longing is for an eternal city, whose architect is God.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?



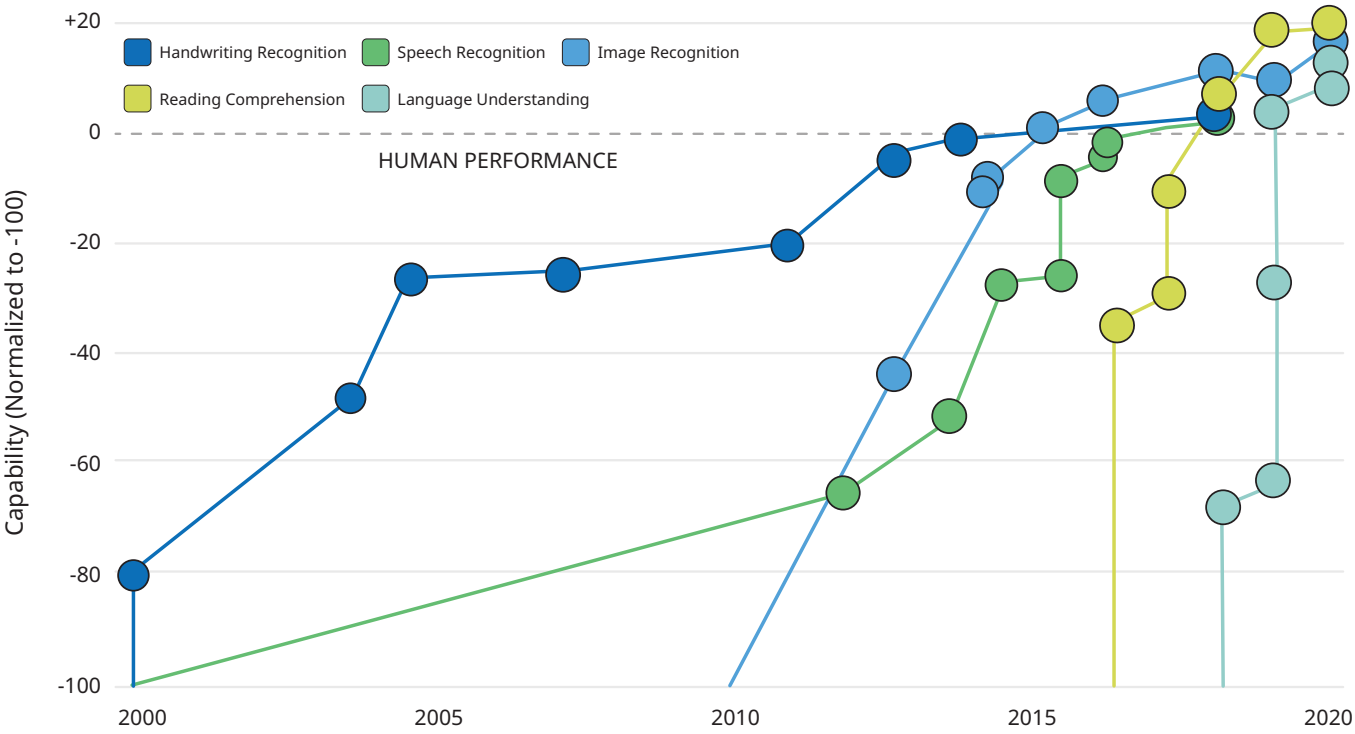
INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advancements and redefinition of human sexual identity are challenging previously held beliefs regarding human distinctiveness. These shifts are driving this generation's defining question, 'What does it mean to be human?'

The following section explores the context shifts in understanding humanness including artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and human sexuality.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A.I. VS HUMAN PERFORMANCE



Source: Our World in Data; Kiela et al, "Dyanbench: Rethinking Benchmarking in NLP, 2021

RISE OF AI

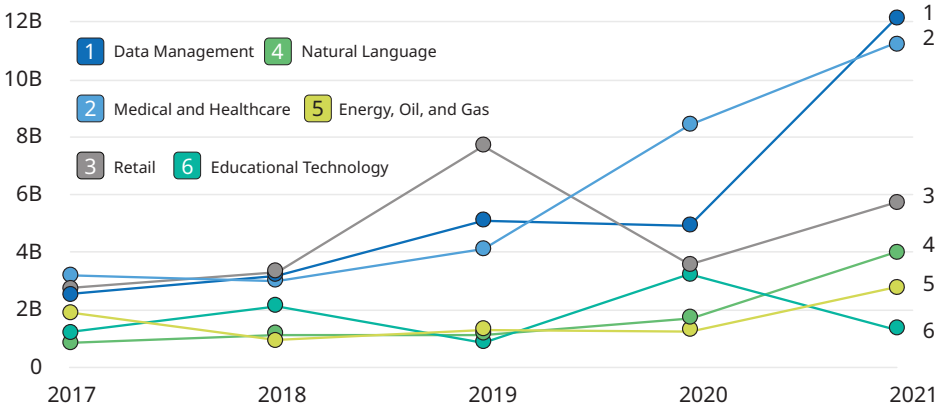
The development of Artificial Intelligence has advanced to the point where its capabilities now surpass human performance in many tasks. From communication recognition to reading comprehension and language understanding, AI is shaping the world.

AI capabilities now surpass human performance in many tasks.

The development of AI is funded across a wide variety of institutions and sectors. In its early development, academic teams lead the development, with industry driving development since around 2015.

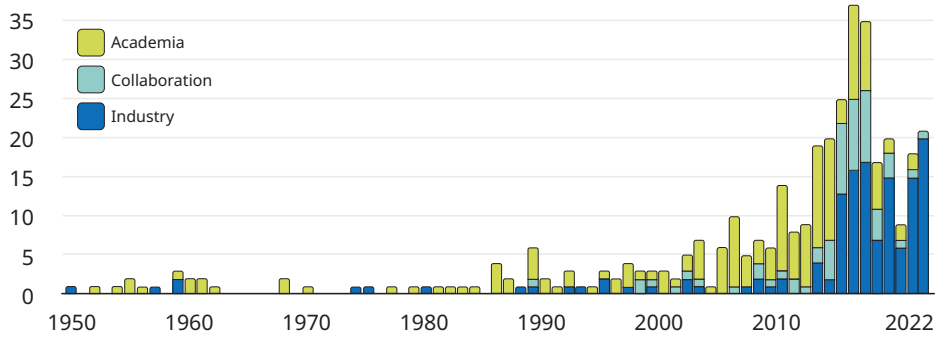
AI private investment aims to utilize AI in a variety of fields. Data management and healthcare receive the highest amount of global private investments.

ANNUAL GLOBAL PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN A.I.



Source: Our World in Data; NetBase Quid via AI Index Report, 2022; B = Billion

RESEARCH TEAMS BUILDING NOTABLE A.I. SYSTEMS

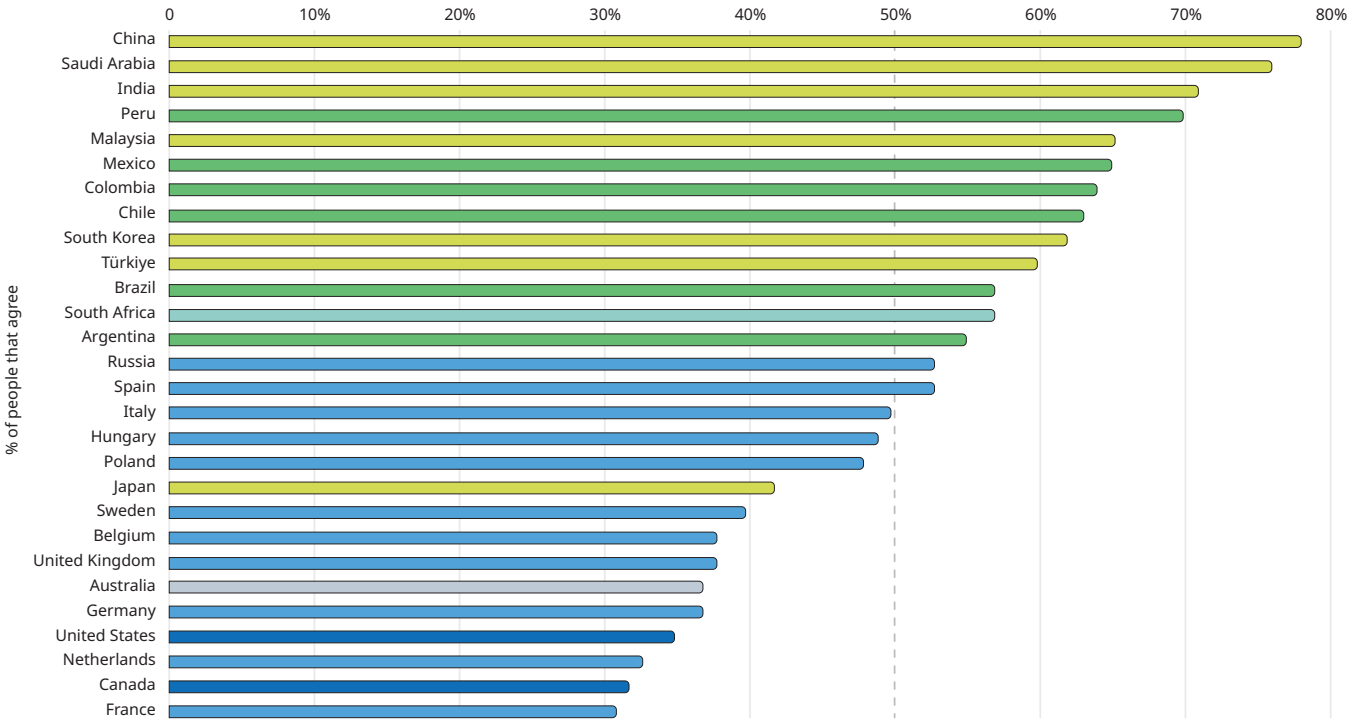


Source: Our World in Data; Sevilla et al 2023; B = Billion

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A.I. PERCEPTION

"Do products and services using AI have more benefits than drawbacks?"



Source: Ipsos, World Bank, 2022

A.I. EFFECT

"Products and services using artificial intelligence will profoundly change my daily life in the next 3-5 years."



Source: Ipsos, "Global Opinions and Expectations about AI," Jan 2022

AI HESITATION

The rise of AI is a present and growing phenomenon. As seen in the global search term trends, since 2021, the globe has been increasingly focused on AI, even over and above its digital interest in Christianity and Jesus.

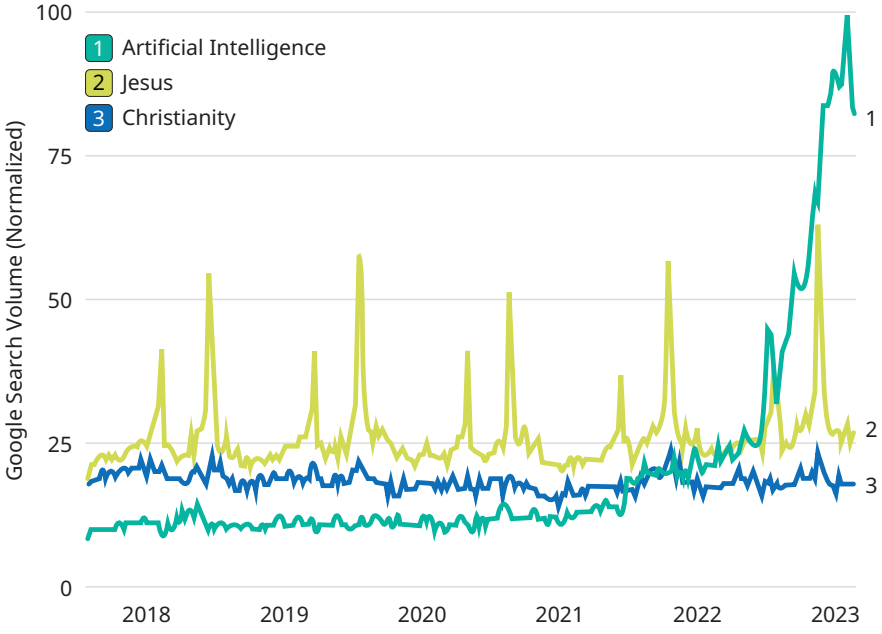
Additionally, most individuals believe that AI products and services will profoundly shape their daily lives soon.

Despite interest and recognition of its effects, there is a general global hesitation towards AI.

In only 15 countries, the majority believe there will be more benefits than drawbacks, with China, Saudi Arabia and India believing in its benefits.

In nearly every Global West country, less than half the population believes AI has more benefits than drawbacks.

GLOBAL INTERNET SEARCH TERMS



Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends)

BIO-TECHNOLOGY

EDITING CREATION

With the large amount of biological data available, biotech companies utilize AI, big data, and analysis to understand and engineer genomes for commercial purposes.

With the rapid reduction in genome sequencing costs, gene editing applications are becoming more prevalent and more widespread.

Gene sequencing and gene editing technologies can be applied to a variety of situations including human editing, animal manipulation, crop development, and pharmaceuticals.

Emerging biotech presents Christians with essential ethical questions and emerging challenges to God's sovereignty.

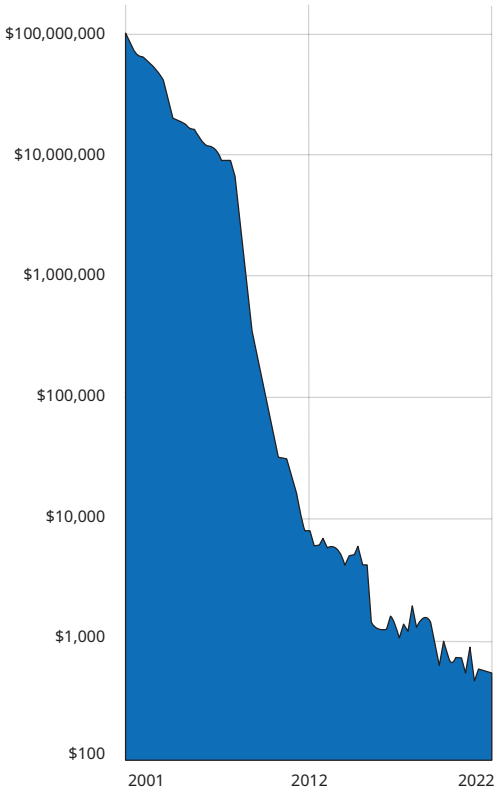
BIO-TECH TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS

% of 4300 BioTech start-up and emerging companies in 2023



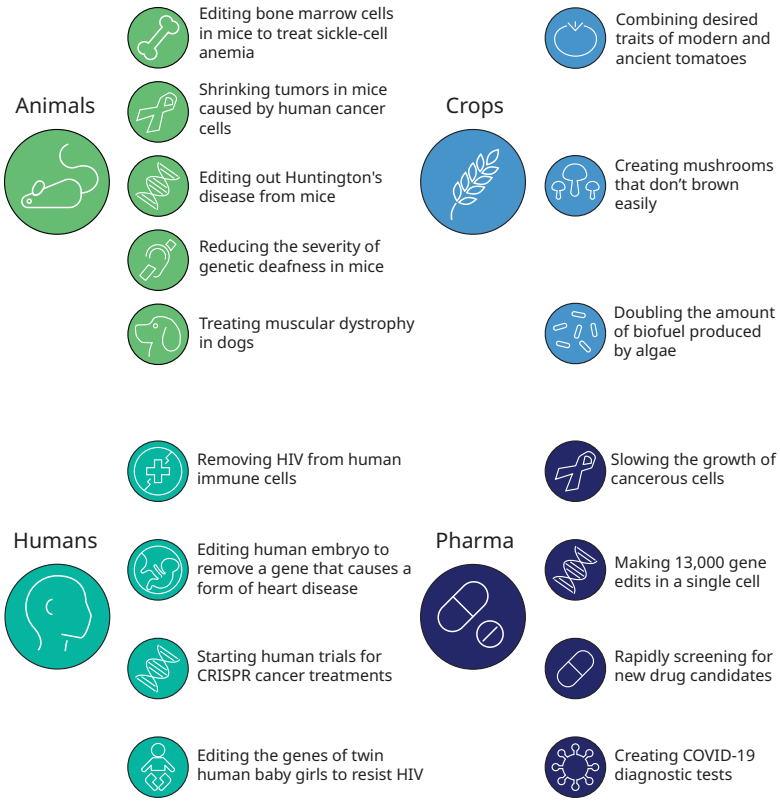
Source: StartUs Insights, Jan. 2023

COST OF GENOME SEQUENCING



Source: National Human Genome Research Institute, 2022

EXISTING GENE EDITING APPLICATIONS

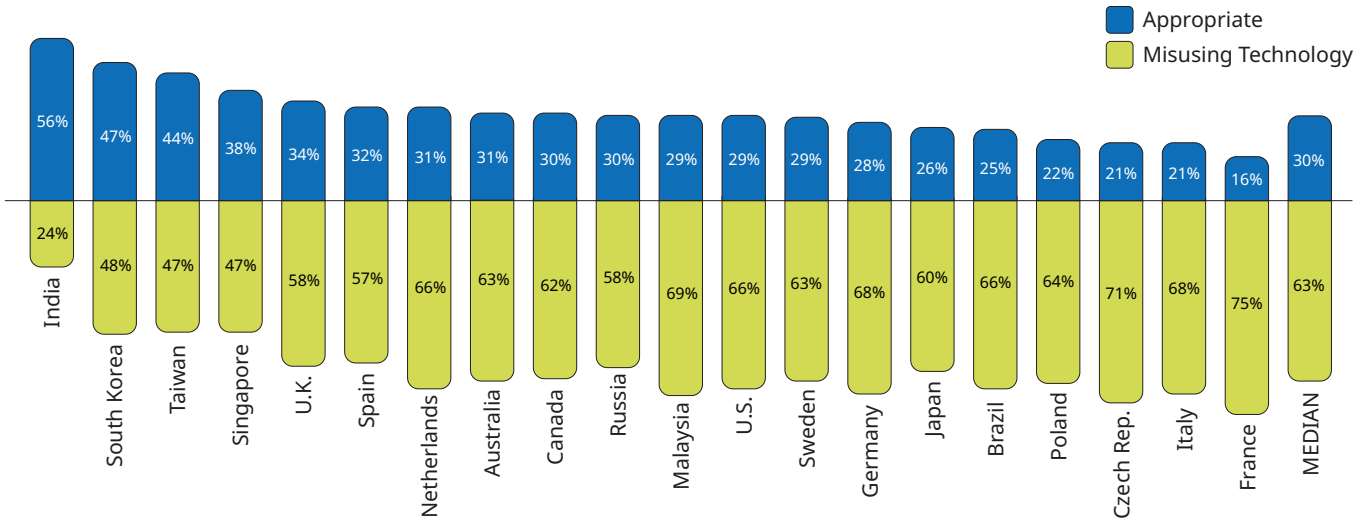


Source: Signals, pg. 124; Bergen 2017

BIO-TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH ON GENE EDITING

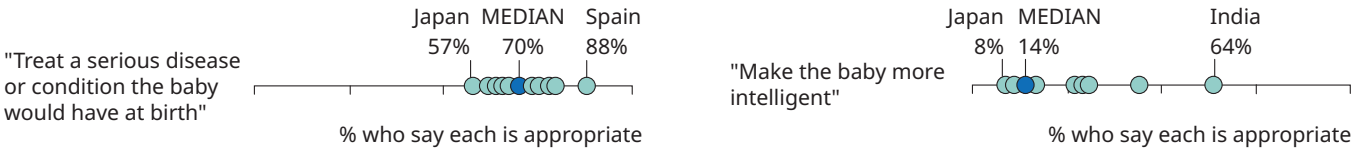
"Scientific research on gene editing is..."



Source: Pew Research Center; International Science Survey, 2019-2020

INFANT GENE EDITING

Changing a baby's genetic characteristics to...



Source: Pew Research Center; International Science Survey, 2019-2020

SCIENTIFIC LIMITS

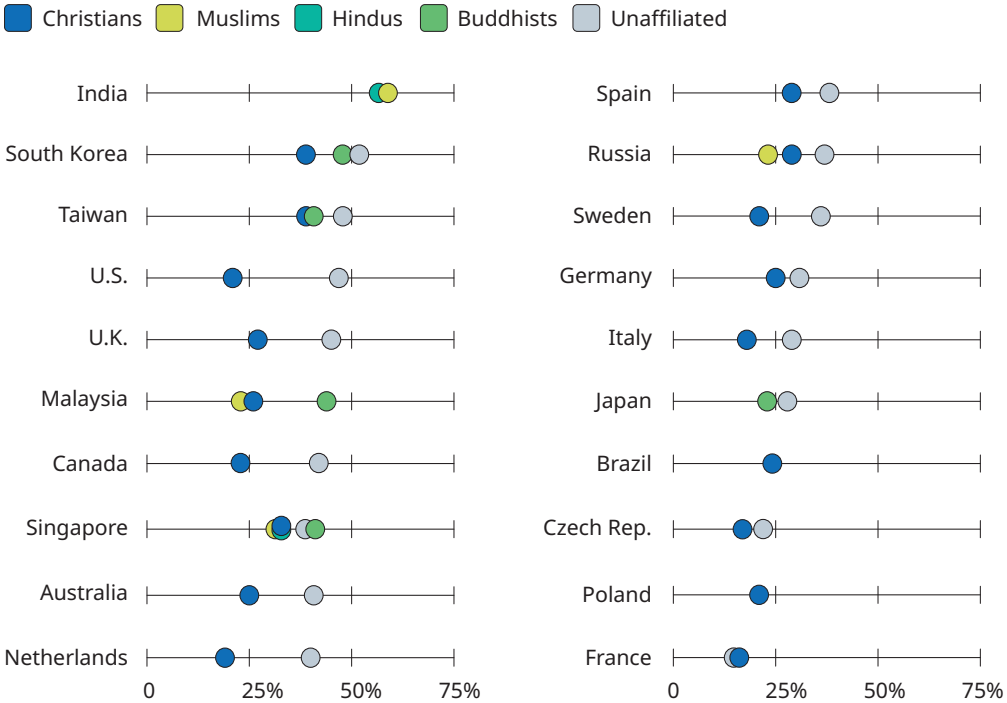
Research and application of gene editing is increasing, despite a general global hesitancy. However, this hesitancy changes when asked about specific applications. When applied to illness or sickness there is a much higher acceptance than when considering enhancing humans.

There is a general global hesitancy towards gene editing.

Generally Christians across the globe hold a more reserved position than the general population regarding the use of gene editing to change genetic characteristics.

RELIGION AND GENE EDITING

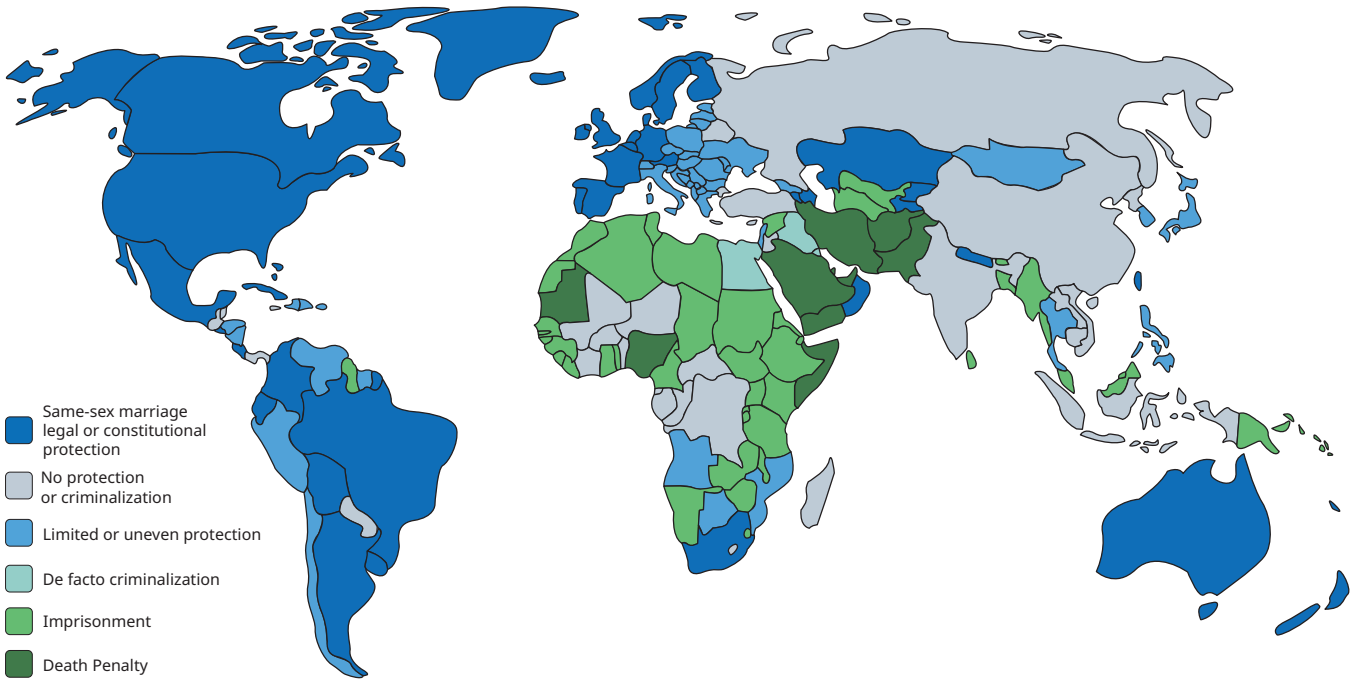
% who say research on gene editing to change genetic characteristics is appropriate



Source: Pew Research Center; International Science Survey, 2019-2020

SEXUALITY

LGBTQ CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS



Source: International LGBT Association; Code of Federal Regulations Research

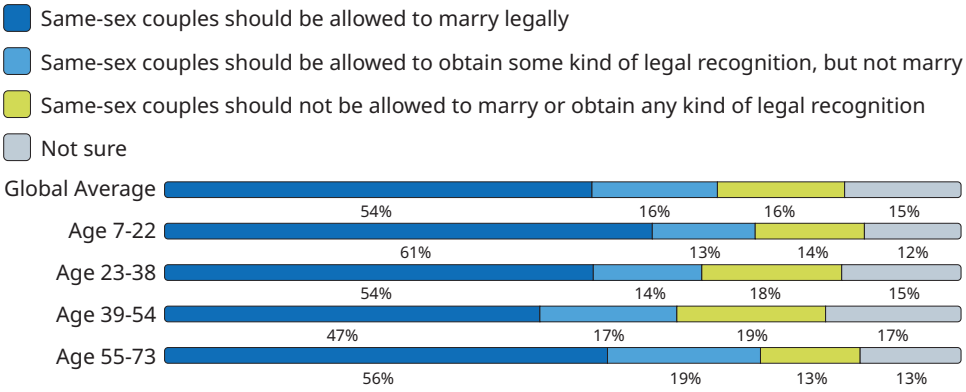
REGIONAL VARIANCE

Same-sex civil and political rights vary across the globe. The Global West primarily allows for full legal or constitutional protection of same-sex marriage. Generally speaking, Africa and Asia provide less legal or constitutional protections. On the far end of the spectrum, much of the Middle East and North Africa, in majority Islamic countries, criminalizes same-sex activities.

Same-sex marriage legal protection varies along regional lines.

Individual views on same-sex marriage correlate with official governmental positions. Global West countries such as Netherlands, Australia, and USA, have a 70% or higher approval rating for marriage or legal recognition. In contrast, countries like Malaysia have a 16 percent approval rating.

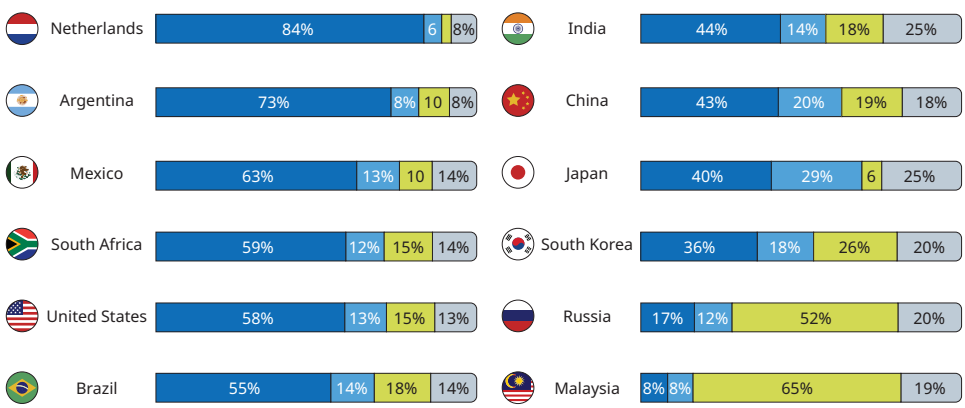
SAME-SEX MARRIAGE APPROVAL BY AGE



Source: Ipsos, "LGBT+ Pride 2021 Global Survey"

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE APPROVAL BY COUNTRY

Key same as above

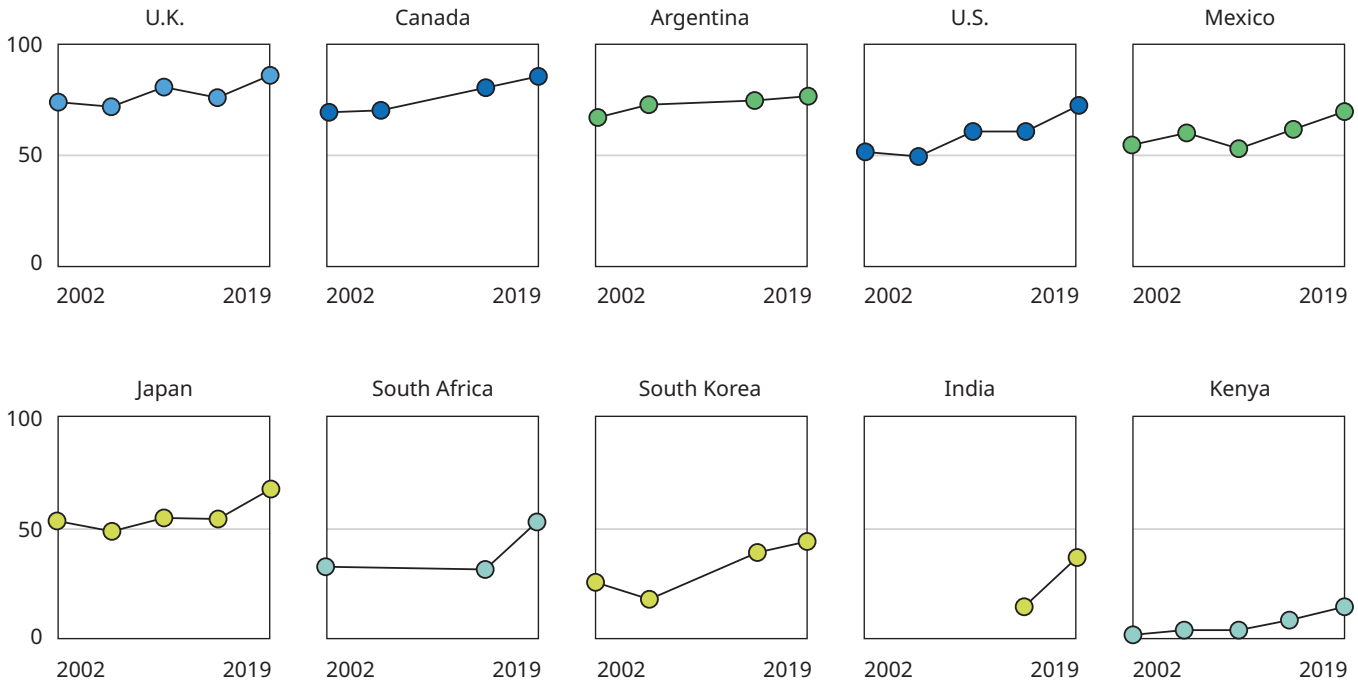


Source: Ipsos, "LGBT+ Pride 2021 Global Survey"

SEXUALITY

RISING LGBTQ ACCEPTANCE

% who say homosexuality should be accepted by society



Source: Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Survey," Spring 2019

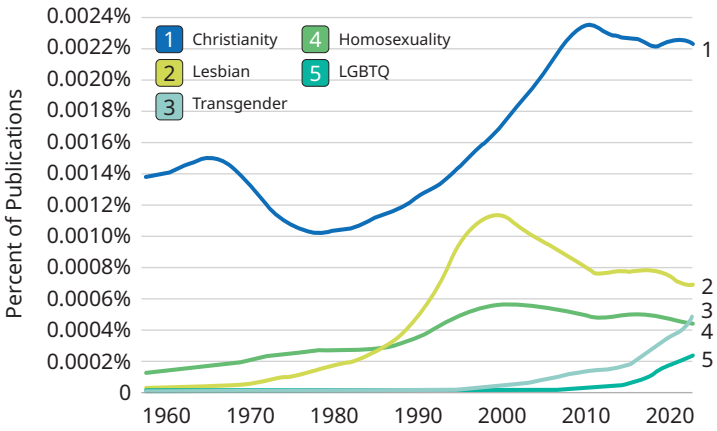
ACCEPTANCE

In the period from 2000-2020 global acceptance of LGBTQ has risen gradually, with regional variants in the level of acceptance. Parallel to this, the number of publications on LGBTQ issues has increased. Yet it should be noted that the volume of publications on LGBTQ is small compared to digital interest in sex / porn vs. Christianity.

GENERATIONS

Globally, youth are more willing to accept homosexuality as part of society than older generations. This difference is most striking with the 50+ generation. The largest generation gap occurs in East Asia with South Korea recording a 56-point difference, and Japan recording a 36-point difference between the youngest and oldest generations.

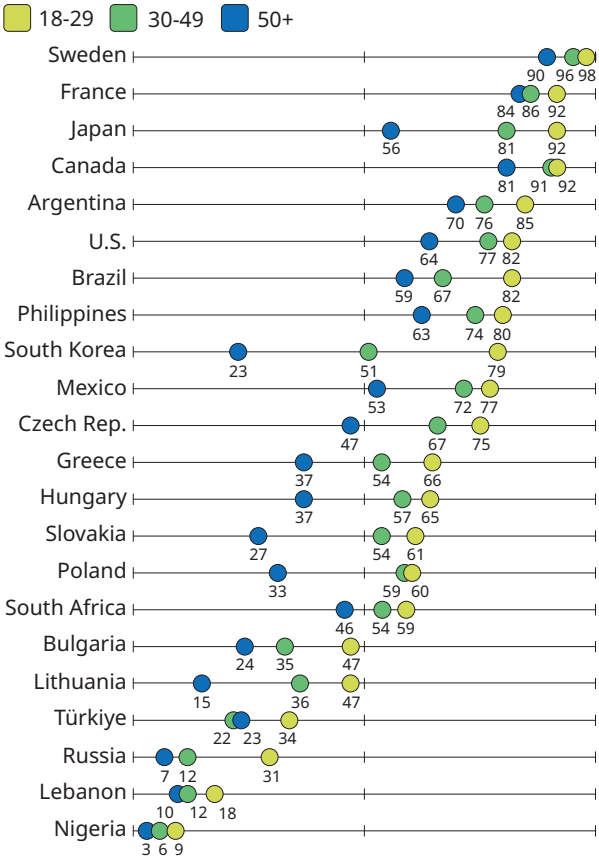
GLOBAL PUBLICATION VOLUME



Source: Google NGram (https://books.google.com/ngrams/), English Publications, Non-English publications have limited global statistical impact

ACCEPTANCE OF LGBTQ BY AGE

% who say homosexuality should be accepted by society

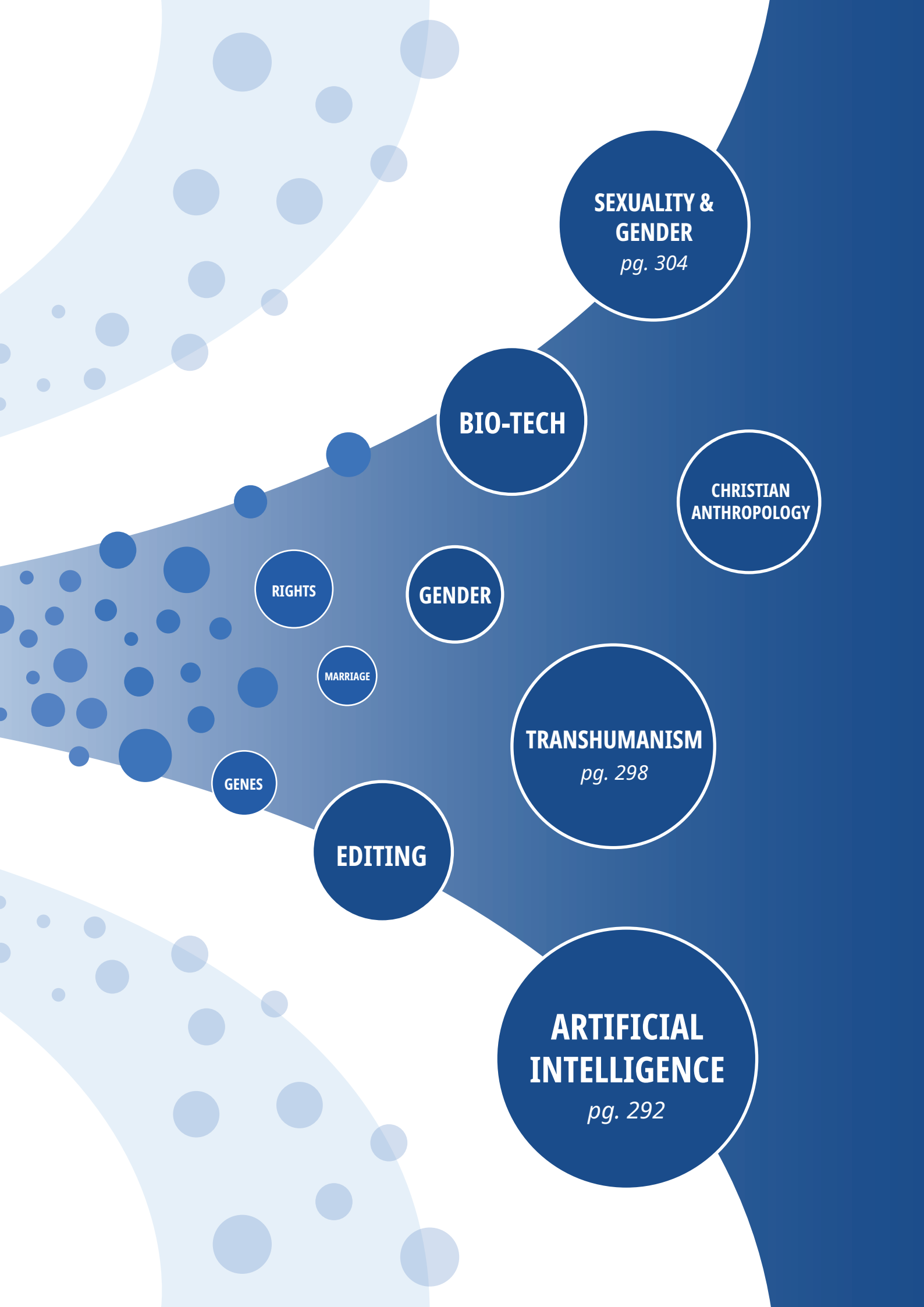


Source: Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Survey," 2019

UNDERSTANDING

HUMANNESS




SEXUALITY & GENDER
pg. 304
BIO-TECH
CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY
RIGHTS
GENDER
MARRIAGE
TRANSHUMANISM
pg. 298
GENES
EDITING
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
pg. 292

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Angela Kim, Sharoon Sarfraz, Jason Thacker, Dan Whitenack

Technologies utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) are changing how people connect with each other both in positive and in unsettling ways. Advances in AI capacity and applications raise new questions about control and power, privacy, bias and discrimination, economic well-being, and our conception of what it means to be human. While it is crucial that we think through the moral ramifications and utilize it responsibly, we believe that AI presents the church and Christian ministries with a special chance to advance and better our work. In this article we will lay out how we believe the use of AI technology can enhance our Great Commission efforts and discuss how we can embrace it responsibly.

Current State of AI

Over the past decade, AI technologies have made their way into nearly every industry, revolutionizing sectors ranging from manufacturing to video production. While the widespread adoption of AI has been an ongoing trend, the public release of OpenAI's ChatGPT marked a significant turning point in the public's realization that AI will inevitably permeate every facet of our lives in the near future.

Christians worldwide have also recognized the immense potential of AI in advancing the spread of the gospel and have employed AI tools in many innovative ways:

- One example of this is the enhancement of discipleship and training through the development of learner profiles. Teaching is at the core of discipleship, and learners are at the core of teaching. By deepening our understanding of learners and assisting us in the customization of learning material, AI systems can be a powerful tool. GoTandem and efforts by Christian Vision offer examples of how this technology is already in use.
- AI's predictive capabilities can also assist us in digital evangelism by producing suggestions on when, what, and how to offer feedback based on a deeper understanding of the learner. For instance, an AI-driven chatbot can respond to inquiries about religion, cite biblical passages, and even have religious discussions.
- In the area of Bible study, AI may be able to examine the text of the Bible, find key themes and patterns, and offer interpretation suggestions for certain passages.[1] AI can also be used to create tools that provide further context or resources for a particular passage, assisting readers in understanding the Bible.
- The use of AI tools to improve and accelerate Bible translation—in written, audio, and visual formats—is also exciting to see.

Interestingly, the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic compelled many churches and Christian educational institutions to invest in their capacity for online worship, fellowship, training, and instruction. Many church leaders and members around the world are now considerably more receptive to the adoption of new technologies as a result. Virtual reality (VR) church in the metaverse is one example of this kind of change – although it has not been widely adopted at the time of writing.

Addressing Common Concerns

It is understandable that many Christians have reservations about integrating AI technologies into the life of the church. Some of these concerns stem from common misconceptions about the nature of AI, and others are grounded in important ethical and theological matters. In either case, these concerns must be addressed if we are to make the best use of our resources for Great Commission purposes.

One common objection argues that because AI tools are created by humans and mimic human intelligence, the employment of such tools violates Christian ethics. This concern will be addressed in greater detail later

in this report, but briefly put, it is important to remember that in creating and utilizing AI technology, we are developing tools, not 'beings'. Though these tools may imitate certain human-like capacities or abilities, AI tools are not human, and we do not have the capacity to make them human. As impressive as AI tools may be, they can only mimic how human beings complete tasks, and however advanced their capacity to analyse data may be, they necessarily cannot think and learn the way humans do.

Also, contrary to popular and exaggerated beliefs, the primary challenge lies not in an AI system becoming sentient or triggering a mass extinction event through autonomous and uncontrolled agents. We can find solace in the fact that God is not caught off guard by AI. He has already knows all possible outcomes within his infinite wisdom. Thus, AI does not pose an existential threat to humanity, but we must be aware of the concerning ways it is shaping our understandings of God, ourselves, and the world around us.

> ***"AI does not pose an existential threat to humanity, but we must be aware of the concerning ways it is shaping our understandings of God, ourselves, and the world around us."***

Concerns about data and privacy protection, meaningful consent, abuse prevention, and the nature of humans and human interaction are on the minds of many, and rightfully so. There is indeed serious potential for AI tools to be used for harm, therefore careful stewardship of AI tools cannot be neglected. It will be important for researchers and policymakers to ensure that AI tools are developed and used in a responsible and ethical manner. But as with new technologies that have come before it, the best path before us is to seek to master it and glean its benefits while working wisely and vigilantly to mitigate its potential negative effects. Before us is an incredible opportunity for Christians in the AI industry to collaborate and promote the importance of ethical and responsible use of these tools, as well as to democratise the technology so that AI tools can be delivered in a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive manner.

Future State of AI

By 2050, it is predicted that AI will become ubiquitous and integrated into every aspect of our lives, from health service and food industry to transportation and edutainment (education + entertainment)—indeed it already has a strong presence in these and many other fields. AI tools could be used to automate a vast array of tasks, allowing people to focus on more creative and strategic work.

We will see significant advancements in AI applications that are capable of exhibiting more human-like behaviour, such as analysis of context and mimicking of empathy and creativity. This could lead to new levels of interaction and collaboration between humans and machines.

AI technology will increasingly be integrated into robotics, leading to the development of more advanced robots that can perform complex tasks and interact with humans in more sophisticated ways not only in science and industry, but also in domestic tasks. This could have significant implications for industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation which need to reskill and upskill their workforce to meet new demands.

By 2050, the new tools and techniques for creative expression provided by AI will deliver significant achievements in art, music, and design. We have already seen how content created with AI tools in music, video, painting, etc. are indistinguishable from human-created works. This, of course, triggers concerns around intellectual property, highlighting the need for close collaboration between technologists, ethicists, and legal professionals.

Overall, the state of AI in 2050 is likely to be characterized by rapid advancements in technology, along with a growing awareness of the ethical and societal implications of AI technology. It will be important for Christian researchers, policymakers, and the public to work together to ensure that AI is developed and used in a way that is centered on human dignity.

Culture, Humanness, and the Plausibility of the Gospel

Technology often raises more questions than it answers. While today's questions may seem novel due to the fast-paced nature of technological advance, the core of these questions is ageless. Artificial intelligence and the popular intrigue surrounding the application of these tools raise a central question: What does it mean to be human? This is a question that the church must be ready to address with truth, clarity, and grace as we seek to navigate culture and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. As AI tools assume many roles and tasks previously only accomplished by humans, this question becomes even more pointed.

This recurring question of what it means to be human becomes even more important in our age of emerging technologies. In Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles, a group of over 70 evangelical leaders from North America affirmed the unique nature of humanity and denied 'that any part of creation, including any form of technology, should ever be used to usurp or subvert the dominion and stewardship which has been entrusted solely to humanity by God; nor should technology be assigned a level of human identity, worth, dignity, or moral agency'.[2] This understanding of the exceptional nature of humanity is rooted in the Christian understanding of the unique status God bestowed when he created humanity according to the imago Dei (Gen 1:26-28).

Historically, the church has argued for three primary definitions of the imago Dei which have centred on our human ability to think, to create, and to perform certain complex tasks. While it is true that humanity does seem to model certain features such as high levels of reason/rationality (substantive view), gregariousness (relational view), and representational ability/responsibility (functional view), we must ask if these attributes or capacities ontologically ground human identity. Or rather, do they better model a fundamental status that human beings have rooted in how God set us apart from the rest of creation as those made in his image. Theologians and philosophers throughout church history have held various combinations of these views as they sought to meet the social and ethical challenges of their day.

German Catholic philosopher Robert Spaemann writes that 'human beings have certain definite properties that license us to call them 'persons'; but it is not the properties we call persons, but the human beings who possess the properties'.[3] In other words, a person is someone vs. something. Regardless of one's capacities or attributes, they are a person by simply being a member of the human species. He writes that 'there can, and must, be one criterion for personality, and one only; that is biological membership of the human race'.[4] This framing of the unique nature of humanity can aid the church as we consider how to navigate the opportunities and challenges ahead, grounded in the love of God and love of neighbour (Matt 22:37-39).

> ***"Regardless of one's capacities or attributes, they are a person by simply being a member of the human species."***

While human beings are a specific kind of creature who often exhibit certain shared characteristics and attributes in varying degrees, human dignity must not be seen as solely based on the presence of those particular attributes or capacities. The absence of these traits, whether due to individual differences or the pernicious effects of sin, does not lead to the loss of dignity or personhood. The unique status of the imago Dei is inalterable and unchanging; it is bestowed upon us uniquely by our creator and applies to all members of the human species across time and culture.

How we define what it means to be human has vast implications for all of life. This includes how we think about emerging technologies that are beginning to mimic the very attributes that we have long thought were exclusively human. The Christian ethic reminds us that even in an age of emerging technologies like AI, the value and dignity of humans isn't rooted in what we do but in who we are

as unique image bearers of our creator, endowed with the capacity for personal communion with the tri-personal God. God made us in his very image and nothing—not even the most advanced AI systems of the future—will be able to alter that ontological status. This truth must be central to the ongoing debates over the development and use of AI today, especially in the church as she seeks to fulfill the Great Commission in response to the Great Commandment.

AI and the Great Commission—Opportunities and Challenges

A proper theology of humanity also informs how the church ought to think about the role of AI in the Great Commission. The proclamation of the gospel is not simply about information transfer but is rather a whole person transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. As noted earlier, Christians throughout the world have long embraced various technological advances to aid in spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Today, many are seeking to harness the immense power of AI tools in the furtherance of the gospel message to all people, tribes, and nations.

As the church seeks to harness these tools, two truths must remain central and drive our use of AI today as well as into the future. First, these tools—as with all technology—can and will be used by God to aid the church in proclaiming the truth to a watching world. Christians across disciplines can and should harness these tools to help spread the gospel message to unreached or under-reached people groups and to disciple the next generation in the ways of the Lord. But this push to employ these tools must be guided by the unique nature of humanity and the recognition that machines are fundamentally different from humans. Wisdom would call us to slow down in an age of efficiency and convenience to examine how these technologies shape us as human beings, including how we understand God, ourselves, and the world around us. Technology, including AI, is not a neutral tool that we can simply use for good or evil. It has the power to define—often without our recognition—the way we perceive the world around us and our role in it.

Second, at its core, the Christian witness and gospel cannot be simply reduced to information transfer or acquiring more knowledge. Christian mission has never simply been about downloading information or mentally assenting to certain facts. Its concern is with the personal and relational aspects of being human. It has always been (and will always be) about a personal encounter with the living God, which is mediated through personal interaction with other image bearers and the local expression of the body of Christ in the church.

"Wisdom would call us to slow down in an age of efficiency and convenience to examine how these technologies shape us as human beings, including how we understand God, ourselves, and the world around us."

This sacred mission cannot simply be automated or reduced to an output by a machine, even if machines may assist us in sharing the gospel message in hard-to-reach places. The missiological potential of AI and other emerging technological tools is immense, but using these tools as substitutes for human connectivity and the embodied nature of Christian mission can lead to dangerous outcomes. Thus, while an AI-powered tool may be able to present the facts of the gospel or perform complex human-like tasks, it cannot truly witness or even preach, as it isn't able to experience true grace or the redemption of sin which is at the core of the gospel message, nor can it commune with the triune God.

Aligning Our Expectations

Navigating the realm of AI in a missional and church context presents us with genuine challenges that must be acknowledged. One such challenge revolves around managing our expectations. It is important to recognize that AI tools, while incredibly powerful, cannot resolve all our missional and church-related issues. However, it would be equally incorrect

to dismiss the potential of AI tools altogether. Embracing this nuanced perspective is akin to our approach to other technologies.

Furthermore, it is essential to grasp the inherent limitations of AI systems themselves. As previously mentioned, AI systems lack the ability to possess a mind or a soul. They are composed of lines of code, executed on computers, and programmed by humans. Consequently, these lines of code are incapable of truly 'understanding' human intent. While AI tools such as ChatGPT may generate seemingly coherent outputs, it is vital to recognize that these outputs are the result of patterns processed by the tools based on mathematical probabilities. They lack awareness of reality, factuality, empathy, and other fundamental aspects of human consciousness. Developing a better understanding of these limitations empowers Christians to approach AI-driven systems with cautious optimism, fully appreciating their potential while remaining vigilant against inevitable system failures.

Stewarding Our Opportunities

By comprehending these challenges and embracing a realistic outlook, Christians can effectively navigate the complexities of AI in a missional and church context. With this approach, we can leverage AI to its fullest extent while ensuring that our missional endeavours remain grounded in the wisdom, discernment, and compassion of human involvement.

Approaching the missional use of AI tools with an open and proactive mindset opens up a world of exciting opportunities. These tools have the potential to revolutionize the way we engage with people, present the gospel, identify seekers, and distribute personalized Christian content. Imagine being able to search through vast databases of commentaries, study guides, and sermons in real time, all within a chat interface or through voice interactions. Furthermore, we can leverage AI technology to rapidly translate content and synthesize it into various formats, such as voice or video, for targeted distribution through AI-driven advertising. These methodologies have already transformed our ability to connect with those in search of answers by providing the right content, at the right time, and in the right format.

As we responsibly utilize this technology in a God-honouring manner, we also have a remarkable opportunity to shape the development of AI. Rather than merely riding the wave or struggling to catch up with the advancements, we can actively engage with the moral, ethical, and value-related questions that AI raises. Tech companies and governments are forming committees to address these issues, and they are actively seeking input. It is our chance to encourage and support individuals within our congregations and organizations to step forward and provide leadership in these discussions. We should rally behind our young generation's interest in technology and coding, nurturing them to become world-class technologists who integrate their Christian faith into their work.

Imagine vibrant gatherings of believers where people from every tribe and tongue come together to worship, hearing content automatically translated into their own language. Imagine praying as one unified voice and witnessing the preaching of God's Word in signed languages, ensuring that no one is left out. Furthermore, imagine people scattering to the farthest corners of the earth, swiftly finding and connecting with those in search of answers, creating diverse and multi-modal content that reaches the right people at the right time, and boldly proclaiming the name of Jesus where it has never been heard before. Let us fervently pray that this generation of Christians will critically embrace this technology in a Spirit-led manner, allowing God's kingdom to manifest in new and powerful ways here on earth as it is in heaven.

Endnotes

1 It should be noted that these interpretive suggestions will inevitably be influenced by particular values and hermeneutical understandings, which should remind Christians of the great need to cultivate wisdom and discernment when utilizing these tools in these ways.

2 "Artificial Intelligence: An Evangelical Statement of Principles," April 11, 2019. https://erlc.com/resource-library/statements/artificial-intelligence-an-evangelical-statement-of-principles.

3 Robert Spaemann, Persons: The Difference Between "Someone" and "Something," trans. Oliver O'Donovan, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 236. (emphasis added)

4 Spaemann, 247.

Authors

Angela Kim is an AI Professional specialised in Ethics, Bias, Explainable & Responsible AI. Angela is the global Chief Education Officer for Women and sits on the Founding Editorial Board of Springer's new AI and Ethics Journal. Angela is a founder of est.ai and the first project is building a product to detect bullying, drug usage, suicidal and mental health wellbeing in social media.

Sharoon Sarfraz is an entrepreneur and CEO of an IT company "Glee Technology". He has 15 years of experience in the IT sector and has worked for IBM and other Leading Cooperate titans. Sharoon has a desire to serve the Lord at work by offering IT solutions for the gospel's global effect. Sharoon serves on the World Evangelical Alliance IT Commission, and as a member of the Lausanne Movement technology advisory group. Sharoon earned both an IT MBA and a bachelor's degree. He likes to speak and share about the new innovations and trends of AI.

Jason Thacker is assistant professor of philosophy and ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Boyce College. He also serves as a research fellow in Christian ethics and director of the research institute at The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. He is the author or editor of several volumes, including The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity, Following Jesus in a Digital Age, and The Digital Public Square: Christian Ethics in a Technological Society.

Dan Whitenack is a Ph.D. trained data scientist working with SIL International on NLP and speech technology for local languages in emerging markets. He has more than ten years of experience developing and deploying machine learning models at scale. Daniel co-hosts the Practical AI podcast, has spoken at conferences around the world including Applied Machine Learning Days, O'Reilly AI, QCon AI, GopherCon, KubeCon, and more.

TRANSHUMANISM

Latha Christie, Stefan Lindholm, Garrett Starr

Understanding Transhumanism

Transhumanism has been defined as:

- The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.
- The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies.[1]

As with all ideologies, transhumanism did not originate of its own accord, but rather owes its foundation to a specific set of philosophical antecedents. Transhumanist philosophy is grounded in Aristotelean metaphysics ('the philosophical study of the nature of being or reality'[2]) and Enlightenment humanism (in which there is a strong emphasis on the priority of the importance of human beings and the future improvement of the human animal). In addition, transhumanism is also rooted in Darwinian naturalism (human beings are a recent evolutionary development and we should control and accelerate our own evolution[3]), the Nietzschean concept of the Übermensch (the idea of the self-created self in transhumanist thought cannot be overstated[4]), and Marxist ideology ('[T]he importance of material conditions and particularly, technological advancement, for revolution; conceptions of human nature; and conceptions of nature in general.'[5]).

In terms of ideological priorities, transhumanism rejects the validity of traditional monotheistic and polytheistic religions and denies the very existence of God. While some proponents of transhumanism seek to merge faith with transhumanist philosophy, the vast preponderance of its adherents are avowed agnostics or atheists.[6] Therefore, transhumanists also reject the possibility of any transcendent eternal truth, and dismiss metanarratives, like the Bible, that lay claim to absolute truth. Transhumanism also opposes the centrality of traditional family values. This worldview supports the ideology of transsexualism and the practice of gender reassignment as viable means of changing human physical expressions because these are viewed as aspects of controlling human evolutionary progress. Indeed, in praxis, transhumanism is focused on controlling and accelerating humanity's evolutionary progress through the application of advanced technologies and medical innovation to human biology.

> ***"(...) transhumanism rejects the validity of traditional monotheistic and polytheistic religions and denies the very existence of God."***

To accomplish this lofty goal of making human beings into something that we are not, transhumanists advocate the use of present and future technologies like genetic engineering, molecular nanotechnology, super computers, prosthetics, biotechnology, cryonics, mind uploading, cloning, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence (AI) to extend human life spans, increase human cognitive and physical abilities, eliminate diseases and suffering, and ameliorate social and economic inequalities. Transhumanists work to realize these posthuman goals by influencing cultural, social, and economic institutions. Ultimately, transhumanists hope to facilitate a human-machine synergy that will result in a technology-enabled cyber immortality in which the perceived limitations of present human phenomenology will give way to a posthuman utopia — a fu-

ture in which human beings will exist, not in physical bodies, but rather in a disembodied state of digital perfection.

If this all sounds strikingly similar to most of the science fiction movies that you have seen, then you are beginning to understand the perspective of the transhumanist worldview. While some of transhumanism's goals are shared by those outside of the philosophy, like curing disease, eliminating human suffering, fostering economic growth, and the overall contributing to human flourishing, the tenets which underlie this worldview and the methods by which transhumanists goals will be accomplished, not to mention the goals themselves, are untenable positions for Christians. Therefore, since transhumanism is an anthropocentric worldview, with humanity as the center and measure of all things — so as to contradict the biblical doctrines of man, sin, the incarnation, salvation, the meaning of the atonement, and forgiveness among others — transhumanism is emerging as a 21st century challenge to the missional presentation of the biblical gospel. In the stark light of day, the beliefs, practices, and goals of transhumanism seek to undo human beings as the image Dei, the unique creation of God who bear His image, and redefine us into a flesh-machine hybrid that will continue to evolve until we no longer resemble who we currently are. Whether the goals of transhumanism are even achievable is not the primary issue for the church. Rather, the challenge lies in recognizing the pervasive influence of transhumanist philosophy and how it will affect the world, the church, and the Great Commission for the next quarter century.

Effects of Transhumanism

The world

Transhumanism is not merely a future state that is hoped for but a set of themes that are now part of the mainstream culture. Hava Thiros Samuelsson aptly notes that:

> '[. . .] today transhumanism is not a mere speculation on the fringe of mainstream culture, but a presence that shapes contemporary culture as transhumanist themes, vocabulary, values, and style frame contemporary film, science fiction, horror genre, video games, performance art, new media art, literature, and cyberpunk. Today all aspects of being human –embodiment, sexuality, subjectivity, emotionality, and sociality – have been thoroughly transformed by the hybridization of the organic and the mechanical, artificial intelligence, new digital and virtualizing media, cyberspace, online gaming, digital collectivities, networked information, and new media arts. If we want to make sense of our contemporary culture, we cannot ignore the transhumanist themes that pervade it.'[7]

Due to the pervasiveness of cultural phenomena that seek to mesh the organic with the artificial, there is a certain plausibility structure that raises the general acceptance level of transhumanism ideas and technologies in the full sense.

> ***"Ultimately, transhumanist hope is to facilitate a human-machine synergy that will result in a technology-enabled cyber immortality (...)"***

In the transhumanist literature there are various ways of describing as well as evaluating transhumanism's effect in the world. Transhumanists like Max More believe that 'transhumanism (like humanism) can act as a philosophy of life that fulfills some of the same functions as a religion without any appeal to a higher power, a supernatural entity, to faith, and without the other core features of religions.'[8] In More's "A Letter to Mother Nature," he gives a list of seven amendments to the human condition: 'We will no longer tolerate the tyranny of aging and death.[9] Through genetic alterations, cellular manipulations, synthetic organs, and *any necessary means*, we will endow ourselves with enduring vitality and remove our expiration date. We will each decide for ourselves how long we shall live.'

However, there are several critical voices in the debate as well. One common objection here is that a transhumanist world runs the risk of becoming ethically and politically divided because there is commercial as well as personal interests that will decide who will get access to enhancement technologies. Another concern is that if technology can replicate and improve itself, there may not be a place for any humans (trans- or post) at all. Moreover, there is the problem of identity. What kind of status (moral and spiritual) will the emergence of transhuman people have? Will the emergence of transhuman people involve the destruction of biologically based humanity?

The church

The attempt of transhumanism to enhance what it means to be human and overcome natural limitations is often described in secular discourses, as 'playing God.' Playing God means by wielding the power of technology, human beings overreach themselves and transgress divinely imposed limits influencing human evolution. Ferkiss asks, 'What if the new man combines the animal irrationality of primitive man with the calculated greed and power, lust of industrial man, while possessing the virtually Godlike powers granted him by technology?'[10] The ascription of divine attributes is obviously metaphorical, but this practice is a slippery slope. Due to our cultural milieu, mentioned above, the step to replacing powerful machines with God is not far away. Quite straightforwardly, due to the impressiveness of machines and power, humanity runs — and also the church in extension — the risk of technological idolatry.

While some Christian theologians have raised warnings about transhumanist technology, others have promoted the use of it with a sense of urgency. While Ted Peter argues that since the ethics of transhumanism is based on the 'survival of the fittest' and an altruistic and benevolent hope for a better, more-than-humane future, they are unable to notice the difference between technological and eschatological immortality.[11] Philip Hefner says that humanity as a 'created co-creator' is capable of transgressing its biological limitations and become a hybrid.[12] Having coined the concept of 'created co-creator,' Hefner seeks to outline what it means to be created in the image of God and also exercise a significant degree of freedom in relation to God, such that our activities contribute to the unfolding of the cosmos. Garner argues that Christians are 'citizens of Heaven', though they live on a different, earthly plain of existence, and there then exists a well-grounded tradition for hybridity and cyborgs in Christian theology.[13]

That is why it is important to build a robust theological position with gospel-centeredness and honest recognition of human sinfulness. In this respect, transhumanism stands opposite to the Christian conviction that humans are under divine judgment. The attempt to play God can be interested as a sinful pride and the virtue of humility is dismantled by the pursuit of transhumanism. Since Cybernetic immortality is the goal of transhumanism leading to the final evolution of humans, transhumanism posits a distinctively secular eschatology. It aims to achieve this goal through human efforts alone rather than with divine intervention, which is opposed to the Christian eschatology. A Christian response to these matters within the public sphere is necessary, especially a response to those in the scientific community who do not want ethics to get in the way of their research.

The Great Commission

The soteriological message of transhumanism is that we need to be saved from our limited and fragile biological prisons. Hence, the transhumanist strategy is to develop such technologies that allow us to remedy the immediate problems. However, Christianity offers a better future with the eternal goal that those who are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will receive immortal bodies. Paul expresses this transformation in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 'When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."' The book of Genesis is foundational in developing a Christian understanding of technology. Creation of space, time, and matter with physical laws, including man, made in the image and likeness of God, and given

dominion over creation and sin, and its consequences, and the redemption through Christ. All these items have connections to the development and use of technology, how we have to use technologies to mitigate suffering but not to exalt human beings in opposition to God.

Opportunities and Challenges for Great Commission Efforts

Since transhumanism is both terrifying and fascinating to people, it evokes big questions. What is a human being? What is a good life? What is the meaning of life? Due to a world now steeped in transhumanist themes, there has probably never before in history been a time when anyone can bring up such questions virtually with anyone else without having to care too much about their cultural differences and educational backgrounds. Just think of some of the standard transhumanist themes such as anti-aging or mind-uploading. Although a person who is not trained in transhumanist thinking initially may be dismissive or reserved about transhumanist hyperbole on such issues, the underlying questions provokes an existential response: 'Would it not be great if we can cure all deceases?' and 'Don't you want to live forever?'

Transhumanist themes provide us with a context which no other period of human history has exemplified. Humans today, though the internet as well as our globalist culture and politics, are more interconnected than ever before. Previous cultural contexts have not brought us together humanity in the way technology has. But this also means that that technology (or 'technique' as Jacques Ellul said)[14] is not to be viewed as a mere instrument which can be used for good or for bad. Technology is the total environment in which we live, move and have our being.

The church is called to respond apologetically to the transhumanist vision and a part of that calling is also to build bridges so that the gospel may be heard and understood in our techno-cultural context. The task of bridge-building, we suggest, is essentially a task of discernment (Rom 12:1–2). We shall end this paper by indicating four brief points relevant for evangelization.

How not to respond.

There are two common, but ineffective, responses to the transhumanist challenges. The first is to dismiss transhumanism as something of relative or no importance. The second is to get all too worked up about it, perhaps by (simplistically) identifying it with eschatological nightmares. Transhumanism does present a challenge to Christian faith and, as with every other new ideology, the church has to take its time to prayerfully work it through. In other words, Transhumanism is here to stay as a cultural phenomenon and, therefore, attitudes of avoidance and fear are not helpful. Churches and leaders need to walk the thin line between these extremes.

Shared concerns, different solutions.

As we have seen, Transhumanism and Christianity share some ultimate concerns, such as the problem of death and suffering (of all kinds) and our longing to overcome these. These shared concerns, although radically different from those of Christian faith, are excellent starting points for dialogue as they seem to strike a deep chord in the human heart. Outspoken transhumanists are often prone to talk about these deeper questions. The culture shaped by transhumanist ideals is also predisposed to deeper engagement with the big questions of life.[15] Instead of dismissing transhumanist hyperbole, a Christian response should address the underlying real concerns.

The blindness of the church.

Communicating the gospel in our cultural milieu will be fraught with its own set of problems (just as any other time in history). One problem for the church is its own intellectual, moral, and spiritual blindness to the ways we are already affected by the transhumanist vision of life and the many subtle ways that already has shaped the way we communicate (or not) the gospel in word and action. Leaders and laypeople are, therefore, wise to start with the house of God. Addressing transhumanism is not merely relating to a worldly phenomenon 'out there' but something that permeates the lives and minds of Christians also.

Transhumanism and materialism.

Discernment involves de-masking the idols of our day – ideas that are false or incoherent, both in light of secular knowledge and a God-centered view of reality. One important area that the church's theologians need to work on is the implied materialism of transhumanism ('materialism' being the doctrine that matter is all there is and no further explanation or principle than material ones are needed). As we have noted above, transhumanism's materialism will change the way we view human beings. As Jacques Ellul once remarked, 'When Technique displays an interest in man, it does so by converting him into a material object.'[16] Transhumanism's rampant materialism is thus the exemplary display of Technique 'interest in man.'

Transhumanism's challenge lies in the fact that it presents, in popular as well as philosophical terms, a convincing case for materialism. But not just any form of materialism. Take the issue of the nature of the mind or even matter itself. Transhumanism is committed to the idea that ultimate reality is material but also that talks about the mind as information-patterns, suggesting that particular feature of the mind will be up-loadable to another hardware than the brain. This parsing of mind and matter is both elusive and evocative to modern people, for it contains a view of human beings as basic information-patterns that can migrate to new forms life and also 'improve' upon itself. Herein we find the merging of science and the modern view of human autonomy as freedom from any constraint to shape my own life. Transhumanist rhetoric presents these issues in the form of solid science (of the near future) and conveniently sidelines the classical Christian view of humans as created in the image of God, a being both material and spiritual. The Christian church needs to return to a classical anthropology, which has the resources need to meet the materialist challenge.

Resources

- Jacob Shatzer. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Steve Donaldson and Ron Cole-Turner, eds. *Christian Perspectives on Transhumanism and the Church: Chips in the Brain, Immortality, and the World of Tomorrow.* Palgrave Studies in the Future of Humanity and its Successors. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Robert Ranisch. "When CRISPR Meets Fantasy: Transhumanism and the Military in the Age of Gene Editing." In Transhumanism: The Proper Guide to a P*osthuman Condition or a Dangerous Idea?* Edited by Wolfgang Hofkirchner and Hans-Jörg Kreowski, 111–120. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021.
- Patrick Hopkins. "A Salvation Paradox for Transhumanism: Saving You Versus Saving You." In *Religion and Transhumanism: The Unknown Future of Human Enhancement,* Edited by Calvin Mercer and Tracey Trothen, 71-81. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2015.
- H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr. *The Foundations of Bioethics.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 37–67.
- Stefan Lindholm. "Forever Young? Understanding Transhumanism" Modern Reformation. Last modified March 1, 2021. https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/forever-young-understanding-transhumanism/

Endnotes

1 https://nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf

2 J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 173.

3 Peter H. Kahn Jr., *Technological Nature: Adaptation and the Future of Human Life* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 12.

4 Brian Leiter, "The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation," in *Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Brian Leiter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 282.

5 James Steinhoff, "Transhumanism and Marxism: Philosophical Connections," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 24, no. 2 (May 2014): 1.

6 It is worth noting that some Christian groups are attempting a synthesized version of Christian transhumanism. See https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/ as one example.

6 It is worth noting that some Christian groups are attempting a synthesized version of Christian transhumanism. See https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/ as one example.

7 Hava Tirosh-Samuelson "In Pursuit of Perfection: The Misguided Transhumanist Vision", *Theology and Science,* (2018) 16:2, 200-222, (quote on page 202) DOI:10.1080/14746700.2018.1463659

8 Max More and Natasha Vita-More. *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future.* Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

9 Max More, "A Letter to Mother Nature: Amendments to the Human Constitution", August 1999, http://strategicphilosophy.blogspot.com/2009/05/its-about-ten-years-since-i-wrote.html.

10 Victor C Ferkiss *The Future of Technological Civilization.* New York: George Braziller, 1974.

11 Peters 2013. "Progress and Provolution. Will Transhumanism Leave Sin Behind?" In: Cole-Turner, R. (Ed.) T*ranshumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement.* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press: 63-86.

12 Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor. Evolution, Culture and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 31-32

13 Garner, S. 2013. "The Hopeful Cyborg." In: Cole-Turner, R. (Ed.) *Transhumanism and Transcendence: Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement.* Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press: 87-100.

14 Jacques Ellul, "The Technological Order", in *Technology and Culture*, vol. 3, No. 4, Proceedings of the Encyclopedia Britannica Conference on the Technological Order (Autumn, 1962): 394-421.

15 https://nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf.

16 Stefan Lindholm, "Jacques Ellul and the Idols of Transhumanism", *Religion & Liberty*: vol. 32, no. 4 (November 2022).

Authors

Dr Latha Christie is a Senior Scientist with over 35 years of experience with the Government of India. She completed her Bachelor's with honors and later her Master's and Ph.D. in Aerospace Engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, India. She completed her International Executive Diploma in Project Management, M.Div, and M.A. in Christian Studies. She is a certified counselor. She received the Women Achiever Award, prof. Satish Dhawan Award for Engineers and the AGNI Team Award for Excellence. She has around 70 published papers and has authored four books. She is the host of the science and religion web series called THE GRAND COSMIC STORY on her youtube channel. https://www.youtube.com/@LathaChristie

Dr Stefan Lindholm is an ordained priest in the Church of Sweden and professor of systematic theology at Johannelund School of Theology, Uppsala. He is editor of Theofilos and the author of Jerome Zanchi (1516–1590) and the Analysis of Reformed Scholastic Christology. For 10 years he worked at L'Abri fellowship with his wife, Lois, in England and Sweden.

Dr Garrett Starr earned a Bachelor of Science at McMurry University, a Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Master of Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Doctor of Ministry in Apologetics with an emphasis in hermeneutic methodology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Studies/Apologetics from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His Ph.D. dissertation, Transhumanist Philosophy in Christian Perspective: A 21st Century Analysis, is a theological and metaphysical diagnosis of and biblical response to transhumanist philosophy. Dr. Starr serves as the Lead Pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Kaiserslautern, Germany, and is an Adjunct Professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Olof Edsinger, Patricia Weerakoon, Mark Yarhouse

The experience of sexuality and gender is central to all human cultures, but attitudes toward this universal reality vary dramatically across the world. Both the universality and the divisiveness of this topic make it eminently relevant for today's global church.

While experiences and opinions on this topic may differ, our touchstone in evaluating it is universally applicable and unchanging. Scripture challenges all cultures and every facet of human life. Issues of sexuality and gender are no exception. As we evaluate these issues, as with every other phenomenon, our ultimate authority is the Word of God.

> ***"As we evaluate these issues, as with every other phenomenon, our ultimate authority is the Word of God."***

While every culture brings its own rich history and insights to the table and has its own challenges in this area, for the purposes of this report, we have chosen to focus mainly on the cultural trends of the Western world. For better and worse, Western culture disproportionately affects the rest of the world through media, film, and the exportation of internet pornography.[1] For this reason, examining Western trends allows us in some ways to start upstream of many global social phenomena. The following theoretical and practical description provides pastoral and missional context for global evangelism.

Global Fruits of the West's Sexual Revolution

To understand the current thinking on gender and sexuality in the West, one must examine the 1960s–1970s sexual revolution, which changed attitudes toward sex and gender, ultimately eroding previously held norms. Two important enablers of this revolution were medical advances which made contraception and abortion easier and safer, and changes in social attitudes which made both socially acceptable.

Both contraception and abortion separate sexual intimacy from reproduction, therefore separating sex from the traditional and biblical understanding of families.[2] These medical technologies and the associated permissive attitudes towards contraception and abortion are today an integral part of debilitating family planning programs not only in the West, but also in other areas of the world.

The overarching claim of the sexual revolution was that individual, familial, and social well-being would be maximised if individuals were given unlimited freedom in sexual expression. This made room for previously stigmatised practices to gain acceptance.[3] It also facilitated a growing culture of individual self-gratification, which viewed traditional obligations to family and society as outdated ways of 'repressing' this individual self-gratification. This carried with it a rejection of authority figures, an impulse exacerbated by institutional sexual scandals that cast doubt on the integrity of sources of authority. Today's ideal is 'freedom' from all external constraints—family expectations, societal norms, biology, and divine authority.

On the surface, it may appear that this has led to an over-valuing of sex. Indeed, sex retains its longstanding place in humanity's pantheon of idols. But ultimately, our over-valuing of our own authority and gratification has devalued sex to the point that its only valuable outcome is self-fulfilment. Devoid of any connection to transcendent purposes, all that remains is pleasing oneself—the love of self that the apostle Paul warned Timothy about (2 Tim. 3:2).

This pursuit of self-gratification, enabled by sexual technological developments, has fed into a larger change in social attitudes. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, Carl Truman[4] has mapped the social and intellectual processes which have led to this situation and describes them as the development of the

'psychological man' in a culture of 'expressive individualism'. In this cultural context, the highest aim is to live as one's authentic self through the identification and expression of self-defined fulfilment. Thus, in an expressive individualistic world, religion is valued only to the extent that it facilitates the fulfilment of an individual's self-determined life purpose.

The effects of this sexual revolution are vast, deep, and damaging:

> ***"Devoid of any connection to transcendent purposes, all that remains is pleasing oneself."***

- Marriage rates and fertility rates are plummeting across the Western world.
- Promiscuous sexual behaviour—the culture of casual sex, 'hook up culture', polyamory, etc.—is mainstream in many urban and/or youth cultures.
- Pornography and the associated sex trafficking and pornified expectations of sex are equally widespread. Even the sacred covenant of marriage is sometimes reframed as a consensual non-monogamous relationship.
- Same-sex sexual behaviour has become mainstream in many urban and/or youth cultures in the West. Especially in their teens, many young people identify as bisexual, as this tends to 'keep all doors open' relationally. In the end, however, most of these youth return to heterosexual relationships.[5]
- When it comes to gender, one's embodied biology is no longer considered a source of any absolute knowledge about oneself; it is rather an accessory to suit one's individual feelings and desires. What started as a rare medical condition of transsexuality has in this way become a transgender phenomenon.

The Road Ahead

All of these contemporary trends run counter to the faithful, biblical sexuality that alone promotes human flourishing. Looking ahead, we foresee several possible scenarios evolving from today's trends on sexuality and gender—scenarios that will most likely exist parallel to one another. These potential trends are important to explore as we consider ministry responses that will lead people of faith in Christ and authentic Kingdom discipleship.

Path One: Extreme individualistic-technocratic libertarianism

The first of these paths is characterised by a radical individualism where self-gratification is more important than bonds of family, friendship, and community. Such a society rejects from the outset the idea that any pattern for healthy sexuality exists outside of one's individual preferences. Here, the individual is king or queen of his or her own universe, including the area of sexual relationships. Technology mediates relationships from the most casual to the most intimate, as people look to virtual spaces and experiences for community and sexual gratification. We expect emerging technologies in sex robots and virtual sex will ultimately render the 'other' seemingly unnecessary for some people in well-resourced societies. The virtual nature of relationships in this scenario will put intense focus on outward appearance and promote casual, commodified sex. This path will also be characterized by increased affirmation of the pursuit of pleasure by any means—be it heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, or polysexual.

This way of life will inevitably lead to increased anxiety, depression, suicidality, and appeal of euthanasia; decreased fertility; and other outcomes which are disastrous for individuals, families, and society in general. From a Christian theological viewpoint, this might be understood as the law of sowing and reaping, associated with elements of active divine judgement (see Lev 18; Rom 1).[6]

Another development will be the ongoing normalisation of gender ideology and the transgender movement. Medical technologies

which are already in use will likely be increasingly accessible and capable of moulding the body in ways that would have been hard to believe a generation ago. We anticipate that such steps will be made readily available to younger and younger populations and will be offered not only for 'medical necessity', but also for perceived quality of life. While some efforts have been made to pause this progression and conduct further and more careful research on these developments, we anticipate that increased access will be the norm.

Path Two: communitarian-naturalistic legalism

The second scenario is the opposite of the first. It narrowly regulates public sexual identification and behaviour according to discernible physiology and strict traditional ethno-communal norms. We can see hints of this rigorous legalistic approach today, such as in Iran's preference for sex reassignment over same-sex sexuality and in its harsh penalties for rule breaking. According to this path, dutiful, obedient conformity is more important than living consistently with one's personal convictions about reality. It prioritises fidelity to individuals, rituals/rites, and symbols which bear communal authority. This path will be hard to maintain in any society influenced strongly by Western cultural norms, but it may attract people reacting fiercely against path one.

> ***"This [Communitariam-naturalistic legalism] would be an uncritical, shared morality that functions as a 'religion'."***

This will likely produce a moralistic religiosity. Rather than a joyful, grace-filled embrace of biblical norms, the result would be an uncritical, shared morality that functions as a 'religion'. Such ideology generally leads to the formation of a stable community for those who share that morality—for our purposes, a common sexual ethic—and will exclude those who do not associate with that morality.

Outside of that community, the perceived universality of that shared 'religious' morality and the pressure to conform to it will probably have negative impacts on minorities who do not share that religious morality—especially, for our purposes, people who experience genuine but perhaps unwanted non-heterosexual desires and who may not conform to the society's gender roles. Consequently, this moralistic religiosity will increase anxiety, depression, and suicidality, thereby reinforcing prejudices that cast religion and traditional forms of community (eg the extended biological family) as only ever oppressive to personal well-being, which will in turn reinforce the secularists' call to abandon religion and community in favour of the kind of self-gratification which characterises path one.

Path Three: Neo-conservatism and an awakened interest in traditional understandings of sexuality and gender

Path three could be described as a re-evaluation of the sexual revolution. The revolution has not delivered on its promises. Instead of freedom and fulfilment, young generations have inherited intense brokenness and emptiness.[7] As some young people come to terms with that reality, we may witness a backlash against these ideologies, particularly in areas where they prove inconsistent with scientific knowledge and objective reality (eg the encouragement of gender reassignment therapies for minors and the denial of the humanity of foetuses). If so, Christians and non-Christians may find common ground in their rejection of mainstream cultural values. Elements of this co-belligerence already exist amongst those who are resisting and seeking to limit the most extreme forms of gender ideology held by some advocates in the contemporary transgender movement.

This movement is already strong in parts of Western culture and could be a central aspect of the future as people are disappointed and hurt by the libertarian individualistic-technocratic path. A subset of this group will be people of faith who are navigating questions around their own experience of same-sex sexuality or discordant gender identity and who are trying to find ways to live their lives according to biblical standards for sexual behavior, as a witness to God's provision. Their lives will be 'a long obedience in the same direction', as Eugene Peterson once put it. We

see this path as a smaller, quieter, embodied existence—a counter-narrative to the prevailing narratives noted above. Communities of faithful witnesses to God's work in their lives will continue to live counter-culturally to the messages of sexual self-actualization.

A Way Forward for the Church

The church must respond to these shifting attitudes for at least two reasons. First, its response should at least slow—perhaps it may arrest or even reverse—society's decline into self-destruction. Love of our neighbours propels us to seek their good, regardless of their attitude toward us, Christ, and his gospel.

The second reason flows from the first. The concepts associated with the Christian framework for healthy sexuality—the idea that a God-given authoritative order exists, which is independent of our emotions and preferences—are important to the Christian gospel, because they underpin the gospel's concepts of God as Creator and of sin as a rejection of him and his patterns for life. In itself, sexual wholeness is not the gospel, but confidence in the biblical, Christian attitudes towards sexual wholeness bolsters confidence in the gospel and empowers Christians to live in ways that are consistent with the demands of the gospel, including in our sexuality.

Therefore, church leaders need sufficient confidence in the biblical view of sexuality to confidently lead their congregations into that view and to contradict secular claims. Theological colleges need to provide teaching programmes which integrate the goodness and beauty of the biblical sexual ethic as presented across the whole canon of Scripture with the scientific evidence and lived experience that supports that biblical ethic.

The church also must be both aware of and sensitive to the faults of the past, where it has contributed to the kind of marginalisation and rejection of non-heterosexual individuals we characterised in path two. We must be willing to identify, challenge, and change marginalisation in the name of the one who only ever used his power to save and to serve. We are called to move towards them, not push them away.

To avoid the pitfalls of path one, the church must:

- Distinguish the faithful church from 'progressive' Christianity which rejects biblical sexual morality in favour of worldly acceptance and thus becomes apostate.
- Demonstrate the goodness and wholesomeness of the biblical sexual ethic, including the value of sexual self-control—restraining sinful sexual impulses is not 'repressive' but builds healthy, virtuous character. Chastity is a blessing.
- Distinguish this biblical sexual ethic from the religious moralism of path two by highlighting the prevenience of divine salvific grace and justification by faith alone. Salvation is by grace, not works, and the sanctification of our sexuality is a gift of God's spirit.
- Prepare our hearts and minds for the slander and hatred we will receive as we reject the idol of sexual permissiveness and instead pursue sexual purity for the glory of God.

We urge the church to adopt the above approaches to avoid being drawn into the legalistic communitarian-naturalistic path merely in reaction to the extreme libertarian individualistic-technocratic path. The church's response to anything must not be dictated by fear of consequences but guided by grace and expressed in love for God and neighbour.

> ***"Therefore, church leaders need sufficient confidence in the biblical view of sexual health to confidently lead their congregations (...)"***

To avoid the negative elements of path two, it is imperative that we:

- Highlight the completeness of divine salvation in Christ—that in Christ, God restores even those who have sinned against the constitution of their embodied sexuality.

- Demonstrate how the completeness of salvation in Christ precludes mere moralism—we do not locate our salvation through heterosexuality or sexual chastity, nor are we 'saved by purity alone' or 'justified by heterosexuality alone'. Rather, we are saved by grace alone, and then in gratitude we lead a life of faithfulness that includes holy sexuality.
- Welcome genuine seekers and truly repentant sexual sinners, just as Christ welcomed the much-forgiven sexual sinners of his time. These include those who feel but do not desire same-sex attraction; those who are navigating gender identity and faith, including those who may have transitioned, in what they honestly considered a life-saving measure; and those who may experience gender change regret and may or may not seek to detransition.
- Be prepared to bear the irrational hatred occasioned by contradicting the idols of superiority and moralistic self-righteousness.

Finally, we recommend that Christians promote path three by developing culturally sensitive methods of teaching biblical sexual ethics and helping Christians develop the kind of character that can withstand the pressures and persecutions of any kind of culture, whether individualist-progressive or communitarian-conservative. Marriage courses, biblical counselling, sexual discipleship, and sound mentorship are likely to be key areas for the church to prioritise if it wants to address the confusion, brokenness, and deep needs of modern people. This can only be achieved by truly seeking to understand both the sexual ethic of our culture and the gracious Lord to whom we as Christians belong.

Sexuality and the Great Commission

The arc of the biblical drama moves through creation, fall, and redemption to consummation. God has granted to us a life 'between the times', in which all of creation is fallen, groaning for redemption from its fallen state. Redemption only occurs in the work of Jesus, and we await the fullness of redemption in the consummation of all things.

We are at times advised to speak less about controversial topics related to sexuality and gender and to focus more on the central truths of the gospel. We agree that there is strategic value in engaging controversial topics selectively and at appropriate times. Nevertheless, we are called to teach the whole counsel of God—everything Christ commanded us. That means teaching a biblical sexual ethic that represents the whole Bible narrative from the creation of man and woman in the garden of Eden to the resurrection narrative of the bride of Christ. And, as noted previously, while sexual wholeness is not the gospel, confidence in the biblical teachings about sexuality bolsters confidence in the gospel and empowers us to live according to its principles.

Christians, therefore, need to know how to obey Christ as sexed, gendered people. In addition to this, we must address destructive forces such as the pornography industry and the use of AI and technology as a substitute for intimacy. We must also identify and repent of how the Great Commission has been threatened by instances of the church's wrongful use of power to bring harm to non-heterosexual individuals and communities, and even facilitate and cover for sexual abuse.

> ***"Sexual wholeness is not the gospel, confidence in the biblical teachings about sexuality bolsters confidence in the gospel."***

The testimonies of reborn, renewed Christians will also be important to the Great Commission—especially those who, in ways akin to 1 Corinthians 6:11, can profess to having had their entire view of themselves and their sexuality changed for the better by their personal relationship with Christ. These may be Christians who were once consumers of pornography, perpetrators of sexual abuse, promiscuous in premarital or extramarital sexual intimacy, and so on, who will be able to testify that their Christ has healed their sexuality and set their lives on a different trajectory. God may enable such reborn Christians to be, as it

were, out and proud for Jesus. The transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these believers can be a life-giving testimony to the saving work of Christ.

But we also expect there to be many who live equally counter-culturally in a less public and visible way. These people are no less confident of Christ and of his love and forgiveness. But their lives, at least in the areas of sexuality, are characterised not by perpetual victory but by faithful, sometimes painful, perseverance. In their quiet commitment to Christ and willingness to overcome their internal impulses out of loyalty to him, they become an embodied counter-narrative to the messages of sexual self-actualization noted above. Their counter-cultural commitment will itself be a living witness to how costly obedience points in the direction of Christ's even more costly, even more obedient, work of redemption.

Opportunities and Challenges for Great Commission Efforts

The church stands on Christian hope. In a world that is sexually and relationally disoriented, the Christian gospel has the wonderful, orienting potential of being good news not only for our souls, but also for our bodies and for society as a whole. Like all of God's gifts, sexuality is supposed to be our servant—not our lord. Toward that end, we are to steward our sexuality as a marker of Christian hope.

In terms of the Great Commission, Christian hope can be embodied and conveyed most convincingly in the testimonies of those who faithfully steward sexuality and gender. This will include those whom Christ has redeemed out of trauma, abuse, addiction, disordered sexuality, and other effects of the fall on human sexuality, and who have by his power and grace cultivated a healthy sexuality in emotionally and spiritually safe and secure church settings.

Several hazards threaten to impede our pursuit of this hope. The first is a potentially divisive tendency to expect that God's provision must look one particular way for all people. The second is the temptation to attribute another's suffering or infirmity to either the person or their parents, as the disciples did (John 9:1–3). Rather than making the complexities of our fallen condition and consequent different forms of divine restoration a matter of division, let us exercise patience with each other, engage in diligent biblical discernment, and celebrate authentic divine redemption wherever and however it occurs.

We must also be vigilant regarding the allure of a celebrity Christian culture in which leaders have little or no accountability, including sexually, and regarding the challenge of leveraging technology for good without becoming subject to it.

In all of this, the church ought to practice 'convicted civility'[8], holding firmly to Christian commitments within a diverse and pluralistic society while exercising civility, respect, and compassion towards those who disagree with our ethics and practice a different way of life.

To navigate these tensions fruitfully, we must operate out of a renewed confidence in:

- sexuality within the monogamous marriage of man and woman as a beautiful mystery and a model of Christ and the church (Eph 5; Rev 19, 21)
- a high view of singleness accompanied by practical and spiritual support for those who are single, including them in the daily rhythms of family life in the body
- an acceptance that all humans are fallen (Gen 3) and have sinful desires not in keeping with God's purpose
- the church as an emotionally and spiritually secure place for transparency and humility, where members can share and support each other, bearing each other's burdens
- discerning the difference between an unhealthy desire, an unnatural disposition, and an ungodly action; we must embrace the gifts of followers of Christ who have been faithfully navigating issues related to sexuality and gender, despite their desires and dispositions
- the value of self-control in inculcating resilient, virtuous character

- the reality of our glorious hope—the delights of glorified eternal life with Christ in resurrected immortal bodies

The church enters into conversations on sexuality and gender with the expectation that good—which is the nature of God's character—will prevail. Ours eschatological hope in who we will become is moving toward a final destination. Human sexuality, or the human longing for completion at all levels (eros), is a universal signal that such longing will only be satisfied in eternity. Christian hope, which is embodied in chastity in singleness and in marriage, directs us toward the eternal vision of bride and bridegroom.

Recommended Resources

- Harrison, Glynn (2016). A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing. London: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Jones, S., & Jones, B. (2019). How and When to Tell Your Kids About Sex: A lifelong approach to shaping your child's sexual character. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Patricia Weerakoon (https://youthworksmedia.net/search?q=patricia+weerakoon)
- The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender (https://www.centerforfaith.com)
- The Sexual & Gender Identity Institute (wheaton.edu/sgi)
- Stott, John R. W. (2017). Same-Sex Relationships. The Good Book Company.
- Yarhouse, Mark (2015). Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic.

Endnotes

1 David L. Rowland & D. Uribe, 'Pornography Use: What do cross-cultural patterns tell us?' In Cultural Differences and the Practice of Sexual Medicine, eds. David L. Rowland and Emmanuele A. Jannini (New York City, NY: Springer, 2000), 317-334.

2 Different cultures view families differently. Some focus more on the nuclear family of husband, wife, and their biological children. Others include the extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc. But both concepts prioritise common genetic ancestry. You were related to your family through shared DNA. That shared DNA created relational obligations which were immoral to ignore. If you didn't perform your filial duty, you were a 'bad' family member.

3 It is important to note that heterosexual promiscuity, paedophilia, gender discordant experiences, and same-sex relationships are not unique to our modern times. Rather, these phenomena were encountered to one degree or another throughout history and across cultures. Early Christian writings, such as the Didache, suggest that many such behaviours came to be denounced in Western culture through the expansion of the Christian church (see Didache, 2:2).

4 Carl Truman, The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

5 Anna Brown, Bisexual adults are far less likely than gay men and lesbians to be "out" to the people in their lives. Pew Research Center, June 18, 2019. Available: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/06/18/bisexual-adults-are-far-less-likely-than-gay-men-and-lesbians-to-be-out-to-the-people-in-their-lives/

6 This does not mean that diverse experiences of sexuality or gender are always, in themselves, a sign of divine condemnation. Jesus, while not approving sexual sin, protected sexual sinners from being punished by religious zealots, offered those sinners forgiveness in his name, and called them to repent of their sin and live a life of sexual wholeness (Luke 7:36-50; John 4; see also 1 Cor 6:10-11). Some of the experiences we are discussing are a result of the fall (or made possible because of the fall) but not the result of individual wilful disobedience. But the prevalence and celebration of these kinds of anti-relational attitudes towards sex and gender are signs of social decline which have been seen time and again during human history.

7 Glynn Harrison, A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing (London: IVP, 2016).

8 Richard Mouw, Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010).

Authors

Olof Edsinger is General Secretary of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance. He is the author of about twenty books, including several on the topics of identity, sexuality and lgbtq. Through his books and his speaking engagements he has become a well-known voice in the area of sexuality and gender in Sweden and the other Nordic countries.

Dr Patricia Weerakoon MBBS (Sri Lanka); MS (Uni Hawaii) MHPEd (Uni NSW, Australia) is a medical doctor and academic. She was director of a graduate program in sexual health in the University of Sydney, and has written several books, including Talking Sex by the Book (2020) and The Gender Revolution (2023).

Dr Mark Yarhouse is the Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College, where he directs the Sexual & Gender Identity Institute. He is author or co-author of several books, including Understanding Gender Dysphoria, Emerging Gender Identities, Costly Obedience, and Homosexuality and the Christian.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL LIFE?



INTRODUCTION

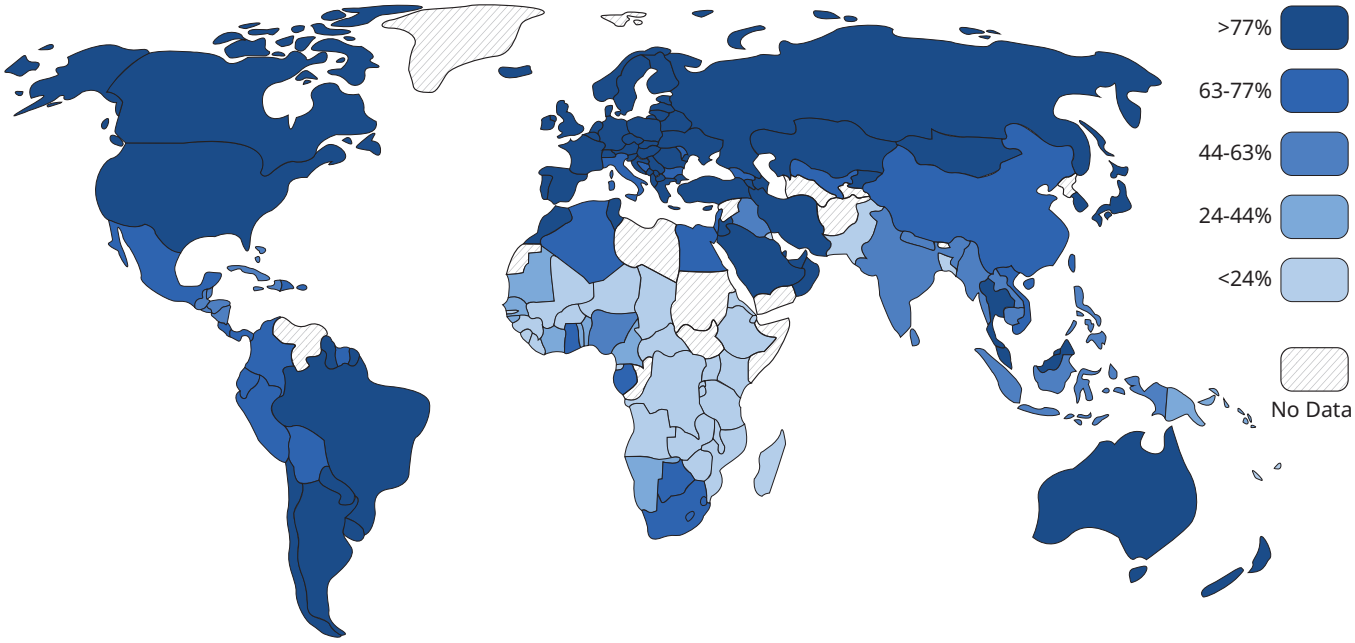
Between the third and fourth Lausanne global congress, digital technology has fundamentally changed the world. For most the world, with notable exceptions, internet, screens, social media, virtual work, shape large portions of life, leading to the question, 'What is a digital life?'

The following section explores the context shifts in technology including connectivity, decentralization, Web 3, and social media.

TECHNOLOGY

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

GLOBAL INTERNET USAGE



Source: The World Bank, "Individuals using the internet (% of population)," 2021

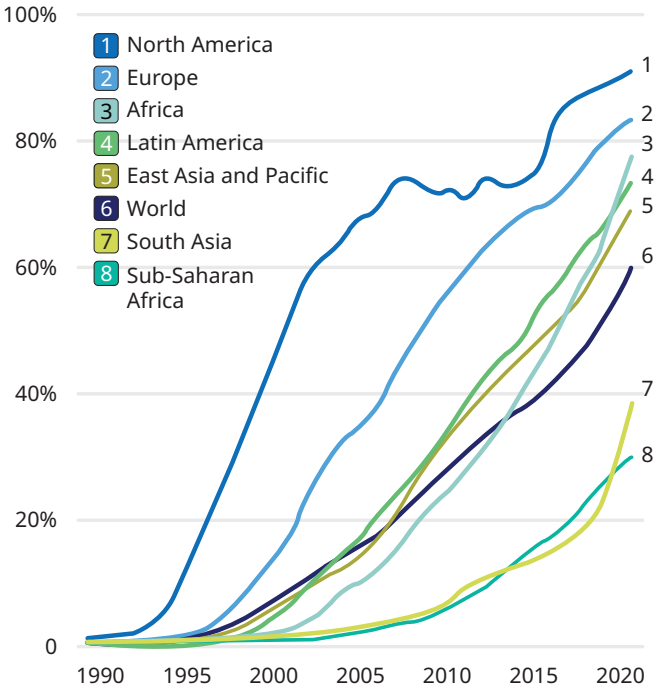
CONNECTED WORLD

Globally, approximately 60 percent of the world is connected to the internet. The percentage of people connected varies across regions. The Americas, Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East are the most connected regions. Although rapidly increasing, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are the least connected regions.

ASIAN INFLUENCE

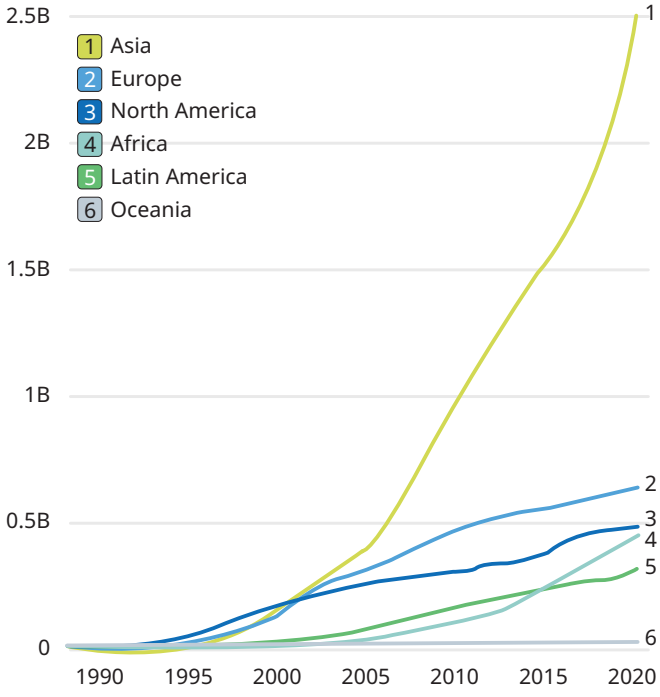
Although portions of Asia are less connected than global average, the number of Asian people using the internet has dramatically increased since 2000. Due to the vast numbers of connected individuals, Asia has an immense influence on the digital world. Similarly, due to vast numbers, the digital mission opportunities in Asia is significant.

% OF PEOPLE ON THE INTERNET



Source: Our World In Data, International Telecommunication Union and UN, 2022

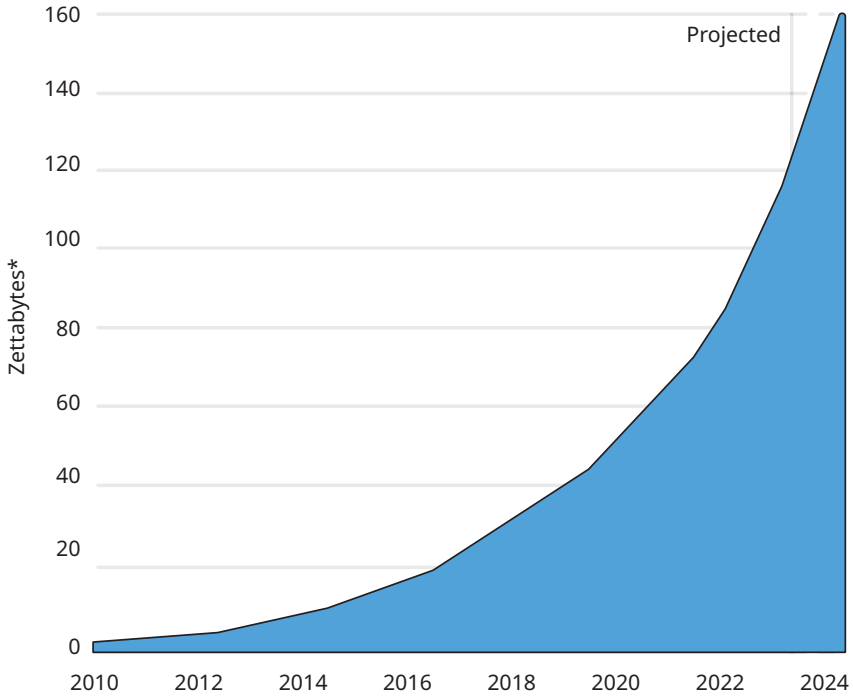
OF PEOPLE USING THE INTERNET



Source: Our World In Data, International Telecommunication Union and UN, 2022; B = Billion

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

INCREASE IN WORLDWIDE DATA



Source: Signals, pg. 72; Reinsel et al. via IDC, 2018; *One zettabyte is equivalent to a trillion gigabytes

A DIGITAL AGE

Since 2010, the total amount of captured and accessible data has rapidly increased with an estimated 60 zettabyes in 2020. This dramatic increase is forecasted to continue to a projected 160-180 zettabytes in 2025.

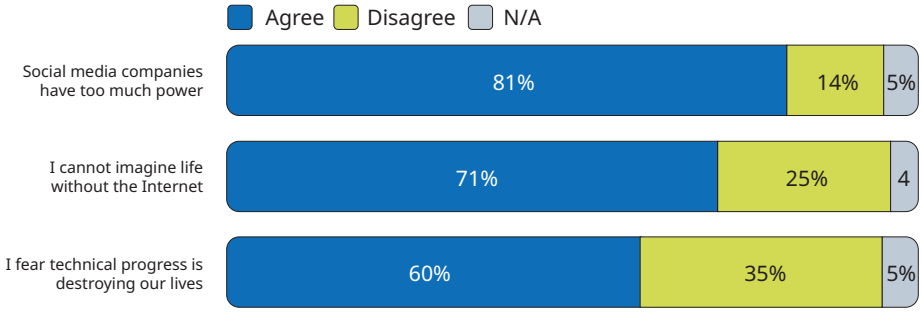
The amount of data available will continue to dramatically increase.

With the advent of global Internet of Things, remote work, in-home entertainment, mobile communications, etc., between 2010 and 2050 data interactions are projected to increase by approximately 5000 percent. Just on WhatsApp alone in 2023, 140 billion messages are exchanged every day between the 2.78 billion users. Arguably the rise of the digital age and access to data is unprecedented and is fundamentally reshaping the world.

WORLD OF SCREENS

In the last half century, much of the world has evolved from a pre-screen world to a world saturated by screens. Screen time globally is increasing every year, having significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth spend more time online than any other generation. Overall, the average daily global screen time is 6:37 and climbing.

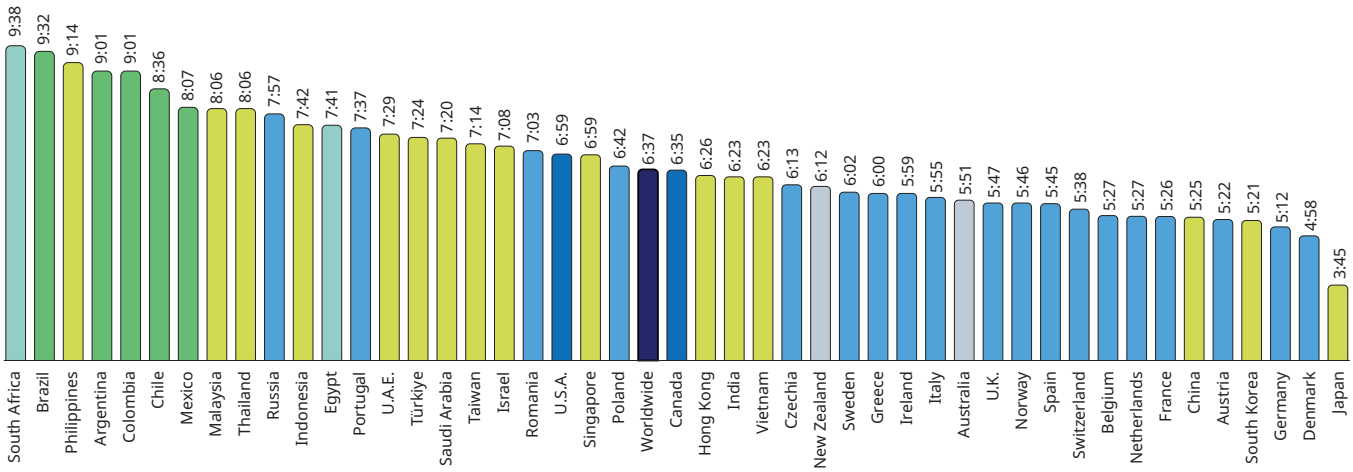
GLOBAL PUBLIC PERCEPTION ABOUT TECHNOLOGY



Source: Ipsos, "Global Trends," 2023

DAILY TIME USING THE INTERNET

Average amount of time (in hours and minutes) that users aged 16 to 64 spend on the internet



Source: GWI (GlobalWebIndex), Q3 2022

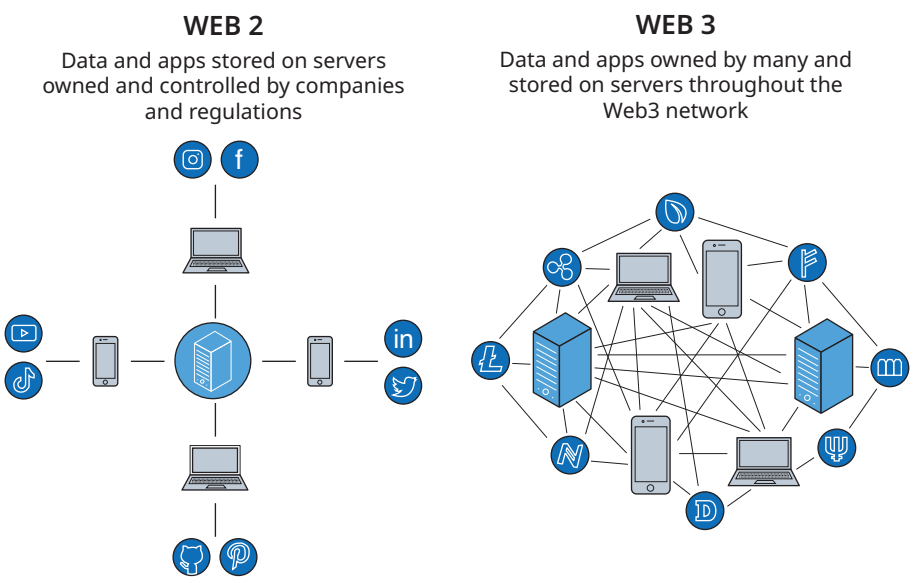
WEB 3

DECENTRALIZATION

The development of Web 3 is a fundamental shift in technology and ideology towards decentralization, shifting power to the individual. The initial format of the internet was designed for reading of information with little interaction. The next phase, or Web 2 allowed users to both consume and create content for free within spaces designed and owned by tech companies.

Web 3 shifts towards a decentralized model where users cannot only consume and create, but also own and influence the decentralized network, owning their own data. This shifts the ownership and power to the individual.

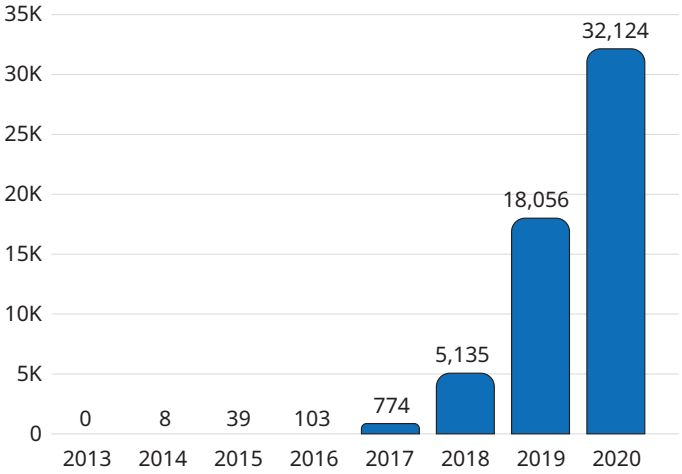
WHAT IS WEB 3?



Source: Skip Level, "An Intro on Web3 for Product Managers," 2022

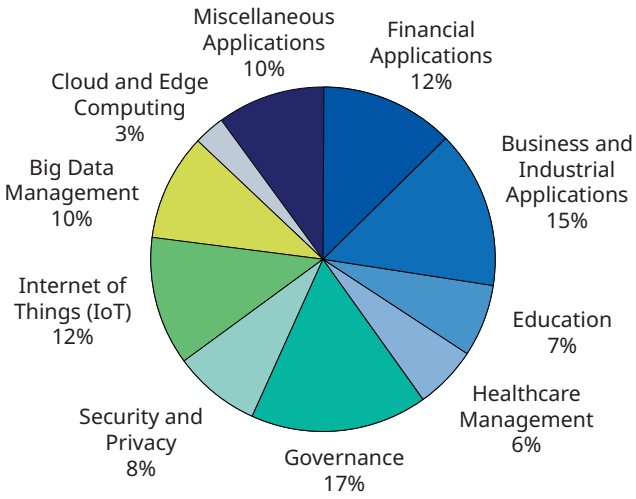
INCREASE OF BLOCKCHAIN RESEARCH

Number of Blockchain papers published yearly



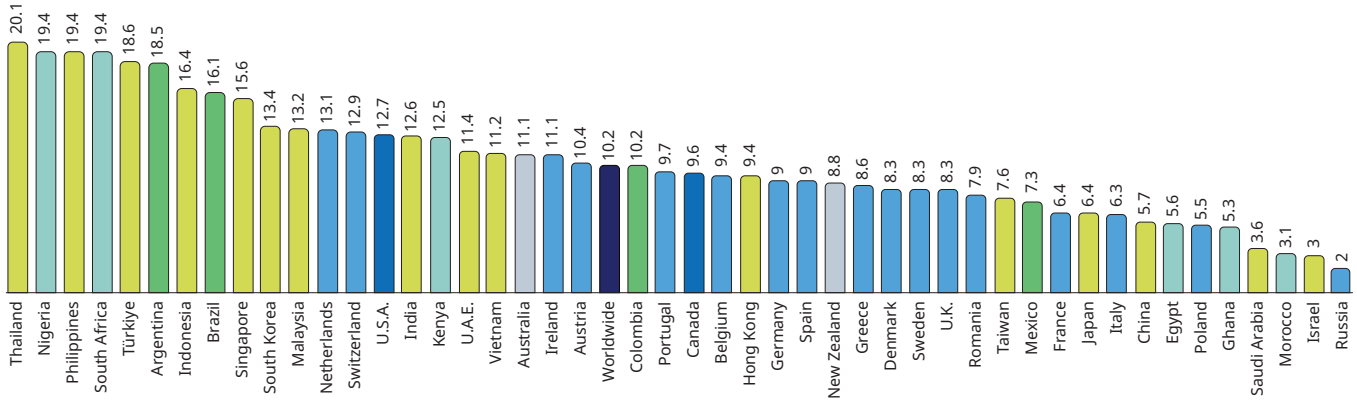
Source: King Saud University, "Emerging Trends in Blockchain Technology," 2022

RISE OF WEB3 RESEARCH



Source: King Saud University, "Emerging Trends in Blockchain Technology," 2022

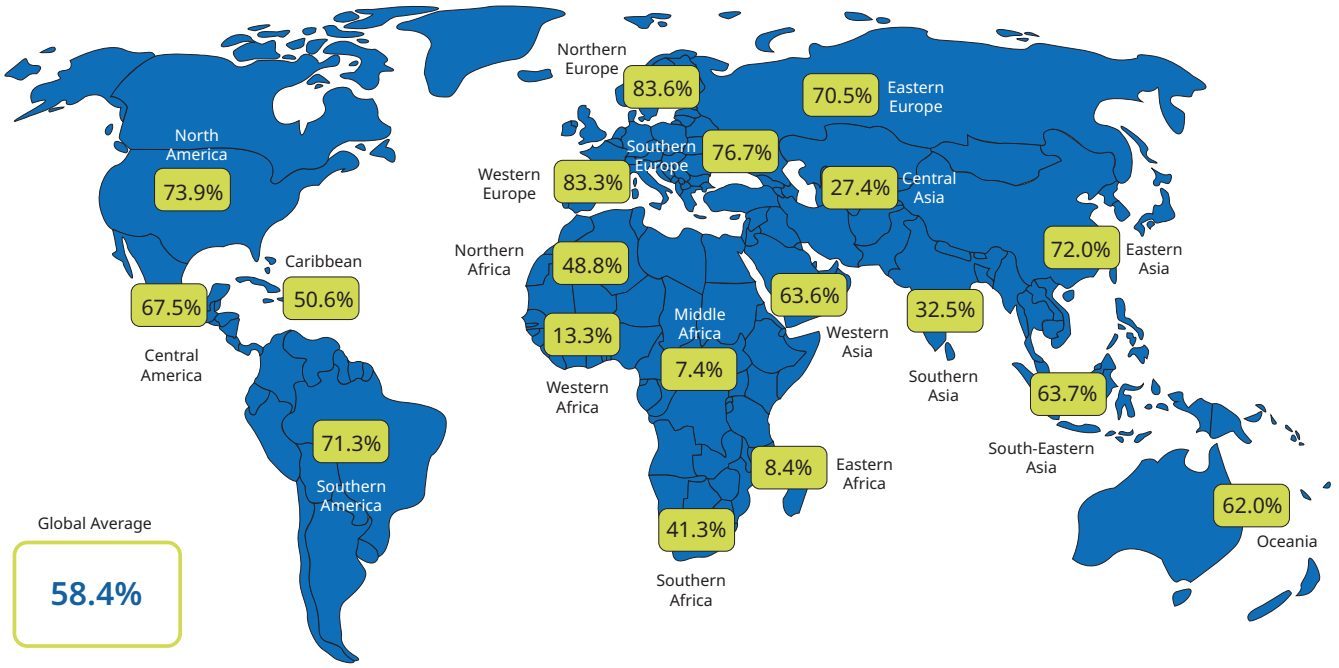
% CRYPTOCURRENCY OWNERSHIP



Source: GWI (GlobalWebIndex), Q3 2022

GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA

REGIONAL PERCENTAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS



Source: Meltwater Global Report, 2023

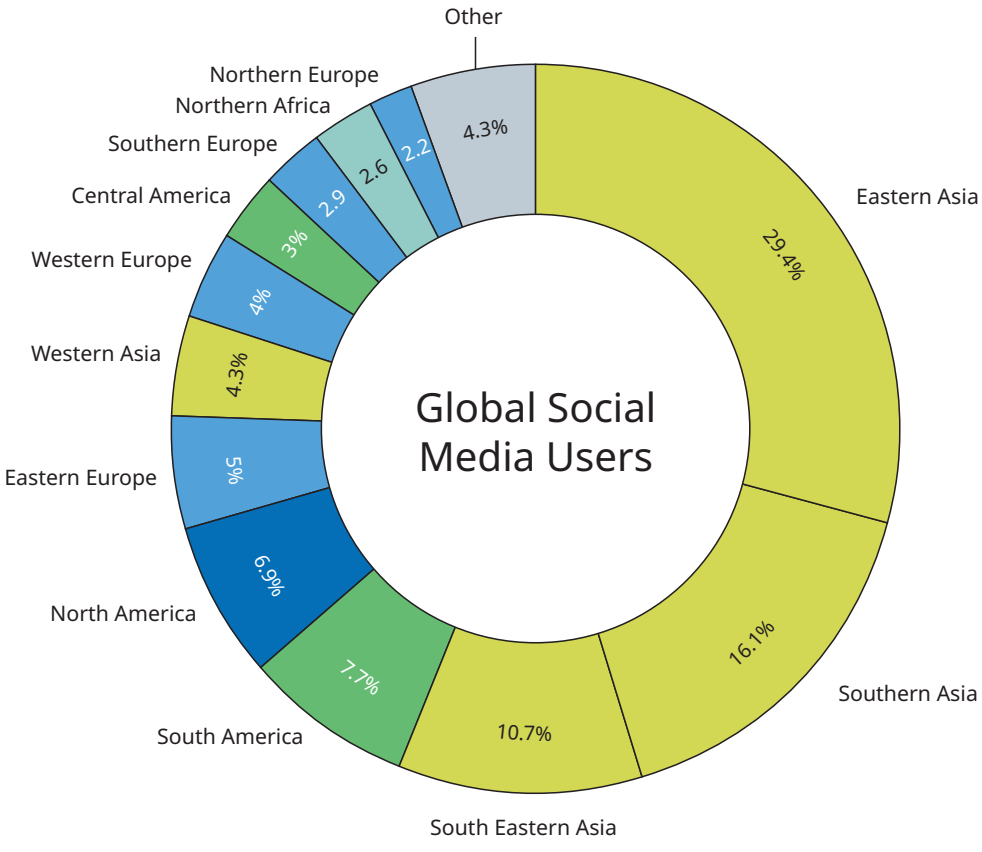
GLOBAL REACH

As of 2023, the majority of the world, or an estimated 4.8 billion individuals, use social media on a regular basis. The average daily time of social media use in 2023 is estimated around 2 hours and 20 minutes per day. With only a small number of companies owning the most used platforms, the global reach and influence of these platforms is unprecedented.

The majority of the world are social media users.

The majority of global social media users are in Asia, even though the percent of population that uses social media varies. Middle, Western, and Eastern Africa have the lowest adoption rate globally with at most 13 percent of the population utilizing social media. Europe tops the highest percentage of its population on social media, with approximately 83 percent.

SHARE OF GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

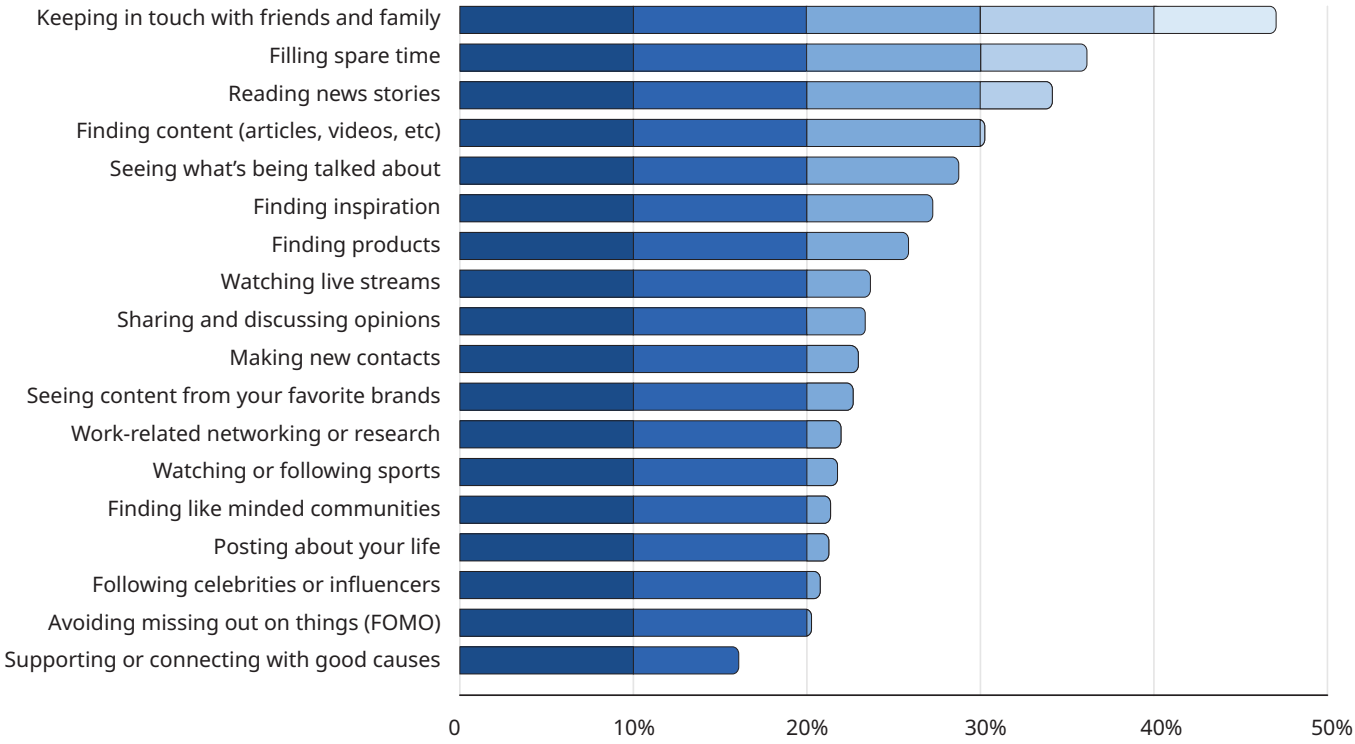


Source: Meltwater Global Report, 2023

SOCIAL MEDIA

REASONS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Primary reasons why global internet users aged 16 to 64 use social media platforms



Source: GWI (GlobalWebIndex), Q3 2022

MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA

- Facebook (2,958M users)
- Youtube (2,542M users)
- WhatsApp (2,000M users)
- Instagram (2,000M users)
- WeChat (1,309M users)
- Tiktok (1,051M users)
- FB Messenger (931M users)
- Douyin (715M users)
- Telegram (700M users)
- Snapchat (635M users)
- Kuaishou (626M users)
- Sina Weibo (584M users)
- QQ (574M users)
- X (556M users)
- Pinterest (445M users)

Source: DataReportal, "Digital 2022: Global Overview Report"

EASY CONNECTION, EASY DISTRACTION

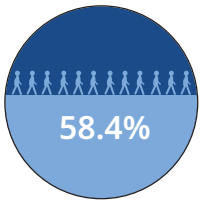
With global individuals spending an estimated average of 2 hours and 20 minutes on social media per day, the purpose of this time is critical to examine. The majority of social media use is to keep in touch with family and friends. However, it is also notable that the second highest purpose for why people use social media is to fill spare time.

SOCIAL MEDIA FACTS

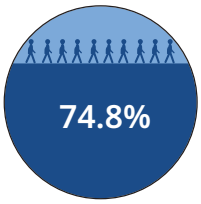
Number of Social Media Users



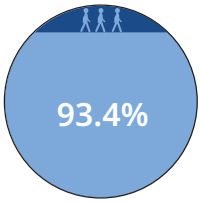
Social media Users VS Total Population



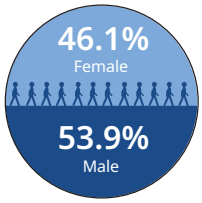
Social media Users VS Population age 13+



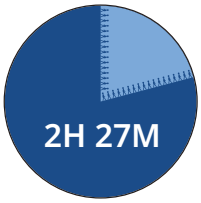
Social Media VS Total Internet Users



Male Social Media Users VS Female Users



Average Time Spent Using Social Media

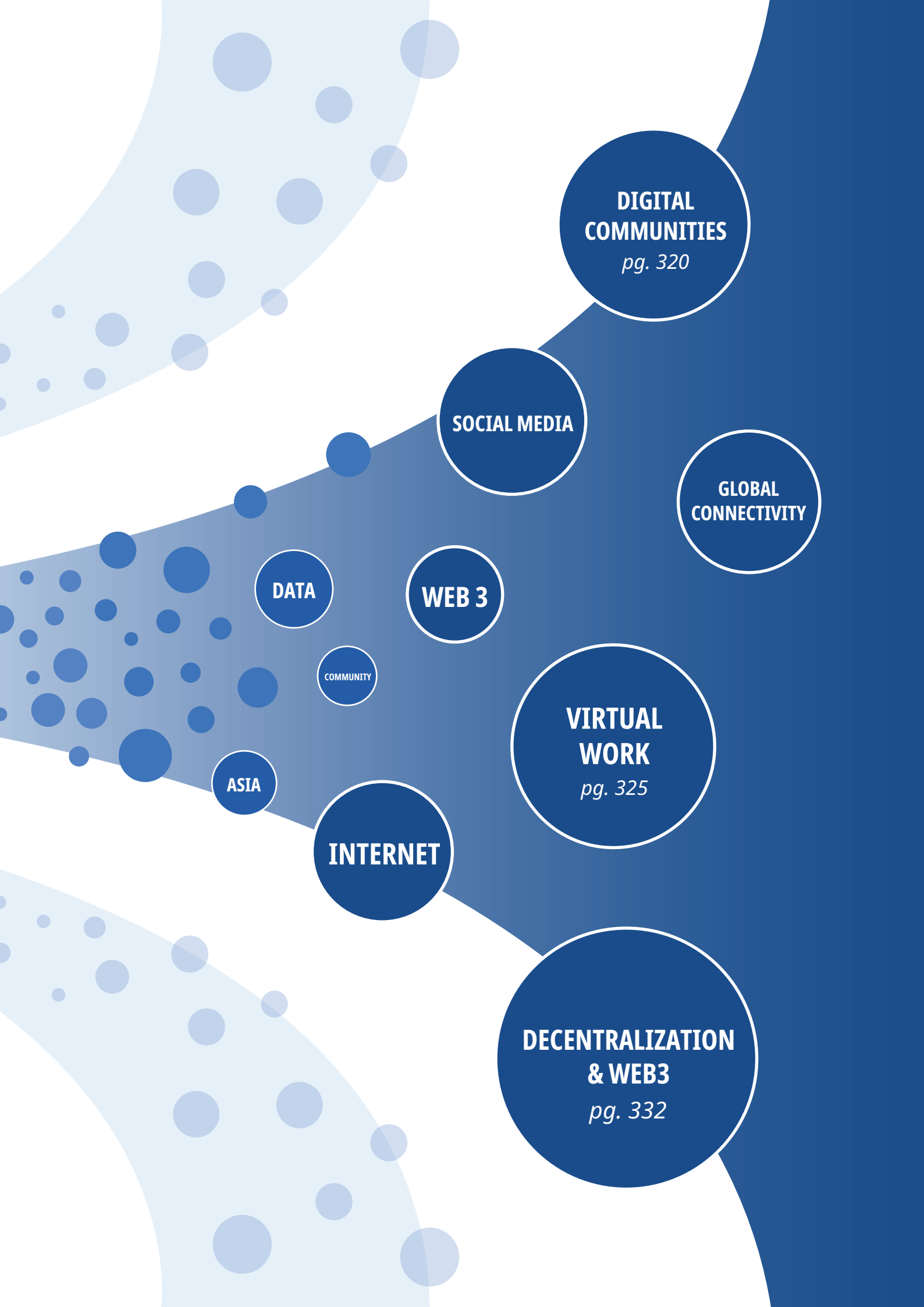


Source: GWI (GlobalWebIndex), Q3 2022

UNDERSTANDING

TECHNOLOGY




DIGITAL COMMUNITIES
pg. 320
SOCIAL MEDIA
GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY
DATA
WEB 3
COMMUNITY
VIRTUAL WORK
pg. 325
ASIA
INTERNET
DECENTRALIZATION & WEB3
pg. 332

DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

David Fernández Caballero, Calida Chu, Peter Phillips

Digital Communities as a Social Unit

Since before the pandemic engaging in digital media has become a daily activity for people around the globe. Thanks to technological advancement, physical distancing does not stop us from connecting with our friends, families, colleagues, and church groups. We are all involved in some form of digital communities, whether we are aware or not.

The term 'digital communities' in this article is defined as communities in which interactions are predominantly engaged via digital devices or digital media, although these communities may have in-person interactions that are nurtured and facilitated by digital communications. We recognise the flourishing of existing digital communities; for example, zoom online services, fellowship groups, Facebook bible studies, as well as video gaming communities can build friendship and relationships with Jesus and his followers.[1]

On the other hand, polarisation and gerrymandering prevalent on social media have torn digital communities apart.[2] Because of algorithms pre-set on social media, the majority of users tend to stay in their social bubbles who may have similar political, cultural, and religious worldviews as theirs. Due to the lack of interaction outside these bubbles, people intensify their dislike and even hatred towards those different from them. This phenomenon raises the question of how Christian communities can nurture friendships and foster relationships, rather than cancelling others because of differences. Although, of course, Christians have had their own 'social bubbles' within the religious world since the dawn of time.

Nonetheless, from now to 2050, we predict that digital communities will become the main social unit where human communications take place. For many digital natives who grow up in a digital environment, using an iPad for leisure, sending messages on Snapchat, and procrastinating on TikTok are their daily activities. Although the theological world sometimes challenges that digital engagement is not as authentic as physical engagement,[3] such communications are not avoidable in all spheres of society, including churches. As such, when one talks about the love of neighbour (Matthew 22:39), the sense of neighbour does not only imply those with geographical proximity but also those we encounter online regularly. Our neighbours are not as close anymore, but are more far-reaching, thanks to the advancement of technology that widens our social network, in which we are informed of the joy and even pain of our neighbour with instant updates on the internet.

> ***"We are all involved in some form of digital communities, whether we are aware or not."***

In the 1990s, Benedict Anderson coined the term 'imagined communities' to discuss the sense of belonging developed by media.[4] In the 2020s, the formation of these kind of imagined communities was accelerated by digital media, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some ways, digital communities cannot be classified as 'imagined' or 'virtual', as being part of them is the reality in everyday life. Despite this, we foresee that physical communities will still exist in the coming years, although human communications within these communities are highly dependent on digital devices/media. It is not uncommon to see how young people gather physically while using social networking services (SNSs) to communicate with their peers standing in front of them. The attachment of certain communities and the belonging of these communities are no longer merely determined by in-person interactions but rather, online. Some may even argue that being partially online and offline

will be what churches operate in the future for Sunday services and even for evangelism.[5]

The Effect on the World, the Church, and the Great Commission

When engaging with digital communities, the medium that conveys the message is as important as the message itself.[6] As such, how one communicates within and beyond one's digital communities will be affected by the technological development of tools such as digital media, AI, and other digital devices. In other words, how human agency is expressed in the digital sphere will be important, so that one's communication is not limited, or even determined by digital technology.

The most pressing issue in the world is in what ways one can create digital devices and digital media ethically that may indirectly affect the formation of digital communities. In recent years, both scientists and ethicists are cautious of how digital devices/media may affect the production of knowledge, which may unconsciously marginalise certain groups in the digital sphere. Through unconscious bias in social media's algorithm, voices of ethnic minorities may not be at the top of the list in search engines.[7] In what ways digital communities bring people together and not tear them apart will be the major concern in the twenty-first century. Hence, equipping the follower of Christ in product development as well as technology industry should be the priority of Christian leaders who have a vision to build a more just world for God. Not only will this prevent the misuse of AI technology that may be harmful to both humans and nonhumans, but this will also assist companies who rely on technology to build an organisation model that leads to the flourishing of society.

The concern about the level of materialism in digital communities will affect the frequency of human beings interacting with each other in these communities. In other words, some may consider communicating in the digital world less authentic, because they do not interact with someone physically present in front of them. This type of social anxiety is validated, because sometimes people give hostile comments online because they cannot see people physically in the digital space. However, this concern seems to deal with the hostility rather than the medium itself. In other words, to effectively tackle aggression online, it is best to educate all regarding the attitude of using this medium — to create respect, generosity, and kindness even though we will not meet the actual person we encounter in digital communities.

> ***"The most pressing issue in the world is in what ways one can create digital devices and digital media ethically that may indirectly affect the formation of digital communities."***

The rise of digital communities also implies that from now to 2050 the church will need to train its pastoral leaders to address the need of fostering digital communities for both groups within and outside the church. The training is not only about the skills of using technology but also the etiquette and the language to engage with people in digital communities. For example, the use of slang and emojis in the online world is as familiar to those who mainly communicate in person or in printing materials. Nonetheless, the training itself is not to substitute in-person communications; on the other hand, the future of pastoral ministry should develop both in-person and digital social skills. Rather than simply rejecting physical activities, digital communities should have the potential to nurture in-person interactions, when certain groups we serve may prefer in-person communications because of disability or any other personal issues.

This also raises issues of how we all understand ecclesiology in the digital world. During the pandemic, Heidi Campbell and other scholars all around the world have edited the book Digital Ecclesiology, linking to the scenarios when all things moved online.[8] In 2023, quarantine has been loosened in most countries and church activities all operate both online and offline again. But this does bring the question if the picture of sharing life together in Acts 2 can all be realised in the digital

world. This requires imagination, both from Christian leaders and technology people, to work together when envisioning a church life immersed in a technological world.

Carrying the Great Commission will also see challenges in countries with higher levels of surveillance due to restrictions on religious activities. Taking China as an example, since March 2022 media laws have been implemented to avoid terrorism, including religious activities.[9] In some ways, church communities have been restricted both physically and digitally. Nonetheless, this does not affect the tenacity of Christians to stay as tightly knit groups. China still has a significant percentage of Christians — at least seven percent of its population, that is 106 million people.[10]

Another dimension affecting the world, the church, and the Great Commission is to what extent AI is implemented in daily communications and especially in evangelism. It is acknowledgeable that AI does create convenience and accelerate the flow of information. However, in what ways should we implement robot evangelism in a post-COVID-19 world? During the pandemic, people talked about robot priests assisting church activities to run normally to help implement physical distancing.[11] But the Christian understanding of the personhood of robots and the information they provide that assists the Christian mission are still in a formative stage. While currently no one considers robots as equivalent to humans because they are less relatable in terms of their personhood and the accuracy of information, it is debatable, in the 2050s, if they will become 'us', because of more advanced AI technology. It also begs the question if robots should be included as 'us' in digital communities, but we perceive this as a rather controversial question that needs careful consideration. The UK's Channel 4 television network had a series, still available online, which explored these themes – 'Humans'.[12]

Opportunities and Challenges for Great Commission Efforts

Despite the opportunities of reaching the unreached without geographical restrictions, we perceive that, because of gerrymandering in certain networks or social groups, there may well be mental health issues or social isolations raised when digital communities become dominant groups for social interactions. Since individuals can choose to engage or withdraw from social groups, without much intervening in other's lives, this can lead to the rise of hikkomori (a form of severe social withdrawal in Japanese), which may affect one's interpersonal relationships and develop mental health issues.[13] As the Great Commission commands us to make disciples of all nations, one of the pressing needs in the future will be to reach to those who may disengage with communities or society in general. The loss itself is not entirely different from the pre-digital age. However, the technique to reach those can be different because it combines online and offline social skills, as well as counseling skills that can assist those to reconnect with God and other human beings.

> ***"[Ministry today] requires imagination from both Christian leaders and technology people, to work together when envisioning a church life immersed in a technological world."***

Another challenge when applying Great Commission efforts to digital communities is the ethical use of digital devices/media in pastoral ministry, including the types of AI and platforms. In the Christian circle, pastoral leaders worry that things like ChatGPT may become a major platform to consume knowledge. However, as Jason Watson rightly argues, 'spiritual formation involves moving beyond merely consuming content about the gospel toward intentionally allowing the truth of the gospel to change the way we live.'[14] While many see the advancement of AI as a threat to humanity, we perceive the trust in God's providence in every Christian life will be as important as ever, because God's guidance cannot be simply replaced by the generation of information.

On this note, as disciples of Christ, we have the responsibility in the years building up to 2050 to educate all to use technology ethically

and to walk the journey together to sense the Holy Spirit in all parts of our life, including our interactions within digital communities and our choices to (dis)engage with digital media/devices, prompted by our understanding of God in our life.

The South-East Asian group Indigitous is a good example of how tech-savvy leaders enable digital missions and stimulate dialogue for how Christians bring glory to God in their local context. As its co-founder Simon Seow comments, 'if God has written digital into your story, He did for a purpose. You've gotta discover that purpose and use it to glorify Him'.[15] The church, including pastoral leaders and laypeople, will be the witness of God who testifies the Word, which becomes fresh through Jesus Christ and is reflected in His followers, who bears the image of God in every part of their life, online and offline, in both physical and digital communities.

Resources

- Campbell, Heidi A. *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation*. College Station, TX: Digital Religion Publications, 2020.
- Kurlberg, Jonas, Nam Vo, and Sara Afshari. 'Lausanne Occasional Paper: Being Church in a Digital Age'. *Lausanne Movement*, accessed 1 June 2023. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lausanne-occasional-paper-being-church-in-a-digital-age.
- Phillips, Peter M. 'On Digital Being'. *Crucible*. February 2023.

Endnotes

1 Video Games Ministries, accessed May 22, 2023, https://videogameministries.com/.

2 Carl T. Bergstrom and Joseph B. Bak-Coleman. 'Information Gerrymandering in Social Networks Skews Collective Decision-Making', *Nature* (September 4, 2019), https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02562-z.

3 Peter M. Phillips, 'On Digital Being', *Crucible*, February 2023.

4 Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

5 Peter M. Phillips, *Hybrid Church: Blending Online and Offline Community* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2020).

6 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2013).

7 Calida Chu, 'Decolonisation/Recolonisation?: digital Theology in the Post-Covid-19 world', GoNeDigital Conference, Online, Global Network for Digital Theology, July 14-16 , 2021.

8 Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Ecclesiology: A Global Conversation* (College Station: Digital Religion Publications, 2020).

9 Sean Cheng, 'Can China's New Regulations Really Stop Evangelism on the Internet?', Christianity Today, 3 March 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/march-web-only/internet-regulations-china-evangelism.html.

10 Gina A. Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World's Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 86.

11 Sofia Bettiza, 'God and Robots: Will Ai Transform Religion?' *BBC News*, 21 October 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-58983047.

12 Channel 4, 'Human', accessed 15 August 2023, https://www.channel4.com/programmes/humans.

13 Roseline Yong and Kyoko Nomura, 'Hikikomori Is Most Associated with Interpersonal Relationships, Followed by Suicide Risks: A Secondary Analysis of a National Cross-Sectional Study', *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10 (2019): 247.

14 Jason Watson, 'Could ChatGPT Make Disciples? Rethinking Evangelical Discipleship in Light of AI', *Lausanne Movement*, February 9, 2023, https://lausanne.org/about/blog/could-chatgpt-make-disciples.

15 Indigitous, 'If God has written digital into your story', *Instagram*, November 5, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CHM1YV8jX6C/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==.

Authors

David Fernández Caballero has extensive experience and implementation of digital environments with a high degree of innovation. David is the founding partner of platforms such as Virtual Fairs, Mi Aula Empresarial, Connecta Negocios with a presence in more than 40 countries in Latin America.

Dr Calida Chu, born and raised in Hong Kong, is Teaching Associate of Sociology of Religion at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham. She previously worked as Teaching Fellow at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh and received her PhD in world Christianity at the same institution in 2020, with a thesis about Hong Kong public theology after 1997. She holds a Master of Art in Sociology from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Revd Dr Peter Phillips is currently the Programme Director for the MA in Digital Theology and Tutor in Theology at Spurgeons College in London, Head of Digital Theology at Premier Christian Media, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. His current research focuses on the impact of digital culture on theology and on contemporary religious practice. He also serves as a Methodist Minister in the Thames Valley Circuit, near London.

VIRTUAL WORK

David Doong, Elisabeth Kopf, Timothy Liu

Rise of Virtual Work

Virtual work and virtual workplaces have been on the rise for several years now, and this trend has only accelerated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has started a series of changes with virtual work and workplaces that is both cultural and structural. Many companies today are re-imagining business models and processes to keep pace with an ever-changing geo-political landscape.

In this article, we will explore the latest trends in virtual work and workplaces, look at the implications they have on the future of work and workplaces, and consider the opportunities this shift provides for the work of the gospel and expansion of God's kingdom until his return.

Trends in Virtual Work

Virtual work can be seen as an extension of what Meta calls 'extended reality' (XR), an immersive, interconnected 3D world in which virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and cryptocurrencies will redefine how we live, work and socialize.[1]

In the spirit of virtual work and the incorporation of artificial intelligence, we asked ChatGPT to contribute to our understanding of what some of these trends might be.

- Remote work: The pandemic has forced many companies to adopt remote work as a temporary measure. However, remote work was already a growing trend before the pandemic, and it is likely to continue in the post-pandemic world. This means that employees can work from anywhere in the world, which can result in greater flexibility and work-life balance.
- Virtual collaboration: As more people work remotely, collaboration tools like video conferencing, chat apps, and project management software have become essential. These tools allow teams to communicate and collaborate effectively, regardless of where they are located.
- Digital transformation: The move to virtual work has also led to a broader digital transformation in many industries. Companies are adopting new technologies to streamline processes, automate tasks, and improve efficiency. This includes cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and the internet of things (IoT).
- New business models: Virtual work has opened up new business models, such as the gig economy, where freelancers can work for multiple clients at the same time. This has also given rise to new platforms, such as Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb, that connect people with services and resources they need.
- Cybersecurity: As more work is done online, cybersecurity has become a major concern for companies. Cyber attacks have become more sophisticated, and companies need to take steps to protect their data and systems from breaches.[2]

Virtual Work as a Medium

Virtual work can be looked upon as a medium by which people can extend themselves to engage in work that, in the past, required physical presence. Virtual work spaces are thereby are also extensions of physical work spaces. This is what Marshall McLuhan referenced when he coined the phrase 'the medium is the message'.[3]

Using the 'Four Laws of Media' developed by McLuhan, one can explore the four aspects of virtual work and work spaces as a medium.

What does the medium enhance?

With the use of tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and collaborative software, people and teams can collaborate

across vast distances, even working on one document simultaneously. This technology has collapsed space, distance, and time zones onto one's device and screen. This application is relevant not only to work spaces, but also to virtual churches and virtual small groups, which enabled worship services and small groups to continue to 'meet' during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What does the medium make obsolete?

Virtual work has reduced the need for commuting to work and the demand for office space. Many office spaces have been vacated or repurposed in major cities. Some estimate that current office usage is at approximately 50 percent of pre-pandemic levels, which may become the new standard.[4] This shift may bypass sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, farming, and service-oriented industries which will continue to require physical presence.

The simple human interactions we used to take for granted—a pat on a back for a job well done, an affirmative glance across the hallway, chats by the coffee machine or in the lunch room—are greatly restricted by virtual work. This lack of physical contact also complicates colleagues' attempts to learn about each other's culture and language.

According to a PEW research report for the U.S., the adoption of virtual or hybrid forms of worship and church as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak has not altered the share of adults who say they attend religious services in a given month, but it has dramatically shifted how they participate.[5]

What does the medium retrieve that had been rendered obsolete earlier?

As people were no longer required to commute extensively into cities for work, virtual work helped in some cases to bring about greater work-life balance. In previous generations and in some areas of the world today, the home has been a workplace for labour such farming, carpentry etc. The industrial revolution and the growth of labour specialization brought many of these tasks out of the home, but virtual work has made the home a workplace again, albeit with different kinds of work. Pandemic lockdowns forced families to coexist in the home—working and schooling alongside each other (with varying degrees of success). This resulted in more family together time. It also encouraged a shift in expectations, whereby productivity could be measured by work outcomes rather than simply by hours clocked.

What does the medium become when taken to extremes?

As most of the work performed virtually is intellectual rather than physical, there will come a time when this work could well be replaced by artificial intelligence. There is a limit to the amount time a human can spend on devices before becoming fatigued. Many during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced what is known as 'Zoom fatigue' after spending hours in video conferences and meetings. Post-pandemic, many were relieved to meet and collaborate with their colleagues again in the flesh. As beings who are social in nature, we crave in-person interactions. Virtual and/or remote work is fundamentally lacking in this essential area of human existence.

Do virtual spaces have space for all of us?

While the virtual world has the potential to bring people together in new and exciting ways, it is right for us to consider carefully if digital spaces are capable of accommodating all of us—both in terms of our populations and our nature.

Valuing the Whole Person

Humans are embodied beings, having what Jesus described as heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). Other than an intellectual presence, a person is also physical, emotional, and spiritual. Virtual work and workplaces separate the physical aspects, and the mediums of virtual conferences and collaboration software disable or severely limit conveyance of sympathy, apathy, and other emotional and spiritual aspects of a person.

Though various traditions take different perspectives on it, all generally agree that the theological concept of *imago Dei* includes humans as embodied beings. Jesus Christ,

the Word made flesh (John 1), demonstrated and affirmed this embodiment, dispelling the Greek dualistic worldview that the physical body is corrupt and a source of temptation. Human personhood is inextricably physical and spiritual. For this reason, to the degree that virtual workplaces disregard the body or make it irrelevant, they de-humanize the person. A virtual world limits our senses. While devices may allow us to hear and see, we can at best see only a portion of the person through a camera, and sounds are mediated to us through technological filters. Current technology does not allow us to touch or smell, and even with future advances in technology, we can only hope for replicas of reality.[6]

With these limitations, what happens to relationships and bonds between people? In Genesis, humans were not only created for worship of God, they were also created for relationships and community. It is not good for man to be alone. Through anthropology and social science, we know that human beings are social beings that require interactions with people. For example, children who were socially isolated tended to have lower subsequent educational attainment, be in a less advantaged social class in adulthood, be psychologically distressed across adulthood, be obese, and smoke.[7]

How then can companies, social groups, and churches create a sense of community through the virtual medium? Jonathan Sacks wrote that there is an inherent 'groupishness' that lies at the heart of human identity: I am who I am because of the group or groups to which I belong. I am because we are. Against liberalism where the individual has no attachments to any group, the idea of an 'unsituated self' as Michael Sandel put it, is not true to life.[8] Virtual work lacks the social interactions that naturally occur at a physical workplace, hindering community-building and adding to isolation.

Valuing All Labour

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments imposed restrictions on movement in order to curb the spread of the virus. The global economy almost came to a halt, while people working in fields deemed 'non-essential' were told either to close or move to an online mode. Interestingly, many low wage, manual, and precarious types of work such as cleaning, nursing, food service and delivery, garbage collection, and supermarket store clerks were suddenly classified as 'essential workers,' though the wages they received rarely reflected this valuable status.

> ***"If in our embrace of virtual work, we directly or indirectly devalue any occupation by which humans can glorify God by serving their fellow man, then we commit a grave error."***

Our societies (including churches and Christian communities) have been influenced by a Greek dualistic worldview which favours intellectual work over manual work. Within our churches, this same dualism creates a divide between the sacred and the secular. However, Scripture bears no duality, whether between ancient and modern, eastern and western, faith and work, or charity and justice.

Human work is part of God's good design in creation. God even portrays himself as a worker (Gen 1–2; John 5:17; Rev 21:5), specifically as shepherd (Ps 23), warrior (Exod 15:3), teacher (Ps 143:10; Prov 15:33), potter (Jer 18:6; Rom 9:20–21), and vinedresser (Isa 5:1–7; John 15:1–6).[9] God welcomes the whole of our working lives within the sphere of ministry, as we serve God in different callings. If in our embrace of virtual work, we directly or indirectly devalue any occupation by which humans can glorify God by serving their fellow man, then we commit a grave error.

Attending to Mental Health

In a 2022 Gallup survey of US Employee Work Locations, about 49 percent of remote-capable employees were in hybrid mode. Exclusively remote work dropped from a peak of 70 percent at the height of COVID-19 to about 29 percent in Q2 of 2022. About a third preferred exclusively remote and two-thirds preferred hybrid, with only 6 percent preferring

full onsite. Employees who don't work in their preferred location have significantly lower employee engagement, alongside higher burnout and desire to quit. They simply do not feel well-positioned to do their best work or live their best life.[10]

Executives trying to get workers to return to the office say remote and hybrid work lead to social isolation, a sense of meaninglessness, and a lack of work-life boundaries. They cite numerous prominent articles, saying that remote work can lead to depression, substance abuse, and sedentary behaviour. While this may be true, it overlooks the many pitfalls that also accompany office-centric work.[11]

Ultimately, it is not the format of the workspace—either virtual or physical—but the culture of the organisation and the environment it creates that fosters a sense of purposeful, meaningful, work and life. Any work environment can be stressful, anxiety-causing, and even toxic, leading to multiple mental health and other health issues. Consider the issues of mobbing at work, work culture such as 996 (9am to 9pm six days a week), or phenomenon such as karoshi (overwork death) or karojisatsu (overwork suicide). These exist in both virtual and office-based work.

Life-giving work cultures make space for physical and mental health. In the example of Jesus, he got up very early in the morning and went to a solidary place where he prayed (Mark 1:35). Believers must make time and space to be engaged in both the active and contemplative life—ora et labora (pray and work) which is a traditional slogan of the Benedictines. This practice promotes whole-person well-being.

Addressing Access Inequity

As exciting as it may be to imagine the possibilities for virtual work, the reality is not so bright, particularly for those who are left behind in the digital divide. COVID-19 was also dubbed the 'inequality virus' due to its contribution to widening the rich-poor gap. Several international studies have shown that the overarching effects of COVID-19 could deepen inequalities between rich and poor nations, between urban and rural populations, and between communities of different socioeconomic levels, age, gender, and colour.[12] Around the world, a marked digital gap, both in access and in fluency exists along socioeconomic lines.[13] In Argentina for example, 32 percent of households do not have a fixed internet access. In its least connected province, that number is as high as 68 percent.[14] Though 93 percent of young people have mobile phones with internet, only 55 percent have computers. While five out of ten young people from the upper class use technology almost all the time at work, only one out of ten in the lower classes uses it. Taking into consideration that technological and scientific capacities are increasingly necessary in workplaces in almost every field, great efforts must be made to reduce this gap from the earliest years of education.

> ***"Life-giving work cultures make space for physical and mental health."***

Addressing Gender Inequality

In addition to the digital divide, we must also address the gender divide. A 2019 International Monetary Fund report indicates that female workers are at a significantly higher risk for displacement by automation than male workers, with 11 percent of the female workforce at high risk of being automated given the current state of technology, albeit with significant cross-country heterogeneity. The probability of automation is lower for younger cohorts of women and for those in managerial positions.[15] The pace of this shift has likely accelerated since the report's publication.

The COVID-19 crisis and the rapid growth of teleworking generated a high-impact change in the lives of women. Some women benefited in the areas of childcare and domestic responsibilities, but this shift did not necessarily generate greater co-responsibility in household tasks, nor did it generate more egalitarian workplaces. Since the transition to remote work due to the pandemic, the mental health problems of women appear to have increased

significantly over those of men as a result of the overload produced by balancing telework with unpaid labour, such as caring for children, the elderly, etc.[16] It is highly necessary that organizations commit to preventing the exacerbation of gender disparity through telecommuting. Steps which may aid in this include:

- promoting equity in wages
- offering career development opportunities for both men and women
- providing support for families to pay for domestic helpers or childcare-related services
- establishing the right to disconnect
- generating networking spaces that allow teleworkers who could be disproportionately disadvantaged by virtual work to grow and develop their professional careers

As Christians, we know that faith in Jesus makes each of us equal with each other (Gal 3:28). Re-thinking and reflecting on gender roles and their implications in families and social organizations can help reduce the gender gap at work and contribute to a better quality of life.

Big Brother Is Watching

Along with the rise in telework came another interesting phenomenon. Managers who were not used to having staff away from the office ended up monitoring staff by requiring them to turn on their device cameras even while they were home to ensure that they were working in front of their terminals and devices. This evokes images of George Orwell's classic Nineteen Eighty-Four where 'Big Brother is always watching you.'[17] More sophisticated monitoring technologies take screen shots of employees' laptops and give activity scores based on keyboard typing and mouse movement. A poll by the Trade Union Congress in 2022 found that 60 percent of employees had experienced tracking in the last year. Workers who are under surveillance report feeling exhausted by trying to reach employers' productivity targets.[18] Surveillance at work isn't new, but when working virtually from home, such surveillance infringes on the personal space of workers and their families and further blurs the lines between work and personal space.

Leading and managing organisations virtually requires new attitudes and skill sets. We must re-design jobs and accountability mechanisms to assess work more by objectives met than by time spent and activity generated. We must also invest in building trust between workers and their supervisors regardless of whether work is conducted in person or virtually. Generally, when employers lack trust, they have a negative or suspicious view of people's motivation, and the resulting work environment is usually disastrous. The Apostle Paul offers an example of restoring trust when he reconciles Onesimus (a run-away slave who came to faith through Paul) to his Christian master Philemon. He also exhorts Christians to 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest but each of you to the interests of the others' (Phil 2:2-4).

Opportunities for the Gospel

Where then does this leave the work of the gospel and the church? Rather than rejecting virtual work or cyberspace for their possible ills, we can work to create work environments—virtual, in-person, and hybrid—that attend to the full needs of persons. These include:

- Helping those left behind by the digital gap to acquire skills that will help them to find jobs and adapt to this new reality. Faith-based ministries can reach out to digitally disadvantaged individuals to provide access, training, and job opportunities. In addition, local churches can also double up as vocational centres.
- Creating online communities where those affected by stress, anxiety, and isolation can be nudged to step out of their homes and into community, with the goal of fostering friendships and providing social and mental health support.
- Advocating for fair wages for 'essential workers' and narrowing the gender wage

gap in our society. Unfortunately, some Christian business owners are seen to exploit low wage and/or female workers. Advocacy for fair wages can be done through raising these issues at unions, business associations, or chambers of commerce by prominent businessmen and women rather than by voices from outside business communities.

- Initiating or continuing to teach a theology of work in our churches that is biblically based and relevant, providing guidance for vocational calling at work. This leads to Christian spirituality that promotes work-life integration with a rhythm of active engagement and contemplative reflection.
- Building communities that reflect the kingdom of God. As the world moves away from this social necessity, Christian communities have a fresh opportunity to reflect the love of Christ through our love for one another (John 13:34–35).

Conclusion

What would Jesus say about our virtual work? Probably that we as humankind focus too much on efficiency and fall prey to the temptation to assume that we can do a lot more than what is realistic for a human being, given the physical and time limitations of each person. Virtual work does not necessary change the nature of the work, the tasks performed, or the necessity for collaboration and serving other people. However, it does change the way and context in which work is being performed through the new medium of virtual workplaces. With more virtual work and workplaces (and more hybrid forms moving forward), what new cultures will emerge? Virtual work can be positive. The contributors to this paper have collaborated entirely remotely from three different countries and two time zones. Perhaps it is time for Christians and churches around the world to, "reflect, re-think, re-group, re-envision, re-tool, and be fully ready to re-engage"[19] in this new reality of virtual work and workplaces.

Endnotes

1 "The future of the metaverse and Extended Reality." *KPMG*. Accessed April 4, 2023. https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/insights/2022/04/the-future-of-the-metaverse.html.

2 Generated by ChatGPT on prompt "Describe trends in virtual work and workplaces"

3 Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media:* The Extension of Man (New York, NY: Signet Books, 1964).

4 Annie Erling Gofus. "Companies Look to Downsize Office Space as Remote Work Continues." Global Workforce. March 23, 2023. https://www.worldwideerc.org/news/global-workforce/companies-look-to-downsize-office-space-as-remote-work-continues.

5 Justin Nortey and Michael Rotolo. "How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services." *Pew Research Center*. March 28, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/28/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-s-religious-services/.

6 Timothy Liu. "COVID Pandemic and Implications on Ecclesiology." *IMPACT Magazine*. https://www.impact.com.sg/post/covid-pandemic-and-implications-on-ecclesiology.

7 Rebecca E. Lacey, Meena Kumari, and Mel Bartley. "Social Isolation in Childhood and Adult Inflammation: Evidence from the National Child Development Study." *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 50, 85–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2014.08.0074.

8 Jonathan Sacks. *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020).

9 Gordon Preece, Timothy Liu and Wong Siew Li, (ed.). "Lausanne Occasional Paper: Marketplace Ministry." *Lausanne Movement*. 2004. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/marketplace-ministry-lop-40.

10 Ben Wigert and Sangeeta Agrawal, "Returning to the Office: The Current, Preferred and Future State of Remote Work." *Gallup*. August 31, 2022. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/397751/returning-office-current-preferred-future-state-remote-work.aspx.

11 Gleb Tsipursky. "Does Remote Work Hurt Well-being and Work-Life Balance?" *Forbes*. Nov 1, 2022. https://www.forbes.com/sites/glebtsipursky/2022/11/01/does-remote-work-hurt-wellbeing-and-work-life-balance/?sh=234600ff4b20.

12 Ng Jun Sen and Natasha Meah. "The Big Read: How COVID-19, dubbed the 'inequality virus', has further widened the rich-poor gap." Channel News Asia. August 23, 2021. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/covid-19-inequality-virus-further-widened-rich-poor-gap-2127951.

13 Marita Carballo. "Ricos y pobres: las razones de la brecha digital entre los jóvenes argentinos." *Clarin*. June 4, 2018. https://www.clarin.com/opinion/ricos-pobres-razones-brecha-digital-jovenes-argentinos_0_S16SZaflQ.html.

14 "32% of Argentine households without fixed Internet connection, says report." *Buenos Aires Times*. November 6, 2021. https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/32-of-argentine-households-do-not-have-a-fixed-internet-connection-says-national-report.phtml.

15 Mariya Brussevich, Era Dabla-Norris, and Salma Khalid. "Is Technology Widening the Gender Gap? Automation and the Future of Female Employment." IMF. May 6, 2019.

16 David Fang, Sonia K. Kang, Sarah Kaplan. "We need to make sure telecommuting does not exacerbate gender disparity." *The Lancet*. July 11, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)01211-9.

17 George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1949).

18 Clea Skopeliti. "'I feel constantly watched': the employees working under surveillance." *The Guardian*. May, 30, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/may/30/i-feel-constantly-watched-employees-working-under-surveillance-monitorig-software-productivity.

19 Timothy Liu. "COVID Pandemic and Implications on Ecclesiology." *IMPACT Magazine.* https://www.impact.com.sg/post/covid-pandemic-and-implications-on-ecclesiology.

Authors

Dr David Doong (Ph.D. in Theology, Fuller) is currently the general secretary of CCCOWE (Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelization). He served as a church pastor and an adjunct professor in various seminaries before current role. He is also a podcaster who hosts "Missional Discipleship" podcast interviewing global Chinese Christian leaders weekly, and the author of "Practical Theology as Discipleship" and "Missional Discipleship".

Ruth Elisabeth Kopf Associate Consultant of Akiel, Business and Organizational Management Consulting. Trainer and coordinator of the area People Experience. Development and execution of virtual and on-site leadership training programs and team building activities in profit and non-profit organizations. Consulting and training remote team leaders in LatAm. Volunteer in the training department and member of the committee at FBO Fortalecer, (www.fortalecerfamilias.org) Educator. Teacher of English as a Foreign Language. Finishing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, specialized in the organizational and work field. Diploma in Human Resources.

Timothy Liu is a healthcare administrator and COO for a public psychiatric hospital in Singapore with 2000 beds. He was formerly CEO of a hospice for 7 years. Prior to healthcare, he spent almost 20 years as a Regional Sales and Marketing Director for multi-national tech and engineering companies. He holds a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering, Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Health. For his contribution in the fight against covid, he was conferred the Public Service Medal in Singapore. Timothy served as Special Interest Committee Chair, Senior Associate and Catalyst for the Workplace at Lausanne Movement for 15 years. He is founder of Marketplace Christian Network in Singapore. His passion is to help followers of Jesus connect their faith to everyday work and life.

DECENTRALIZATION & WEB3

Andrew Han, Jason Lee, Jasmine Ng

The Great Commission[1] is a calling that no single person can fulfil.[2] Thankfully, over the centuries, the advent of new technologies like the printing press, airplanes, and the internet have all played pivotal roles in facilitating global missions. Web3 technologies are now part of this story.

This report will explore the current and potential future state of Web3 technology and its implications. It aims to provide an understanding of the current state and potential future developments of this technology along with the impact of the decentralization that accompanies it as we seek to equip the reader to embrace and navigate the transformative landscape of Web3 technologies to advance the gospel.

Understanding Web3

Known as the third generation of the web, Web3 describes the evolution of the internet.[3] While its exact parameters are debated, here are some examples of what we know Web3 can do:

- Allow users to own their data and control how it is used
- Make it easier for people to connect and build communities
- Create new ways to publish and distribute content
- Make it easier for people to launch and run global initiatives
- Provide more secure and transparent economic transactions

To quote Paul Vigna and Michael J. Casey in The Age of Cryptocurrency, 'Web3 represents a new frontier of possibilities, where individuals have more control over their data, identity, and online interactions.'[4] To understand this better, let's first look at its predecessors.

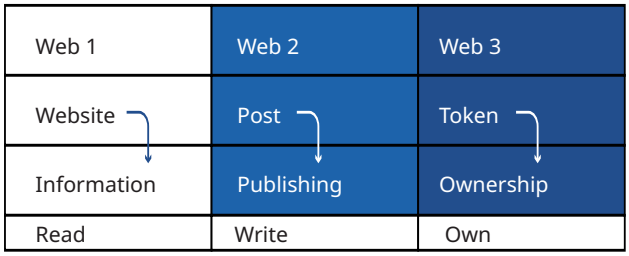


Figure 1: Web Generations[5]

Web1 is the early version of the internet that emerged in the 1990s. It primarily consisted of static websites where users could consume information with little opportunity for interaction.

Web2 is the internet we are most familiar with today. It brought significant advancements, introducing interactive websites, social media platforms, online marketplaces, and various web applications. Web2 empowered users not only to consume content but also to create and share it.

Web3 represents a paradigm shift in how we perceive and engage with the internet. If we imagine that the internet is an extensive library, in the current web (Web2), a few big companies own and control the library. These companies decide what books are in the library, who can read them, and how much they cost. In Web3, the library is owned and controlled by its users. This means everyone has equal access to the library, and no one can censor or control what you read.

Daniel Drescher explains that with Web3, 'Individuals can be owners of their data, creators of their digital identities, and participants in decentralized economies, leading to greater autonomy and self-determination.'[6]

Web3, Crypto . . . Scam?

When the word Web3 is brought up during a conversation, it is fair to assume that the word 'cryptocurrency' will be thrown into the mix.[7] Multiple headline-worthy downfalls have caused the loss of investor monies to the tune

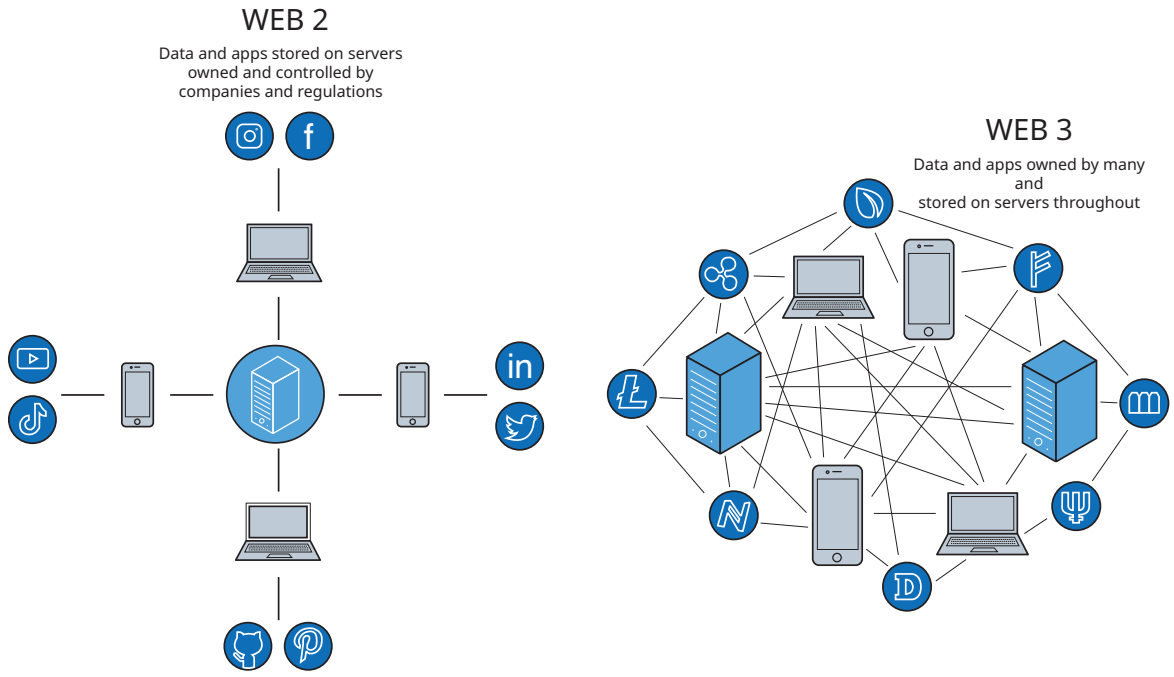


Figure 2: Web3 enables a more diverse ownership structure[8]

of billions of US dollars. Although this report will not focus on the impact of cryptocurrencies, we will discuss how Web3 came to being—Bitcoin.

Known as the most globally recognized cryptocurrency, Bitcoin was introduced in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis—directly born from the desire to form a financial system that could operate independently from the modern banking system.[9] The success of Bitcoin demonstrated how a financial concept, when developed collectively with focused intention, could become an asset recognized globally, even by traditional financial institutions.

Today, Bitcoin is officially recognized across many jurisdictions in different shapes and forms —by some countries as an approved commodity and by other countries as legal tender—spurring the creation of multiple other cryptocurrencies hoping to have a similar impact. While we won't cover the other cryptocurrencies in this report, at the most fundamental level, each one is similar in that they could not function without financial decentralization.

Decentralization Defined

Decentralization is a complex and multifaceted concept; no single definition is universally accepted. However, it is commonly described as the distribution of power or authority away from a central location or organization.

By this definition, decentralization posits the idea that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible, closest to those affected by these decisions. It can also be seen as a vehicle for promoting participation and democracy, giving people more say in how they are governed.

Decentralization can be challenging, as ensuring everyone has an equitable voice and stake in their own governance can be difficult to manage. However, we believe applying principles of decentralization is well worth the effort, as implementing it well has the potential to build stronger and more just churches, communities, and societies.

Critics of decentralization have viewed it as overly fragile compared to centralization's robust efficiency and clarity in decision-making, especially when centralized systems benefit from streamlined processes. However, centralization can also come at the cost of limiting self-determination, privacy, and personal freedom.

Decentralization and Web3

The concept of decentralization lies at the heart of Web3 technologies, heralding a new era where control and authority are distributed among ecosystem participants. It offers

a new paradigm. These tools enable the creation of a decentralized digital infrastructure supporting robust economies. This decentralized approach fosters innovation, inclusivity, and transparency, aligning with the mission to spread the gospel while preserving individual freedoms and choices. As William Mougayar puts it, 'Decentralization in Web3 offers the promise of reducing reliance on centralized gatekeepers, enabling more democratic decision-making, and fostering innovation at the edges of the network.'[10]

Familiar Web3 buzzwords are a combination of concepts including the metaverse, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, decentralized applications (DApps), smart contracts, decentralized finance (DeFi), non-fungible tokens (NFTs), artificial intelligence (AI), internet of things (IoT), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR). This is not an exhaustive list, and we won't go into details on each term.

However, as a whole, most of these technologies are only just emerging into public view and still experience limited mainstream adoption beyond their theoretical use cases. Some reasons for this limited adoption include conceptual complexity, high development cost, lack of user-friendliness, security concerns, lagging regulations, and limited integration into existing systems.

The question then is, why are we discussing this topic when it lacks mainstream adoption? The reality is that significant thought leadership institutions like the World Economic Forum,[11] United Nations,[12] and McKinsey Global Institute[13] have already begun to document the economic and geopolitical imperative of diving in deep to understand these burgeoning technologies and how to take advantage as they start to grow in market share.

As with any ecosystem development, greater adoption is needed to grow the services and benefits offered by Web3. While steps are being taken to enable higher adoption rates from a technology standpoint, greater awareness, knowledge, and government regulation are needed to encourage participation.

This chart shows Web3 adoption through unique active wallets on Web3 applications as reported addresses. The number of wallets indicates the number of users in Web3.

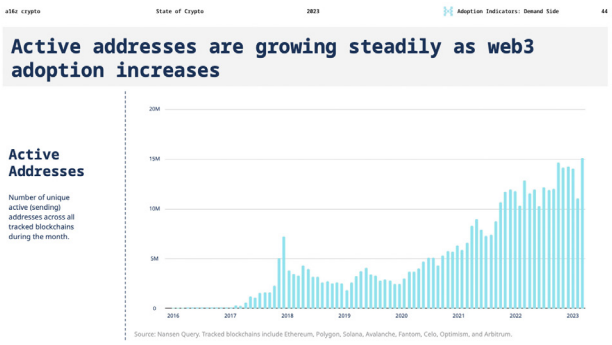


Figure 3: Web3 Adoption[14]

As you read this paper, Christians worldwide have already started recognizing how to take advantage of these Web3-enabled benefits. Let us now turn to consider a few case studies.

Decentralization, Web3, and the Great Commission

Case Study: Giving in cryptocurrency yields greater efficiency and transparency

Resourcing the work of the Great Commission is crucial, and having the ability to give in cryptocurrency (crypto)[15] adds to the many benefits of decentralization and Web3. Crypto can offer greater efficiency and transparency because it provides:

- Lower fees: The fees associated with crypto donations are typically much lower than those of traditional fiat currency donations. This lower cost is partly thanks to crypto transactions not requiring third-party intermediaries to process transfers.
- Near-instantaneous transfers: Crypto donations can be transferred in moments worldwide, saving both givers and recipients time and money. This contrasts with traditional donations, which can take time to process due to the traditional financial system's layers of intermediaries.
- Enhanced transparency: All crypto transactions are recorded on a public blockchain, which makes them

transparent and auditable. This helps ensure that donations are being used for their intended purpose.

If an organization or individual accepts crypto donations, donations can be processed directly through an individual, custodial, or smart-contract wallet. Alternatively, donations can be made through specialized donation platforms.[16] Other potential benefits of giving in crypto include:

- Reaching a new audience: Crypto donations can help to reach a new audience of donors, such as people who are more familiar with the ownership of digital assets.
- Diversifying funding sources: Alongside receiving transfers in a national currency, crypto adds to the diversity of funding sources.
- Leveraging the power of blockchain: The underlying blockchain technology of cryptocurrency can create new ways to track and manage charitable donations.

One point to note is that cryptocurrency tends to fluctuate in value depending on market conditions. Hence, the recipient will need to be prepared to receive this liquid asset at a value that may change if they keep it in its current form. Thankfully, the option that most donation platforms provide by default is automatically supporting the direct conversion of cryptocurrency into one's national currency on receipt to avoid the risk of unforeseen depreciation.

Case Study: Harnessing the power of community for translation

Translating the Bible into a specific language is no easy task. Even with an entire team of experienced translators, editors, theologians, and proof-readers, it can take more than ten years to complete. By leveraging the power of Web3 and AI, however, the body of Christ can bridge language barriers and provide access to the gospel. Web3 innovators are already applying these technologies to crowdsource the creation of translation engines for over 7,000 tribal languages.[17] For example, a game in development called "War Tribe of Binyamin" aims to harness a global online community's power to translate over 7,000 tribal languages. By crowdsourcing translation work via augmented reality, WarTribe aims to be a channel of employment for remote people groups via tokenization of activities similar to a play-to-earn revenue model.

By leveraging the power of Web3 and AI, the body of Christ can bridge language barriers and provide access to the Gospel. This can engage global audiences and foster deeper connections to one another while focusing on biblical truths. It can support collaborative efforts for accurate and efficient Bible translation into even the most remote languages by involving diverse communities and native speakers. AI-powered natural language processing (NLP) has great promise as a way to rapidly enhance the process of mapping sacred texts into non-trade languages.



Figure 4: Land of Promise

Case Study: Engaging the next generation in discovering their faith through gaming

Due to the accelerated pace of technology adoption through the global pandemic, virtual ecosystems are generating more engagement. This change highlights the need for the church to develop creative content that fosters biblical literacy. Enter the 'Land of Promise'—a Christian-influenced Minecraft universe created to facilitate interactive exploration of biblical teachings through meticulously crafted virtual landscapes like ancient Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee. Tailored lessons provided in-game can help guide spiritual growth and aid users in their faith journey.

The current sandbox initiative aims to provide a captivating gameplay experience and

enable mentorship and discipleship across geographical boundaries. Trained mentors initiate meaningful faith conversations with online visitors of all ages, discreetly sharing the gospel in the process. This is especially helpful in regions where openly sharing religious messages remains taboo at the very least and more often can potentially compromise one's physical safety.[18]

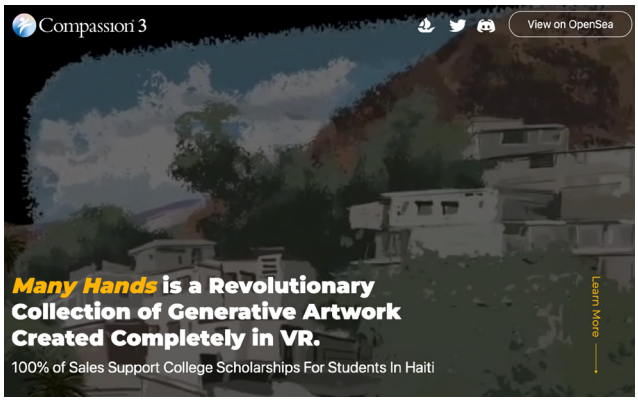


Figure 5: Many hands homepage

Case Study: Secure and low-cost fundraising through digital collectibles

Compassion International's successful ManyHands NFT fundraising campaign[19] financed university scholarships for high-achieving students in Haiti through the sale of digital assets known as non-fungible tokens (NFTs). You can think of these NFTs as digital art collectibles, each with their unique code verifying ownership to each buyer.

The sale of this special collection provided the funds to buy each student a laptop and granted their cohort access to ongoing leadership development and support throughout the next few years of their education.



Figure 6: Many Hands NFT, #102

If we extrapolate this use-case further, the ownership of a digital asset like this digital art piece can act as a virtual 'key' that can be used to grant an individual private access to a community of like-minded donors as well as the ministers and missionaries serving in particular organizations and networks. The benefit of being a part of this network goes far beyond the current status quo of receiving a monthly support letter by email.

By being connected to an inner circle of givers, donors will be able to receive further updates in real-time from the missionaries. By adopting digital assets like crypto, supporters could improve accountability and safely maintain closer contact with missionaries, who rarely tap their supporters' expertise and prayerful recommendations for their work.

Challenges for Great Commission Efforts

While embracing the opportunities Web3 offers, we must also understand and acknowledge the challenges that come with it.

Late and limited adoption: Suspicion toward these technological changes (in part due to their recent misuse for scams and fraud) has made many Christians reluctant to adopt them in their ministries. For some, this suspicion is fuelled by a lack of awareness. Web3 presents a steep learning curve for people lacking the specialized knowledge and expertise—or even internet access—needed to maximize its benefits.

Training and education: Greater investment in technology infrastructure and training in digital literacy is needed to empower individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in decentralized evangelism. This lack of accessibility becomes a pain point for faith-led organizations to understand how to integrate these tools, platforms, and models to enhance or evolve their work.[20]

Theological integrity and ethical concerns: A simple web search will yield multiple faith-based projects that raise serious ethical concerns and thus bring more questions than clarity for the Great Commission. The church must proactively address theological and ethical issues raised by this advance in technology. Just like the Bereans in the Bible,[21] we need to encourage discernment and critical thinking when engaging with decentralized platforms

and communities, just as we do when testing the proper doctrinal applications of Scripture.

A Path Forward

In harnessing Web3 technology for advancing God's kingdom, we are embarking on new wineskin work.[22] To prepare for this exciting endeavour, our first and most crucial step is to seek divine guidance through prayer and remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In this process, we must maintain a posture of flexibility, adaptability, and humility, recognizing that God is unfolding a new work among his people through these cutting-edge technologies. Just as a new wineskin is needed for new wine, we are called to embrace change and innovation as we work together to spread the gospel and fulfil our mission in the digital age.

A model for a path forward is a 3-pronged approach to educate, equip, and empower, all undergirded with unity of the body through collaboration.

Educate: Let's start with learning and understanding the basics of Web3. This report and the resources listed at the end are meant to be a starting point. Next, we must start conversations about this with our teams. Collaborative efforts across church organizations to hold seminars and workshops are a good way for the ekklesia[23] to come together. Early-stage resources are found in groups like Christians in Web3,[24] FaithTech,[25] and Indigitous,[26] who are already making strides in this direction and are invaluable resources. Whether we choose to engage with them or not, Web3 and the principles of decentralization are becoming an important part of our daily lives. It is time for the church to prayerfully consider how to use them for human flourishing and the greater glory of God.

Equip: To equip the church to be leaders in using Web3 technologies for the Great Commission requires God's shepherds to use and experiment with it. Life Church experimented by planting a church in the metaverse and learned that many traditional church-planting principles applied virtually too. However, the need for local church engagement is vital for the spiritual health of the new disciple.[27] As his body and bride, it is essential that we collaborate in these equipping experiments for faster learning and effective deployment in whatever areas our Lord calls us to. This is evidenced by the way the COVID-19 pandemic drove the need for 'church tech' as an industry on its own.[28] In this, we should help church leaders discover how to collaborate more effectively with technologists and industry professionals within and outside their own congregations, giving them concrete resources on how Web3 technology and digital missions can aid in fulfilling the Great Commission.[29]

Empower: As leaders, remember C.S. Lewis' wisdom: 'You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.' We can embrace the new wineskin of Web3 by empowering ourselves as leaders and leading our congregation into this new space with the focus of 'empowering through collaboration'. One example is a church that hosted a 'The Faith & AI: Friends or Foes?' event, which embodies the collaborative sharing and empowering of the body of Christ.[30] The purpose of the event was to empower collaboration across different churches, sharing knowledge and experiences to empower audiences and help transform their minds to pursue God's good and perfect will.[31] By breaking free from fear and doubt and leaning on the collective strength and talent in the body of Christ, we will effectively navigate and utilize Web3 technologies to advance the gospel.

Conclusion

The era of Web3 and decentralization is ushering in a technological revolution with unparalleled potential. Quoting Ryan Collins, 'The future of technology is uncertain, but one thing is for sure: it will continue to change the world in ways that we can't even imagine.'[32] As stewards of this transformative power, the question before us is whether we will wield it for good or ill. Will we harness it to build a better world or allow it to be a tool of destruction? The choice lies with us.

This technological wave presents an extraordinary opportunity for the church to fulfil its divine mission, as laid out in the Great Commission. Thoughtful and theologically informed stewardship of Web3 technologies

can amplify the dissemination of the gospel, transcending borders, cultures, and languages. The decentralized nature of Web3 aligns with the biblical notion that we are many parts but one body, each with unique gifts and roles. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered disciples to go forth and spread the message of salvation,[33] Web3 can empower the church to reach even greater heights.

However, seizing this opportunity requires a dual approach. First, the church must equip its missionaries to understand and navigate the digital sphere. Just as the apostles ventured into new territories to share the gospel, today's missionaries must navigate the digital mission field. Secondly, the broader body of Christ must be educated about the potential risks and challenges inherent in Web3. As the church, we are called to unity with many parts serving different functions, whether in physical ministries, virtual mission fields, or digital marketplaces.[34]

Crucially, the true transformation brought by Web3 will begin with the renewal of minds, both individually and collectively.[35] This renewal involves embracing the decentralized ethos, empowering believers to become shepherds in their own right. The potential of Web3 for the Great Commission can only be fully realized when the church embraces this transformation, equips its members for the digital age, and collectively acts as the body of Christ, fulfilling his mission with unity and purpose.

Resources

Books

- Ryan Collins. *The God of Tech: Modern technology, its Divine origin, and the next great movement of God through Spirit-led innovation* (self-published, 2023).
- Andy Crouch. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2017).
- John Dyer. *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011).
- Alan Noble. *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2018).
- Sandra Maria Van Opstal. *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2015).
- Sherry Turkle. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (London: Penguin Books, 2016).
- 'The FaithTech Playbook: Practicing Redemptive Technology.' *FaithTech*. https://faithtech.com/wp-content/uploads/The-FaithTech-Playbook.pdf.

Podcasts

- *The FaithTech Podcast* by FaithTech
- *AllThingsNew.Tech Podcast* by TheologyTech
- *The Bible for Normal People* by Pete Enns and Jared Byas
- *The Bible Project Podcast* by Tim Mackie and Jon Collins

Endnotes

1 Acts 1:8

2 Rom 12:4–5 presents the church of Christ as one body consisting of many parts.

3 Arjun Kharpal. 'What is "Web3"? Here's the vision for the future of the internet from the man who coined the phrase.' *CNBC.* 19 April 2022. https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/20/what-is-web3-gavin-wood-who-invented-the-word-gives-his-vision.html.

4 Paul Vigna and Michael J. Casey. *The Age of Cryptocurrency: How Bitcoin and Digital Money Are Challenging the Global Economic Order* (London: Picador, 2015).

5 Daren Matsuoka, Eddy Lazzarin, Robert Hackett, Stephanie Zinn. 'State of Crypto 2023.' a16z crypto. 11 April 2023. https://api.a16zcrypto.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/State-of-Crypto.pdf

6 Daniel Drescher. *Blockchain Basics: A Non-Technical Introduction in 25 Steps* (New York, NY: Apress, 2017).

7 Notable headlines related to this include the Terra Luna crash, the collapse of FTX together with the failure of Silicon Valley Bank, Signature, and Silvergate Bank.

8 Skip Level, "An Intro on Web3 for Product Managers," 2022

9 Satoshi Nakamoto, 'Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System.' 2008. https://bitcoin.org/bitcoin.pdf.

10 William Mougayar. *The Business Blockchain: Promise, Practice, and Application of the Next Internet Technology* (Toronto: Wiley, 2016).

11 Adrian Ma. 'What is Web3 ad How Could It Change the Internet?' *World Economic Forum.* 2 Mar 2023. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/what-is-web3-and-how-could-it-change-the-internet/.

12 '#Web3for2030: How can Web3 help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.' UNDP. 22 Nov 2022. https://www.undp.org/publications/web3for2030-how-can-web3-help-achieve-sustainable-development-goals.

13 Anutosh Banerjee, Robert Byrne, Ian De Bode, and Matt Higginson. 'Web3 Beyond the Hype.' *McKinsey & Company.* 26 Sept 2022. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/web3-beyond-the-hype.

14 Daren Matsuoka, Eddy Lazzarin, Robert Hackett, Stephanie Zinn. 'State of Crypto 2023.' a16z crypto. 11 April 2023. https://api.a16zcrypto.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/State-of-Crypto.pdf..

15 Cryptocurrency is a digital currency that uses cryptography to improve security. It is decentralized, meaning it is not subject to intermediary (government or financial institution) control. Currency transfers are done via a blockchain (a distributed immutable ledger of records hosted on Web3 servers).

16 Platforms that enable this include but are not limited to Engiven, Overflow, The Giving Block, Endaoment, Classy, Crypto for Charity, and PledgeGive.

17 Through the innovative use of AI and Augmented Reality (AR), a game in development called the 'WarTribe of Binyamin' proposes to achieve this goal by harnessing the power of a global online community via augmented reality. The creators of this game aim for it to be a channel of employment for remote people groups via tokenization of activities similar to a play-to-earn revenue model. For more information, visit https://wartribe.gravityjack.com/.

18 Patrick Bezalel Art. 'Land of Promise.' *YouTube*. 4 April 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F3unKa9dxI.

19 'Compassion International launches revolutionary NFT collection, created completely in VR.' *Compassion International.* 20 July 2022. https://www.compassion.com/news-releases/compassion-international-launches-revolutionary-nft-collection-created-completely-in-vr.htm.

20 @0xBacktrace, @0xSpade_wav, and @0xxxxxin, 'Web3 Mass Adoption: The Importance of Education.' *Treehouse.* 23 May 2023. https://www.treehouse.finance/treehouse-academy/web3-mass-adoption-the-importance-of-education.

21 Acts 17:11

22 Luke 5:37–39

23 Acts 11:26

24 'Uniting Christians in Web3.' *Christians in Web3.* https://www.cw3.global/.

25 'How FaithTech Bridges the Gap.' *FaithTech.* https://faithtech.com/.

26 'Helping You Reach Your World.' *Indigitous*. https://indigitous.org/.

27 '10 Great Insights from 10 Weeks of Church in the Metaverse.' *Open Network*. https://openblog.life.church/10-insight-from-10-weeks-of-church-in-the-metaverse/.

28 Will Robbins. 'Jesus, SaaS and digital tithing Part 1: Welcome to church tech.' *TechCrunch*. 30 July 2020. https://techcrunch.com/2020/07/30/jesus-saas-and-digital-tithing-welcome-to-churchtech/.

29 Col 3:23

30 'Faith and AI: Friends or Foes.' *Wesley Methodist Church.* 9 September 2023. https://wesleymc.org/events-courses/events/digital-wesley-faith-ai-friends-or-foes.

31 Rom 12:2

32 Ryan C. Collins. *The God of Tech: Modern technology, its Divine origin, and activating the next great movement of God through Spirit-led innovation* (self-published, 2023).

33 Acts 1 & 2

34 Gal 6:9–10

35 Rom 12:2

Authors

Andrew Han is the director of research with a multi-family office focusing on traditional financial markets and conducts research on the family office ecosystem, emerging financial services, and technologies. He has worked in tech start-ups focused on digital assets and healthcare. His ministry focus is on effectively impacting the marketplace with kingdom values.

Jason Lee is a founding steward of Christians in Web3. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Lausanne Movement. He is an active angel investor with an advisory firm focused on emerging technologies. He was previously the chief operating officer for the blockchain protocol Algorand Foundation. He was a FinTech start-up co-founder, ecosystem builder, and wealth management executive with Standard Chartered Bank.

Jasmine Ng is a seasoned professional with 25+ years of experience in financial services and technology. Her passion for using technology to create positive social impact led to recognition as a Global Women Empowerment Icon 2023 and an Exceptional Woman in Blockchain. She co-founded Women In Blockchain Asia, EnGame, and myBID (a blockchain-based ID management project). Jasmine is still active in EPIC Homes as an advisor and serves as vice chair of junior achievement (Malaysia). She actively supports many other non-profits and social enterprises.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their contribution to this report: John Knox, Celine Wee, John Kim, Cynthia Smith, Nick Kim, Jessica Chin, Ronald Wong, Patrick Bezalel Lee, Lily Chia, Stephen McCaskell, and Luke Richey.

WHAT IS **MINISTRY** IN A DIGITAL AGE?



INTRODUCTION

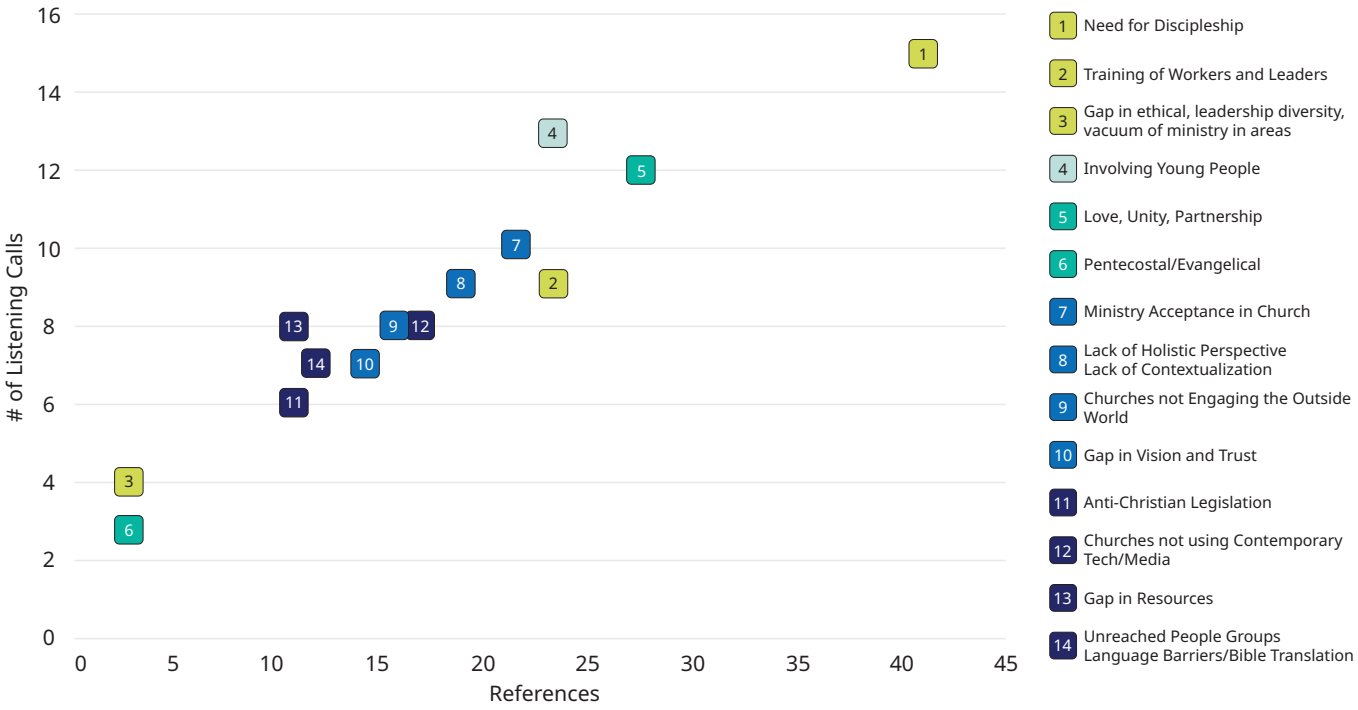
The majority of the world now lives in a digital age. Connections, influence, and ideas originate just as much, if not more, from digital media than personal relationships. As the church aims to be faithful to the great commission in this new digital context, ministry leaders are asking, 'What is Ministry in a Digital Age?'

The following section explores proclamation evangelism, scripture engagement, church forms, ministry data, and discipleship in a digital age.

DISCIPLESHIP

NEED FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Ranking of perceived global gaps and needs for Great Commission efforts



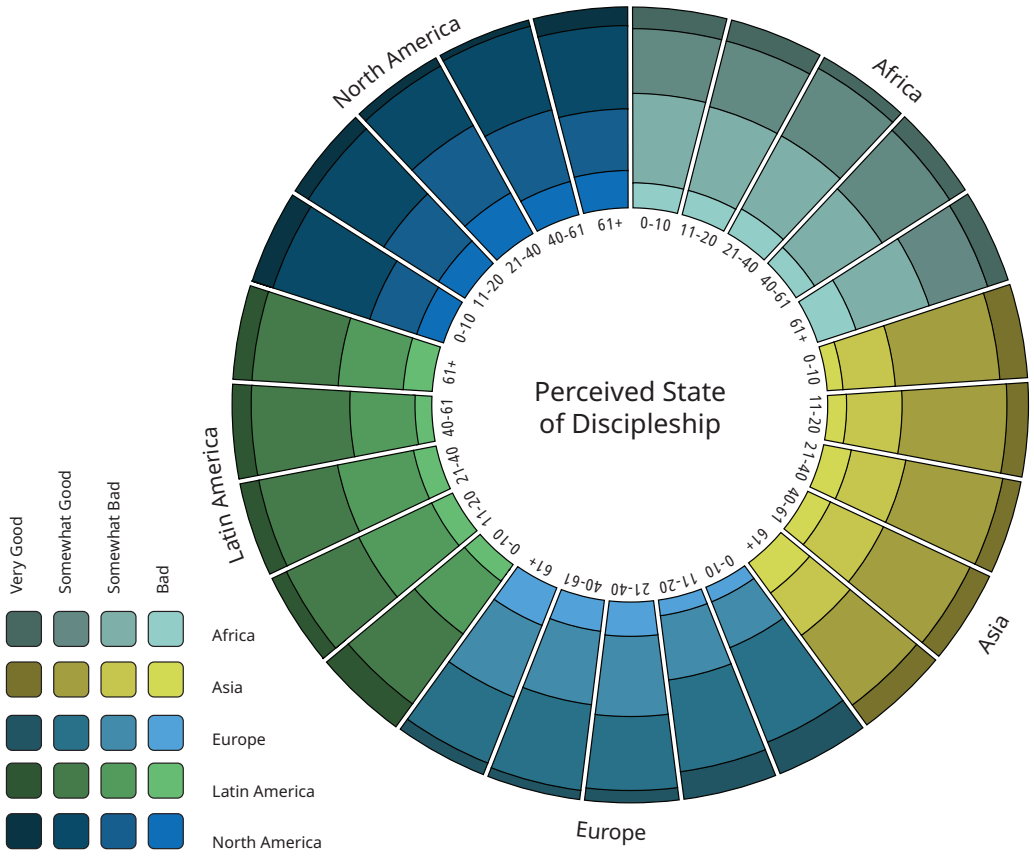
Source: Lausanne Movement, Lausanne 4 Listening Calls, 2022

LIMITED SUCCESS

Over a two year period, Lausanne Movement held a series of Global Listening calls and conducted a global survey of 1,500 leaders. Throughout the research, the 'Need for Discipleship' was by far the most frequently identified gap in Great Commission efforts. The second most identified gap was reaching youth.

Overall, only a small minority of leaders within each region perceived the status of our discipleship efforts as, 'very good' across all age groups. Additionally, it is key to note that the majority of regions perceived discipleship efforts of the 61+ age group was least good of all ages.

REGIONAL PERCEIVED STATE OF DISCIPLESHIP



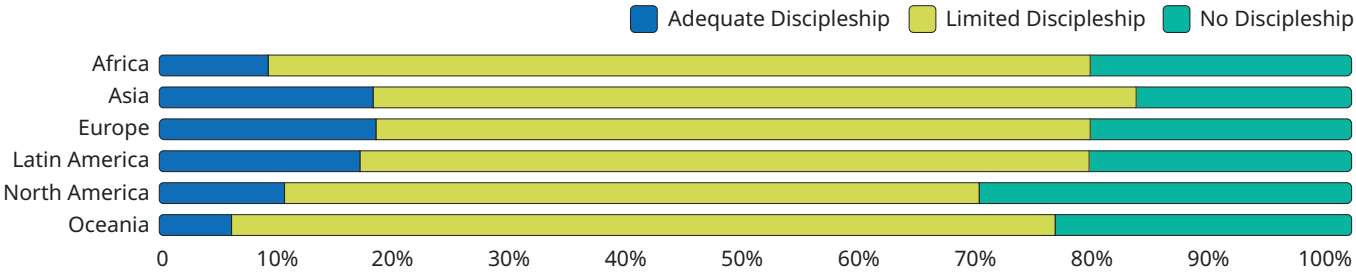
Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

MINISTRY

DISCIPLESHIP REPORT

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP

"In your context, when a person becomes a new believer in Christ, do you feel they are then adequately discipled in the Great Commission Mandate?"



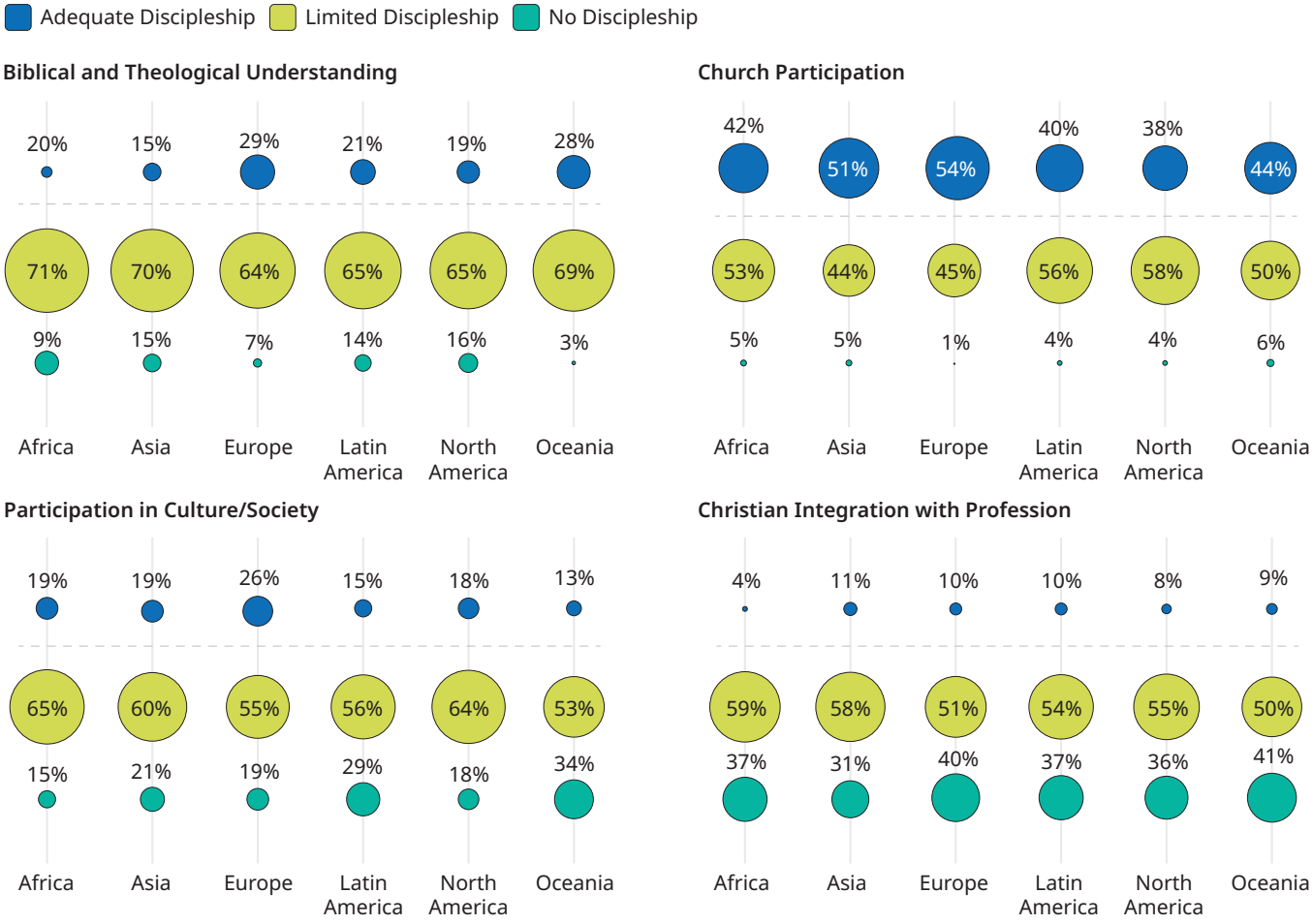
Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

PERCEPTIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP

In a survey asking 1,500 global Lausanne leaders their perception of the adequacy of discipleship in their context, results showed a varied perception across several sectors. In every region, leaders perceived that discipleship efforts are most adequate in church participation. Yet, in every region, leaders perceived that discipleship efforts are least adequate in Christian integration with an individual's profession. When considering discipling individuals in the Great Commission, only 5-15 percent of leaders in each region perceived there to be adequate discipleship with 20-30 percent of leaders perceiving there to be no discipleship in the Great Commission (in) their context. Overall, leaders perceived there to be limited discipleship across all discipleship areas.

DISCIPLESHIP IN VARIOUS AREAS

"In your context, when a person becomes a new believer in Christ, do you feel they are then adequately discipled in the following areas?"

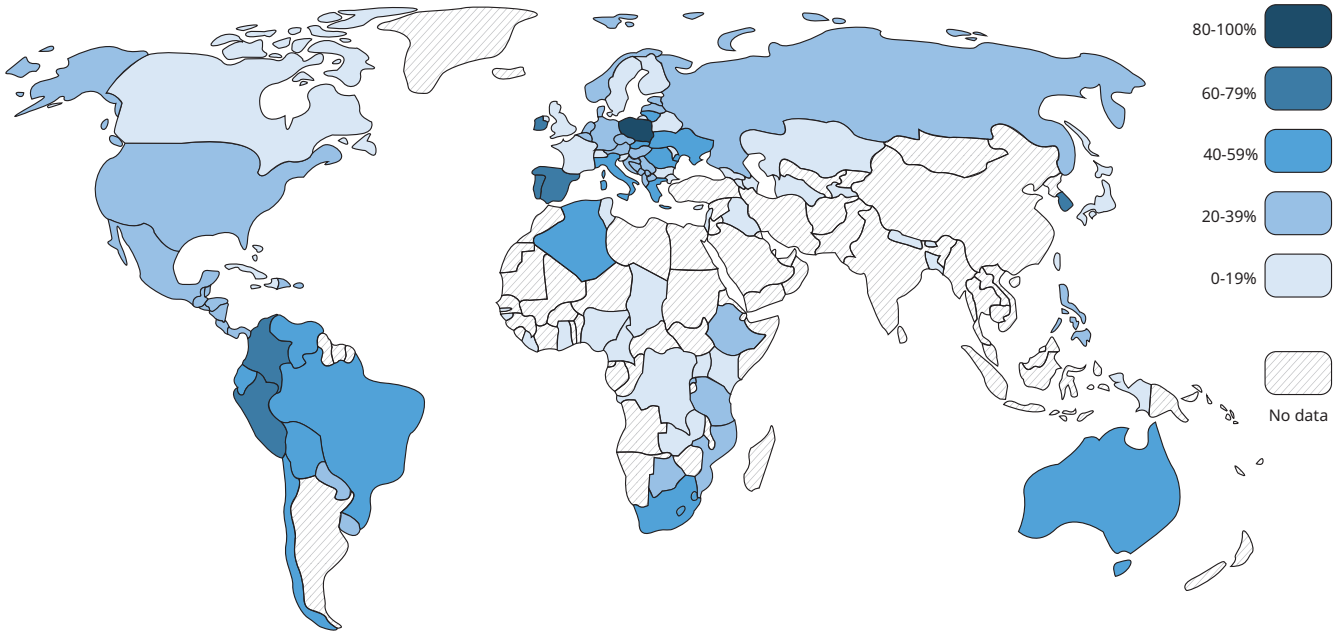


Source: Lausanne Movement, Global Leaders Survey, 2022

WORSHIP ENGAGEMENT

WEEKLY WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

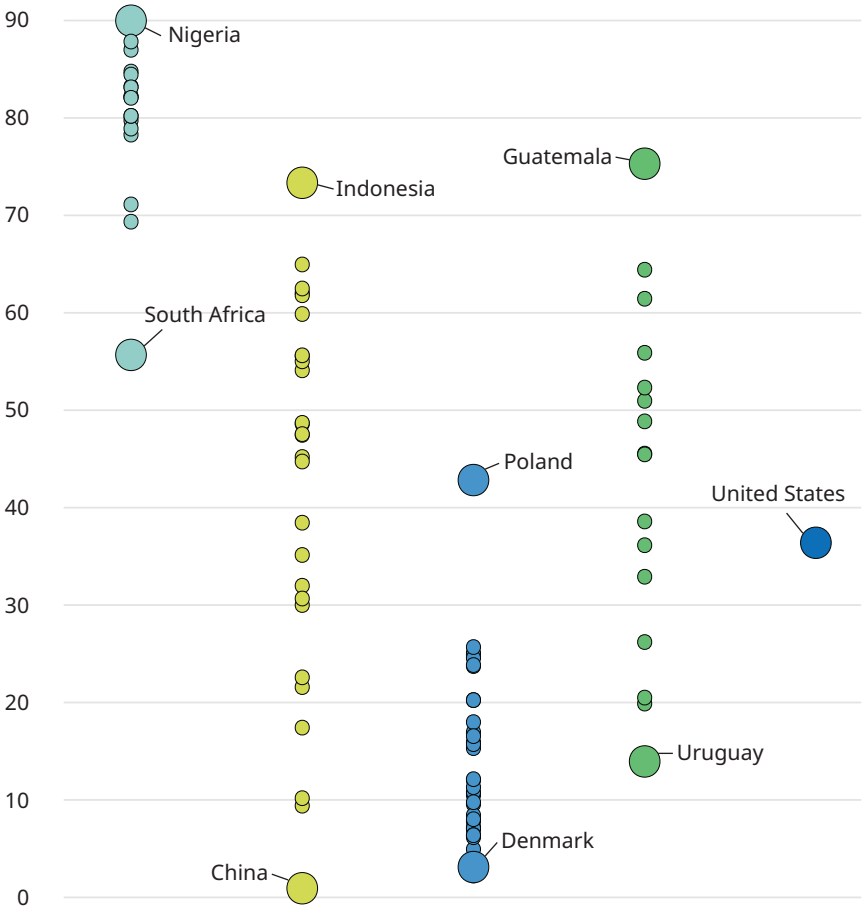
Worship attendance includes all major religions



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," 2008-2017

% WEEKLY WORSHIP* ATTENDANCE

% of adults who attend religious services weekly



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap...," 2008-2017; *Worship attendance includes all major religions.

GLOBAL WORSHIP

When comparing the religious adherence and weekly worship attendance, there is a noticeable difference. The percent of individuals who worship on a weekly basis is often significantly lower than the percent of individuals that identify as Christian.

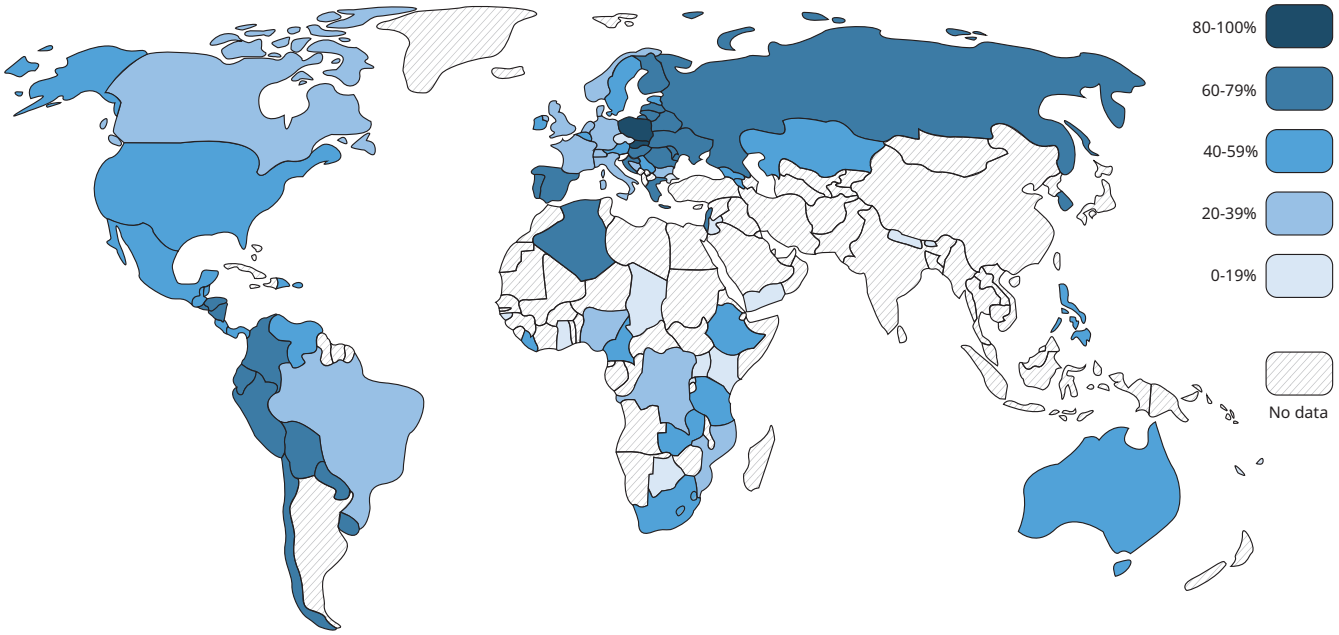
Worship attendance is lower than religious identification.

Across the global regions, there are noticeable variances. Africa leads the globe in average weekly attendance with countries like Nigeria seeing most of its population attending worship. On the other end of the spectrum, Europe and North America average the lowest attendance – with most European countries seeing less than 15 percent attendance. Latin America and Asia have a wide range of attendance across the region. Countries like Indonesia and Guatemala see over 70 percent weekly attendance and countries like Uruguay (less than 15 percent) and China (less than 5 percent) have only a small minority attending weekly.

PRAYER ENGAGEMENT

WEEKLY PRAYER

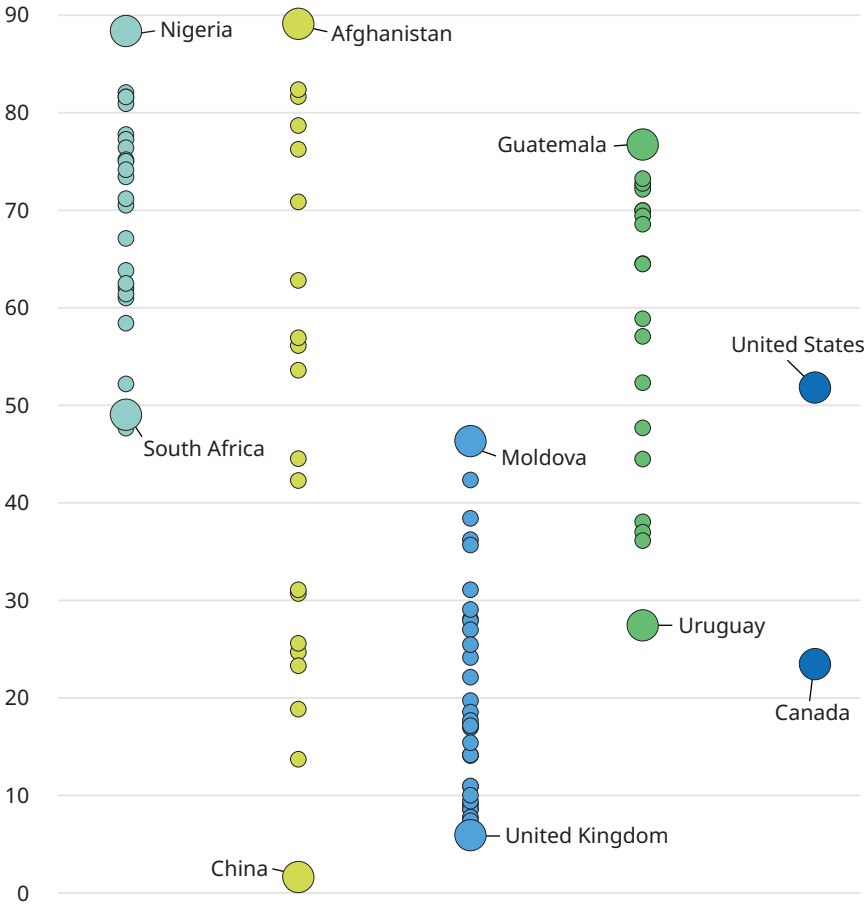
Prayer engagement includes all major religions



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World," 2008-2017

% WEEKLY PRAYER*

% of adults who say they pray daily



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in...," 2008-2017; *Prayer engagement includes all major world religions.

GLOBAL PRAYER

When comparing the prayer engagement and weekly worship attendance, there is a noticeable difference. The percent of individuals who engage in weekly prayer is observably higher in most countries than individuals who participate in weekly worship.

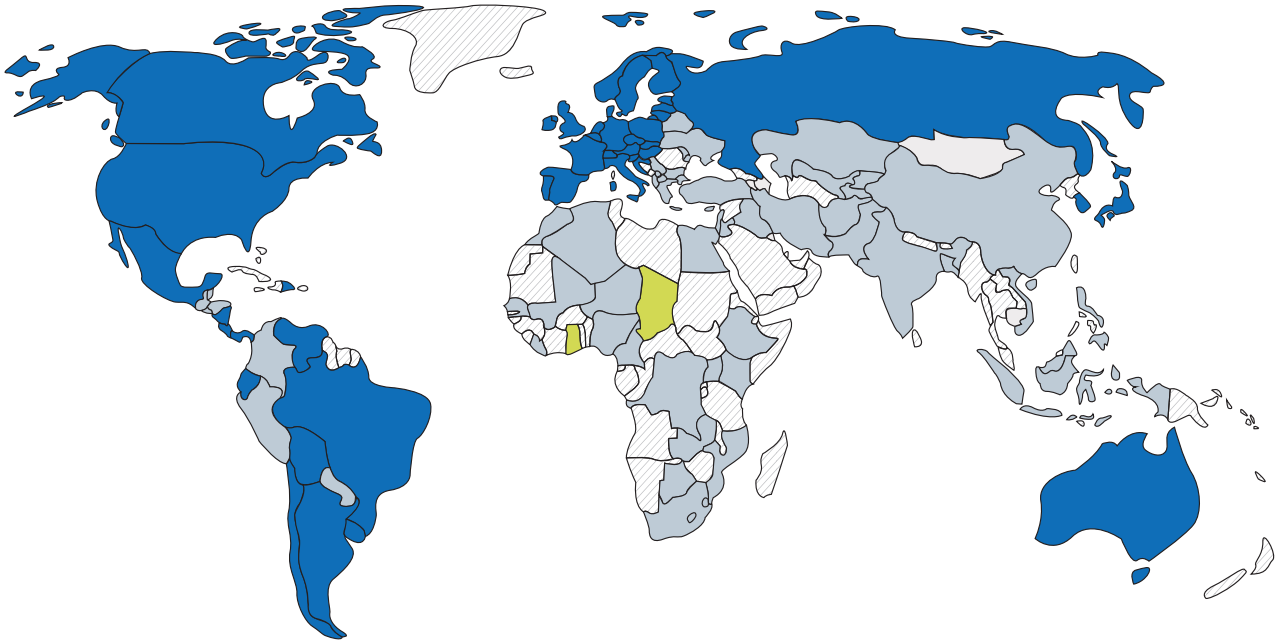
Across the global regions, the variance between regions aligns with variances in weekly worship attendance. Africa, overall, is more engaged with prayer, and Europe on the whole is least engage with prayer. Latin America and Asia have a wide range of engagement across the region – but similarly overall higher than worship attendance.

Prayer engagement is more frequent than worship attendance.

Notably the United States has one of the largest differences between worship attendance (35-40 percent) and prayer engagement (50-55 percent). Additionally, in the United States, prayer is more common than in many other wealthy countries.

YOUTH AFFILIATION

CHRISTIAN AFFILIATION AGE GAP



Younger adults (18-39) are less affiliated with Christianity | Older adults (40+) are less affiliated with Christianity | No difference | No data

Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World," 2008-2017

YOUTH DISAFFILIATION

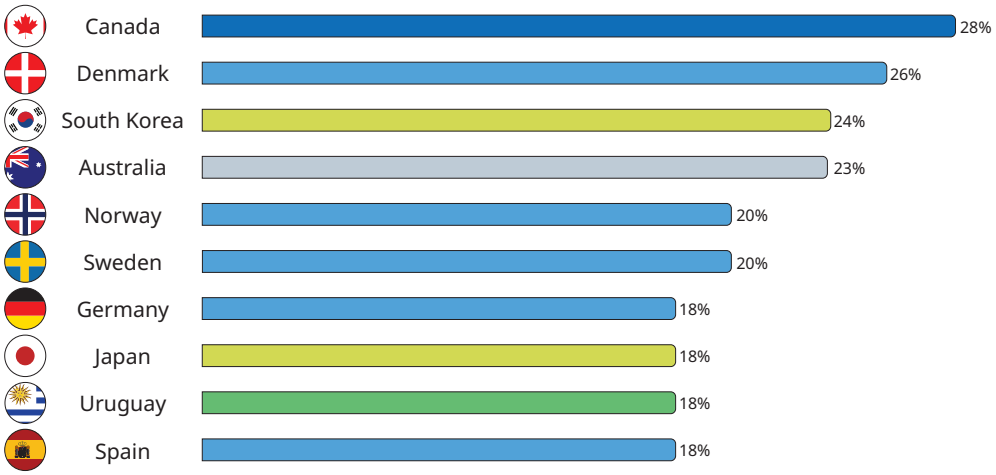
In recent decades, in many parts of the world, the youngest generation is affiliated with Christianity and religion less than previous generation.

The gap between youth and older generation affiliation is most prevalent in Europe, North America, Australia, and much of Latin America.

In countries like Canada, Denmark, South Korea, and Australia, the difference between youth affiliation and older generations is over 20 percent.

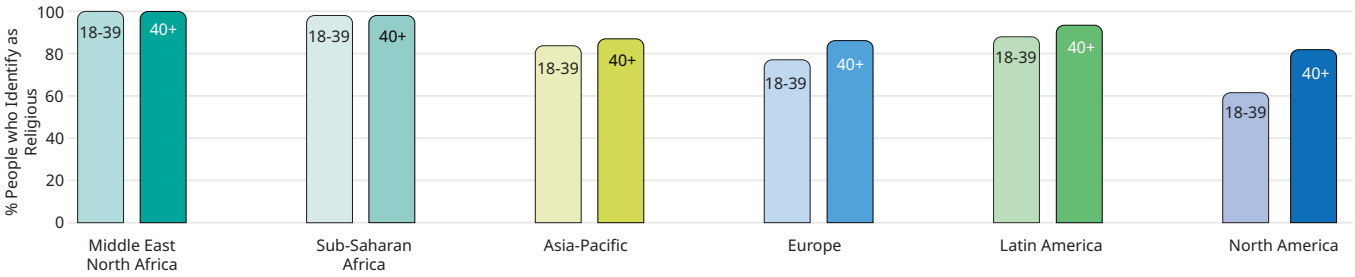
COUNTRIES WITH LARGEST RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION GAP

Percentage-point differences in shares of younger (ages 18-39) and older adults (ages 40+) who identify with any religion



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World" 2008-2017

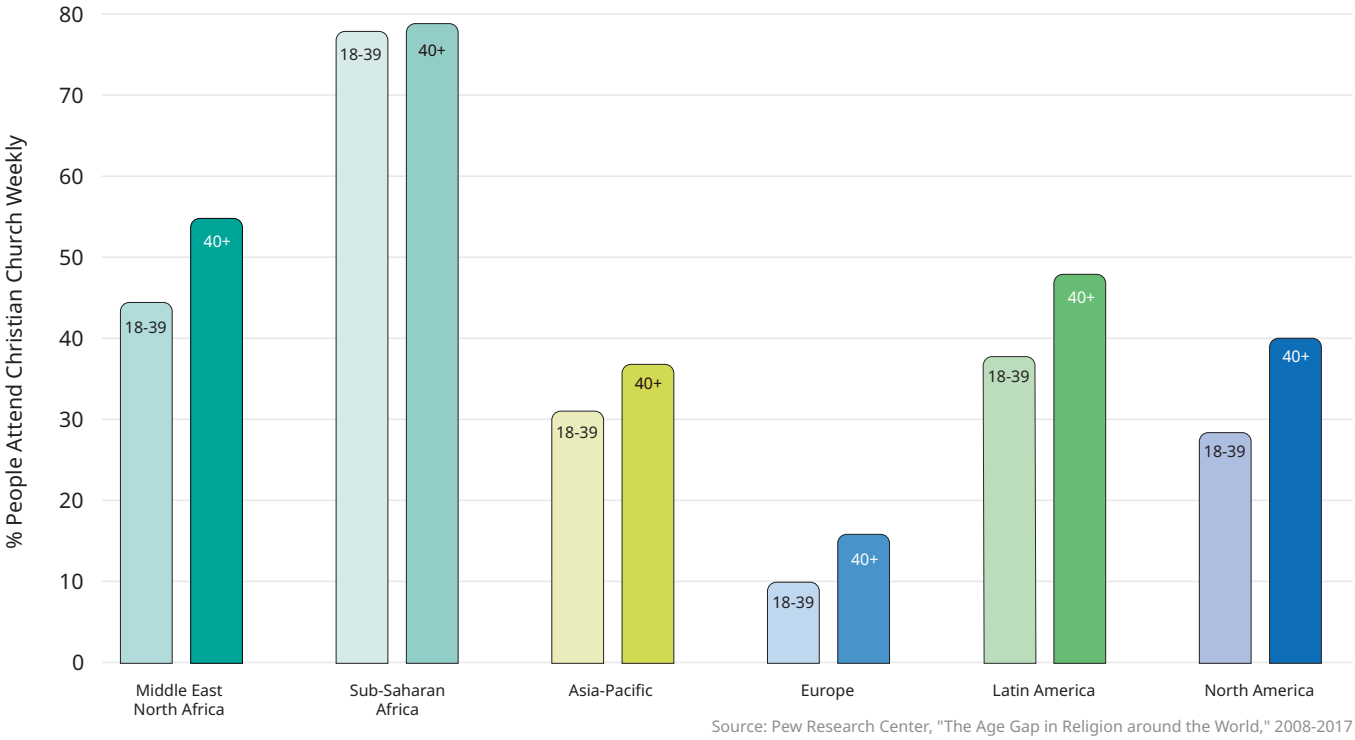
REGIONAL RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AGE GAP



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World" 2008-2017

YOUTH WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

WEEKLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH ATTENDANCE AGE GAP



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World," 2008-2017

LESS ATTENDANCE

In every region, individuals between 18-39 attend weekly church services less than individuals 40+, no matter how high or low the overall percentage of weekly attendance of the region.

THE AMERICAS

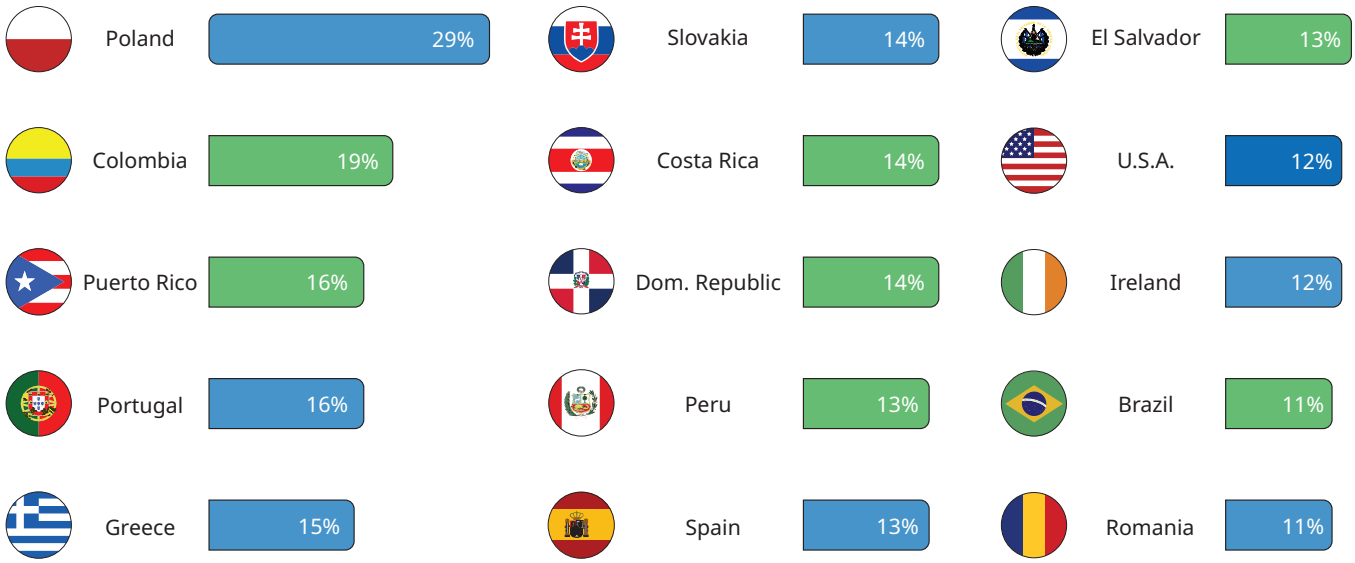
Latin America and North America are experiencing the largest age gap in weekly attendance with an estimated gap between 10-12 percent difference. The Americas are predicted to have little Christian growth between 2020-2050, partially due to this generational gap.

AFRICA

Africa has the highest overall attendance percentage, and the lowest gap between generations. With Africa's rising youth populations, the small gap in worship attendance is a strong indicator for the continued vitality of the African church.

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE AGE GAP

Percentage-point differences in shares of younger (ages 18-39) and older adults (ages 40+) who attend religious services weekly

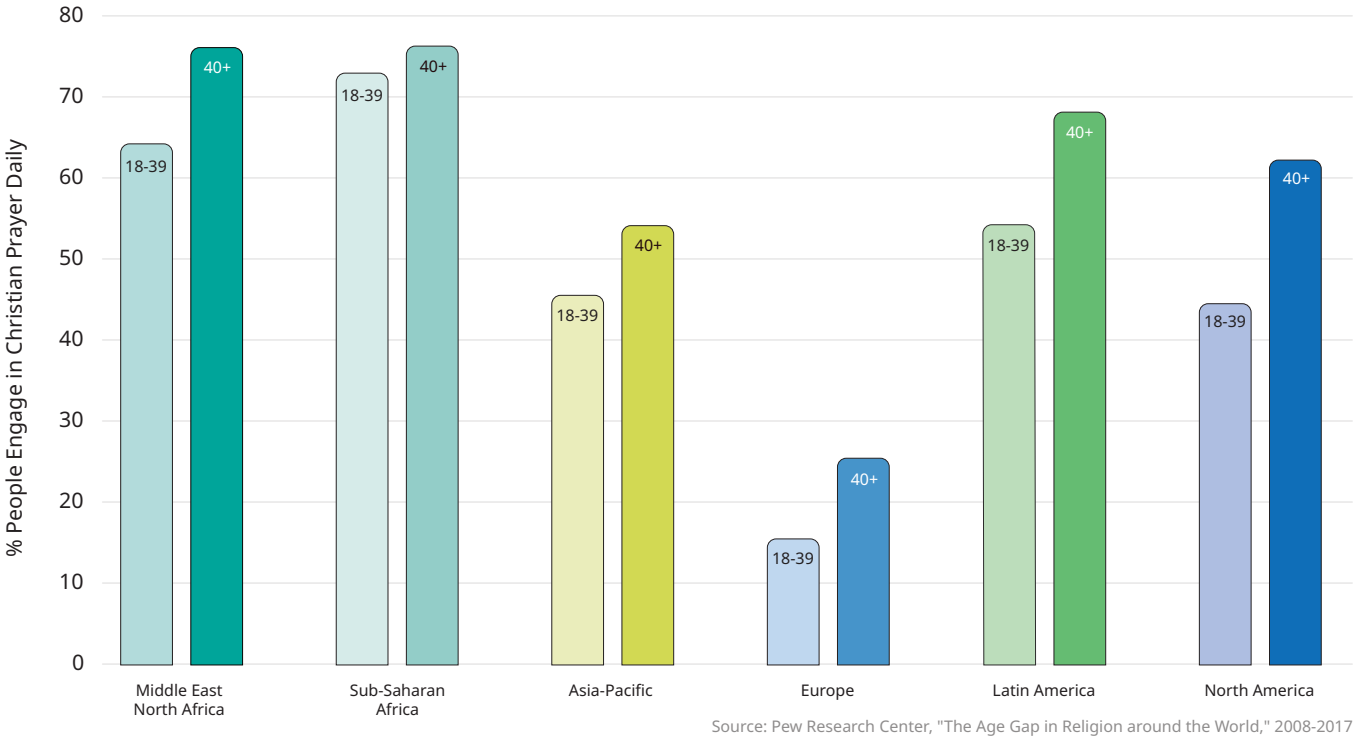


Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World" 2008-2017; Countries shown represent Christian majority countries only

MINISTRY

YOUTH DAILY PRAYER

CHRISTIAN PRAYER ENGAGEMENT AGE GAP



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World," 2008-2017

LESS PRAYER

In every region, younger individuals are less engaged in daily prayer. This observation is independent of regional weekly church attendance. Globally there is a 9 percent gap between youth prayer engagement and older generations, with Africa having the least gap.

THE AMERICAS

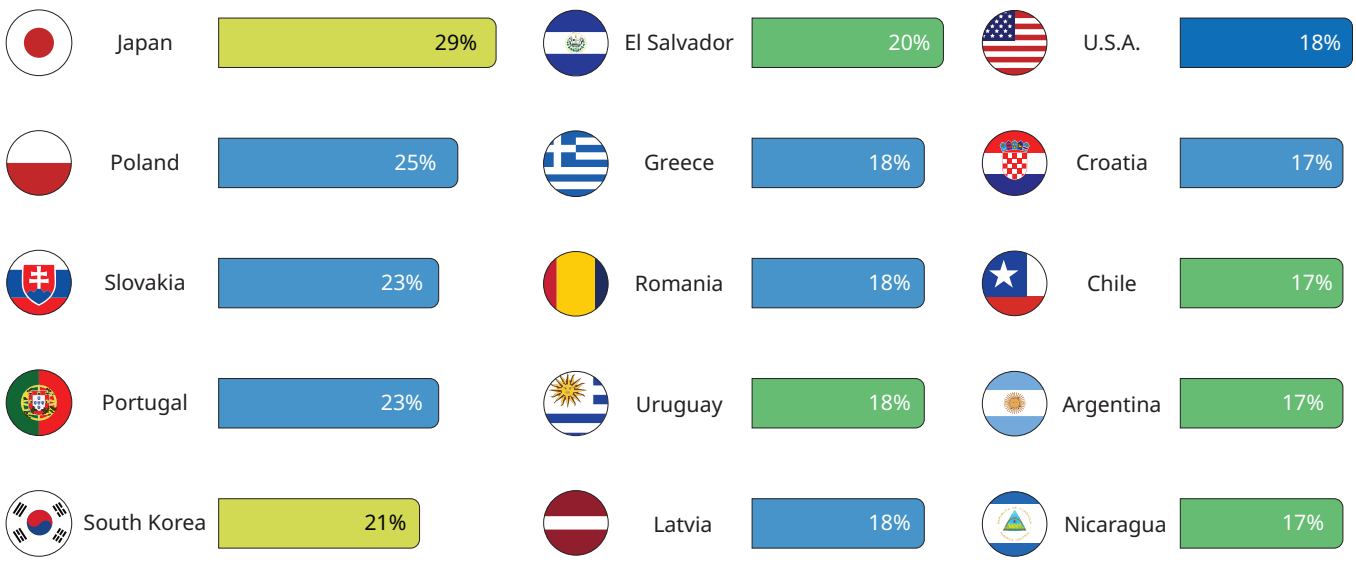
Latin America and North America are experiencing a similar gap in prayer engagement parallel to affiliation. Youth are less likely to engage in prayer in all 19 surveyed countries in Latin America, the United States, and Canada.

TOP GAPS

Three out of the top five countries who are experiencing lower youth prayer engagement are in Europe. However, notably, despite Asia having less gap overall, Japan and South Korea are in the top five countries with the largest gap.

CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES* WITH LARGEST DAILY PRAYER AGE GAP

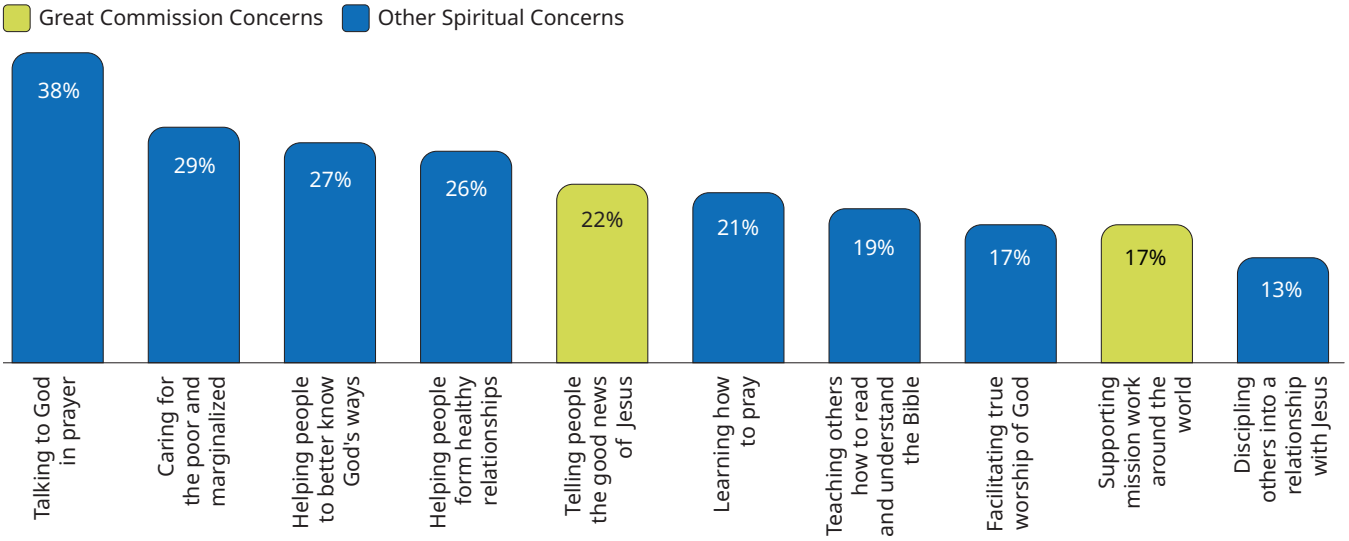
*The Largest religious group in Japan and South Korea is Unaffiliated



Source: Pew Research Center, "The Age Gap in Religion around the World" 2008-2017; Countries shown represent Christian and Unaffiliated countries only

YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

YOUTH CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL CONCERNS



Source: Barna Research Group, "Youth Greatest Spiritual Concerns," 2021

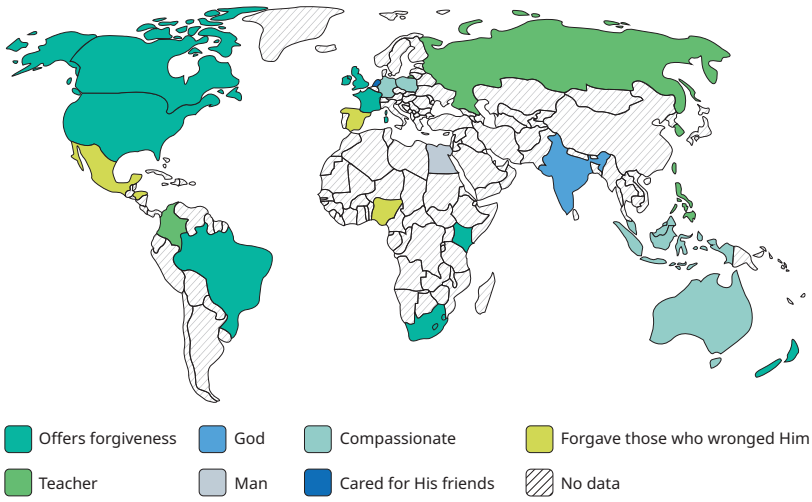
SPIRITUAL PRIORITIES

Despite the gap between youth and older generations prayer engagement, talking to God in prayer is a top priority for Christian youth.

Additionally, youth prioritize caring for the poor and marginalized, and helping people to have healthy relationships with God and others. Telling people the good news of Jesus is a lower priority.

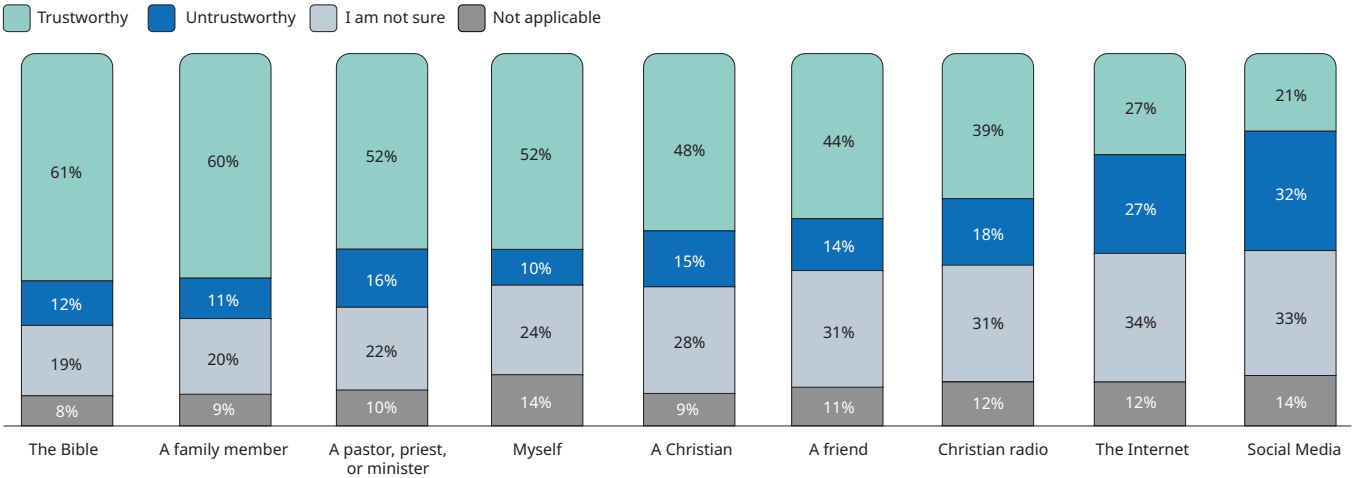
As youth look to learn about Jesus, a variety of sources are perceived as viable by the majority including the Bible, a family member, and a religious leader. It should also be noted that over half of global youth surveyed identified themselves as a trustworthy source to learn about Jesus.

MAP OF YOUTH DESCRIPTIONS OF JESUS



Source: Barna Research Group, "Youth Greatest Spiritual Concerns," 2021

SOURCES TO LEARN ABOUT JESUS

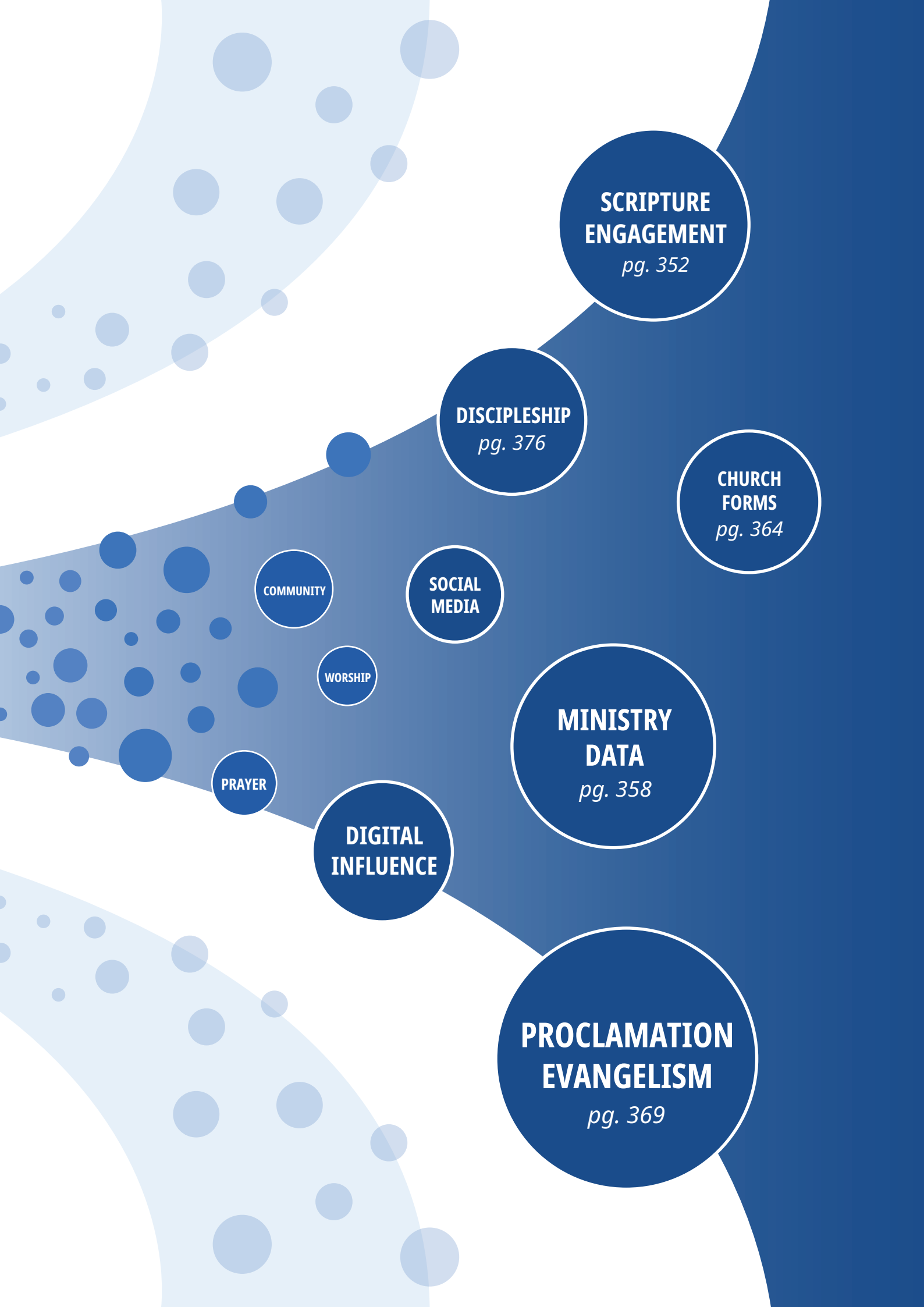


Source: Barna Research Group, "Youth Committed Christians by Country," 2021

UNDERSTANDING

MINISTRY




SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT
pg. 352
DISCIPLESHIP
pg. 376
CHURCH FORMS
pg. 364
COMMUNITY
SOCIAL MEDIA
WORSHIP
MINISTRY DATA
pg. 358
PRAYER
DIGITAL INFLUENCE
PROCLAMATION EVANGELISM
pg. 369

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL AGE

Nicole Martin, John Plake, Mariam Varghese

Scripture Engagement in the Twenty-First Century

The onset of the digital age has radically reshaped how individuals interact with various forms of information, with religious texts, such as the Bible, being no exception.[1] This transition introduces both opportunities and hurdles in accomplishing the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20), which encompasses disseminating the gospel and encouraging worldwide engagement with Scripture.

> ***"The onset of the digital age has radically reshaped how individuals interact with various forms of information, with religious texts, such as the bible, being no exception."***

The profound impact of engaging with God's Word is undebatable. Research confirms that active participation in the Word of God cultivates prosperity in every facet of individuals' daily lives.[2] This transformative journey has always been at the heart of the local church's mission. From the early church era to the present day, pastors and leaders have been bestowed with the singular capability to guide believers in better understanding and connecting with God's Word at all life stages. This guidance is often offered through systematic preaching, teaching, and discipleship, facilitating communities' engagement with God through the Bible.

Although these endeavors are both significant and influential, many church leaders perceive a lack of preparedness to lead their communities beyond their current spiritual state. This sentiment rings particularly true as societies progressively digitize, and as in some regions churches experience a decrease in attendance. Churches of all sizes find themselves vying for the attention of individuals whose perceptions are shaped by global people and networks. In some instances, the church's Scripture engagement has lagged behind the digital knowledge and information wave, creating hurdles in disciple-making for successive generations.

This paper analyzes how churches and parachurch organizations can collaboratively ensure that Scripture engagement remains robust within congregations and faith communities. Furthermore, it will evaluate the forthcoming challenges we must be equipped for and offer practical measures to jointly further God's kingdom. This article scrutinizes the contemporary state of Scripture engagement in the digital age, investigates the role of technology in Bible translation, and pinpoints key issues that the global church must tackle to exploit digital technology's capabilities fully.

Translation in the Digital Age

As one of the most translated works in history, the Bible is accessible to many people worldwide. Promoting Scripture engagement, the interaction between individuals and the biblical text, heavily relies on Bible translation. This process involves converting the biblical text from its original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—into other languages to improve accessibility for diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. The lack of translations would render most of the global population unable to engage with the Bible in their native languages.[3] Access to the Bible in a person's mother tongue fosters a deeper understanding, personal connection, and significant im-

pact on the person's spiritual journey. The transformation observed is attributable more to the Bible in local languages rather than to a foreign language that is locally in use.[4]

Bible translations' quality, accuracy, and readability significantly impact Scripture engagement. Translations that accurately capture the meaning and intention of the original text pave the way for a deeper understanding and personal connection to the Scripture. Moreover, translations mindful of the target audience's linguistic and cultural context contribute to a more relevant and meaningful engagement with the Bible.[5] Thus, having translations in various languages promotes inclusive and diverse Scripture engagement globally.

> ***"The digital age has significantly contributed to Bible translation and Scripture engagement."***

The digital age has significantly contributed to Bible translation and Scripture engagement. Digital technology has expedited translation through translation software, online collaboration tools, and crowd-sourced translation projects. These advancements have promoted the advancement of technology and efficient distribution of Bible translations, reached previously unreachable language groups, and facilitated Scripture engagement on a global scale. Incorporating technology into Bible translation efforts has positively impacted Scripture engagement, enabling more people to engage with the Bible in a language they comprehend.[6] However, many languages still lack a complete Bible translation, and this deficiency highlights the continuous need for translation efforts.

Digital platforms have increased how people can engage with the Bible. Online Bibles, mobile apps, and social media platforms provide diverse avenues to read, study, and share Scripture, amplifying Bible translations' overall reach and impact.[7] Miniaturized libraries in the form of mobile apps have transformed access to religious resources.[8] Reports on the 'State of the Bible' (SOTB) conducted by institutions like the American Bible Society (ABS) and the United Bible Societies (UBS) offer insights into how individuals interact with the Bible and trends in Bible reading.[9] These reports reveal that digital tools, including Bible apps and online platforms, have globally increased Scripture accessibility.[10]

Key Issues for the Global Church

The advent of the digital age has expanded the realm of Scripture engagement, presenting opportunities as well as challenges for the global church. Remarkable opportunities, such as increased access and personalization, have emerged. Digital platforms enable believers to engage with Scripture at their own pace, tailoring their experiences to personal needs. These platforms have also facilitated the formation of global virtual communities, linking believers worldwide to share faith experiences, while digital advancements expedite Bible translation and distribution, augmenting Scripture engagement across diverse language groups.

Technological advancements have democratized access to the Bible and other religious texts, fueling deeper faith connections, while simultaneously created hurdles that must be overcome. The global church is presented with several vital issues that need addressing in this digital age.

The Digital Divide

The digital divide and accessibility are among the first of these issues. Although digital tools have increases accessibility to scriptures, the disparities in the accessibility to these digital tools poses a significant challenge, as access to technology and digital literacy levels fluctuate across various regions and demographic groups.[11] The church must address this divide to guarantee that every individual, regardless of geographical location or socioeconomic status, can access digital tools essential for engaging with Scripture.[12] As of 2023, 55 percent of households globally have an internet connection, but only 20 percent are in the poorest countries.[13] Addressing this issue may require investment in digital infrastruc-

ture, advocacy for digital literacy, and development of cost-effective digital solutions.

Cultural Relevance

A second issue revolves around cultural sensitivity and relevance. Digital tools and resources must resonate with local contexts and cultures to foster a more profound engagement with Scripture.[14] Maintaining cultural sensitivity and relevance will likely require collaboration among linguists, Bible translators, and local communities to create digital resources that are culturally appropriate. Ensuring cultural relevance through culturally sensitive digital resources can deepen Scripture engagement.

Misinformation

Third, the observation that the sheer volume of online information may precipitate superficial Scripture engagement must be considered. Furthermore, the rapid spread of misinterpretation of religious texts and online misinformation emphasizes the need for accurate digital resources and literacy promotion. Social media and online communities have revolutionized how people engage with Scripture via virtual communities that cross geographical borders. Yet these virtual communities can rapidly propagate misinformation and misinterpretation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the global church to harness these platforms effectively to promote Scripture engagement, while simultaneously addressing the potential problem of information disorder.[15]

Countering misinformation necessitates the creation of accurate digital resources and the fostering of digital literacy. The global church must provide strategies and tools that foster genuine spiritual growth, even in the face of an overwhelming abundance of information.

Artificial Intelligence

The fourth issue is the ethical dimension of utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) in Bible translation.[16] The increasing prevalence of AI-driven applications in Scripture engagement and Bible translation necessitates careful consideration of ethical issues, which could include biases inherent in AI algorithms and the potential implications of AI-generated translations. The increasing role of AI in Scripture engagement necessitates transparency and accountability to avoid potential biases. Developing guidelines and promoting education around the ethical use of AI technologies in Scripture engagement is paramount. However, this should coincide with fostering trust between the church and technologists, ensuring the productive use of time in developing guidelines, and providing Scripture access.

Partnership and Collaboration

Finally, partnership and collaboration in the digital age are critical. A cooperative approach involving religious organizations, tech companies, and educational institutions will facilitate the full potential of digital technology in Scripture engagement. Through collaboration, these entities can share best practices, spark innovation, and develop advanced digital tools and resources for a more meaningful engagement with Scripture. The church has a leadership role in fostering cross-sector collaboration that creates a more interconnected and inclusive digital ecosystem for studying and disseminating sacred texts.

By addressing these challenges, the global church can navigate the digital age, ensuring that Scripture engagement remains both accessible and transformative, thereby fulfilling the Great Commission in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Envisioning the Future

Looking toward the future of Scripture engagement between today and 2050, one must anticipate the implications of emerging technologies and societal trends. How the global church adapts will determine the accessibility and level of engagement with sacred texts.

Church-Centric Bible Translation (CCBT) is a unique model that emphasizes the church's involvement in the Bible translation process. AI-powered tools and AI-driven translation can aid in accelerating the Bible translation for endangered and minority languages. Involving the local church, Bible translation and engagement will be joined to create a new paradigm where digital tools and AI can aid

in understanding cultural nuances, theological concepts, and literary styles, which necessitates human judgment and expertise. Therefore, the human element, especially the church's role in CCBT, remains crucial to ensure the accuracy and spiritual integrity of the translation. CCBT can indirectly contribute to bridging the digital divide by fostering literacy and providing access to spiritual resources in the local language.

With some languages increasingly endangered, there is a mounting need for language preservation and minority language Bible translation. Collaborative initiatives between linguists, Bible translators, and local communities, assisted by advancements in translation technology, will be essential.

> ***"The interplay of technological innovation, societal trends, and the global church's adaptability will shape the future of Scripture engagement ."***

Furthermore, AI could significantly enhance personalized learning, with AI-driven applications providing customized Bible study materials based on user habits, comprehension levels, and interests. Additionally, Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR and VR) technologies are set to offer immersive Scripture engagement experiences, from visualizing biblical events to participating in virtual faith gatherings.[17] Ethical considerations surrounding emerging technologies, such as AI, AR, and VR, also demand careful thought, particularly regarding privacy, data security, and the authenticity of biblical text.

As global connectivity grows, interfaith dialogue becomes more significant. Digital platforms can encourage conversations between faiths, promoting mutual respect and nuanced understanding. Moreover, balancing digital and physical religious communities is key to maintaining social and spiritual richness in one's faith life.

The interplay of technological innovation, societal trends, and the global church's adaptability will shape the future of Scripture engagement. By proactively addressing challenges in this digital age, the global church can forge a globally interconnected, inclusive, and engaging future for believers, upholding the Great Commission into the twenty-first century and beyond.

As we look toward the future of Scripture engagement, we must consider the potential impact of emerging technologies and trends in the coming decades. By anticipating these developments, the global church can adapt and prepare for the opportunities and challenges ahead, ensuring that the sacred texts remain accessible and engaging for believers worldwide. The following are some key areas to watch as we envision the future of Scripture engagement from today to 2050.

Strategic Guidelines in the Digital Age

To fully harness the benefits of the digital era and address the concomitant challenges, the global church must implement strategic initiatives and well-directed investments. The following guidelines provide a framework for enhancing Scripture engagement in the digital era.

Invest in Infrastructure and Training

Investments in digital infrastructure and capacity-building programs, especially in developing nations, are integral to providing fair access to digital resources and equipping individuals with the necessary competencies to engage efficiently with Scripture.[18] Such steps can benefit the global church's mission by democratizing Scripture engagement, facilitating personal and community spiritual growth.

Formulate Ethical AI Protocols

Collaborative engagement with technology companies to devise protocols for the ethical application of AI in Scripture engagement is critical. These protocols should tackle matters like algorithmic bias, data confidentiality, and potential implications of AI-generated translations. The benefit of such measures is a more trustworthy, fair, and secure digital religious space that fosters confidence and inclusivity among believers.

Foster Collaboration between AI and Humans

Human wisdom and AI systems should be used collaboratively, leveraging the unique strengths of each. The concept of 'cooperative AI', in which AI technologies enhance human capabilities rather than replacing them, lead to mutually beneficial outcomes.[19]

Encourage Cross-Sector Partnership

Promoting cooperation amongst churches, parachurches, technology enterprises, and educational bodies can foster innovation. Such collaboration creates a holistic digital ecosystem for studying and disseminating Scripture, which benefits the community by providing enriched and diverse faith-based learning resources.

Develop Culturally Inclusive Resources

Coordinating closely with local communities to generate culturally congruent digital resources can catalyze a more profound engagement with Scripture.[20] The benefits of this approach are twofold: it not only enhances individual connections with faith traditions, but also strengthens community bonds and respect for cultural diversity.

Elevate Digital Literacy

Investment in training programs that enhance digital literacy is key. These initiatives can empower believers to distinguish credible sources of information and navigate the digital landscape more effectively. The benefit here is the cultivation of a digitally savvy faith community equipped to handle the influx of digital information responsibly and confidently.

Embrace Church-Centric Bible Translation (CCBT)

Advocating for the adoption of CCBT can guarantee Scripture availability in various local dialects. This approach involves the active participation of local church communities in the translation process, making the translation more responsive to their linguistic and cultural specificities. The integration of AI in this process can expedite translation endeavors, facilitating quicker accessibility of the Bible in more languages. As a result, communities benefit from increased cultural relevance and understanding of Scripture, which ultimately lead to a deeper and more personal faith experience.

Conclusion

As we venture further into the digital age, it introduces myriad unique challenges and opportunities for Scripture engagement and the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Addressing the knowledge gap and embracing the potential of technology is pivotal to crafting a future for Scripture engagement that is both inclusive and impactful on a global scale. The strategies and recommendations in this discourse underscore the need to foster robust collaboration and synergies among religious organizations, tech companies, and educational institutions. This cooperative framework can spur innovation and play a critical role in actualizing the Great Commission in the digital era.

By executing these strategic initiatives, the global church has the potential to lay the groundwork for a genuinely global and interconnected religious community that transcends the boundaries of the twenty-first century and beyond. This ensures that the transformative power of Scripture remains accessible, engaging, and deeply resonant for believers worldwide. In this collaborative spirit, the combined efforts of churches and parachurch organizations can magnify the transformative impact of individuals engaging with God's Word. Together, we can navigate the digital future, making Scripture a living, breathing testament to faith in every corner of the world.

Endnotes

1 Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 16-33.

2 "State of the Bible 2023," American Bible Society, https://sotb.research.bible/.

3 Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Brill, 2003), 149.

4 Wayne T. Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 89–96.

5 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 345-348, 379.

6 "Scripture and Language Statistics 2020," Wycliffe Global Alliance, https://www.wycliffe.net/statistics/.

7 Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22-26.

8 Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 54.

9 "State of the Bible 2023."

10 Ibid.

11 Emily Vogels, "Some Digital Divides Persist between Rural, Urban and Suburban America," Pew Research Center, August 19, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/19/some-digital-divides-persist-between-rural-urban-and-suburban-america/.

12 Ibid.

13 "Digital Divide 2023: Key Insights and Trends," Gitnux, March 11, 2023, https://blog.gitnux.com/digital-divide-statistics/.

14 Andrew F. Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (New York, Orbis Books: 2007), 258.

15 Claire Wardle, "Understanding Information Disorder," First Draft News, September 22, 2020, https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/.

16 Bernd C. Stahl, "Ethical Issues of AI," in *Artificial Intelligence for a Better Future* (Springer, 2021), 35–53, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69978-9_4.

17 Joshua L. Mann, "Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Religion: Recent Developments and Their Significance," in *Believing in Bits: Digital Media and the Supernatural,* eds. Simone Natale and Diana Pasulka (New York: Oxford Academic, 2019), 197-201.

18 "World Development Report 2020: Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains," World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2020.

19 Max Tegmark, *Life 3: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (New York: Knopf, 2017), [page number].

20 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 26-30.

Authors

Rev Dr Nicole Massie Martin serves as the Chief Impact Officer at Christianity Today and is a co-catalyst for the Lausanne Scripture Engagement network. Dr. Martin resides in Baltimore, Maryland with her best friend, Dr. Mark Martin, and their two amazing daughters, Addison and Josephine.

Dr John Plake serves as Chief Ministry Insights Officer at American Bible Society, and co-catalyst for the Lausanne Scripture Engagement network. Plake is the author and editor of several books and articles for both scholarly and popular media. As editor-in-chief of American Bible Society's annual State of the Bible research series, his work has been featured in numerous media outlets, including CBN, The Christian Post, Christianity Today, Outreach Magazine, Philanthropy Daily, Relevant Magazine, and Washington Watch.

Mariam Hency Varghese is the Co-Catalyst for Lausanne Scripture Engagement and the Chief Administrative Officer at Avodah. With a keen passion for the convergence of scripture engagement, bible translation, business, and technology, she brings a unique vision to her work. In her spare time, she nurtures her artistic talents, fostering creativity in all aspects of her life.

MINISTRY DATA IN A DIGITAL AGE

Andrew Feng, Lara Heneveld, Rodrigo Tinoco, Danny Weiss

Digital Data, Digital World

In 2006, Clive Humbly, a British mathematician and data science entrepreneur, coined the phrase 'data is the new oil', heralding the prominence of data to the fledgling digital age. Data Science was still in its initial stages of development in the West, and the church at-large often had a somewhat stilted relationship with missional information. Average Western church-goers simply did not preternaturally have much awareness to acquire or question the existence of any such resource, let alone their fellow congregants from among the Global South. Notably, many in the Majority World often have a very different relationship with data as an industry or science.

> ***"Notably, many in the Majority World often have a very different relationship with data as an industry or science."***

Historically, ministry data reflected information primarily obtained for Western missiological audiences, in the sense that it often spoke to issues such as evangelical presence, the concerns of gospel access and Scripture's availability, or tracking denominations at a national level. Advocates utilized the available findings to inform Western missional strategy. This information was often curated with a specific project, focus, or strategy in mind, but much of the information was retained and protected by those that created and published it. Any additional significance required an external awareness that such resources were available; how global data was curated and produced might often not be known outside of the originating ministry. Conversely, the data might have had unperceived value to audiences that the data was not originally intended for.

As the appetite for globally comprehensive, consistent, and accessible data grew larger, publicly available mission datasets rose to prominence. For example, resources like *Operation World*[1] and the *World Christian Encyclopedia*[2] produced comprehensive, printed (and at one time disc-supported) volumes that provided prayer-catalytic content, which they continue to update and release on a periodic basis. However, the very existence and viability of some of those few providing ministry data was often dependent on monetizing the printed material or product they provided. Lacking that, some raised personal support to fund research, some obtained sponsorship for individual projects, or at times the work was personally fundraised. Others, like Global Mapping International (www.gmi.org), were ultimately unable to continue serving as researchers and key technical service providers. These examples of work have warranted their earned esteem while unintentionally predilecting English speaking, Western-minded missional leaders, sometimes at the expense of global participation.

Then, in March 2020, the world shifted, and with it, the significance of the digital age. The societal repercussions of COVID were forcing new normals for movement, interaction, and engagement.[3] It changed what types of data people trusted and how they interacted with that data[4]. In some cases, COVID even changed what people believed. In the weeks and months after March 15, 2020, the digital world became not only the primary medium of operation for information exchange, but was now affecting nearly every aspect of our lives. Church and mission functions that traditionally would have been conducted solely in person were on hold or forced to adapt. COVID affected where and how missionaries were able to be sent, as well as who was able or willing to participate in 'church'. [5] No one knew how long the interruption would last or if we would ever return to 'normal'.

COVID altered our relationship with ministry data in a variety of ways. There was erosion of public trust in global data authority,

in part due to how pandemic data coverage was politicized.[4] This encouraged a reexamination of data validity and collection methodology across the board.[6,7] COVID allowed for new modes and patterns of communication that brought previously distant relational networks into tighter and more transparent orbits. Longstanding questions or concerns over sanctioned missional data from both Western and Majority World leaders now became inexcusably actionable opportunities. These discussions underscored the fact that the world was able to change much faster than existing data systems and paradigms were able to reflect those changes. Indeed, were true veracity and up-to-the-minute time relevance even obtainable data ideals? Once familiar ministry data was questioned anew. Could data become more effective for informing ministry strategy in this new, shifting environment or would traditional datasets be relegated to increasing irrelevance as the world continued changing?

> ***"Ministry data, and data as ministry, will be more critical than ever before as the digital world rewrites immediate insight, access, and relational connectivity as the new normal."***

These changes amplify the urgency for the global church to reevaluate the way it supports and interacts with data as a ministry. Data integrates research, information, and the technology that emerging Christian forces use for communication, education, deployment, and application of strategic ministry direction. Ministry data, and data as ministry, will be more critical than ever before as the digital world rewrites immediate insight, access, and relational connectivity as the new normal.

Transformation of Ministry Data

The quantifiable amount of data that global ministries and their teams are now able to cultivate is unprecedented, encompassing anything and everything from digital gospel engagement to oral communicator surveys to the GPS coordinates of house churches. And it will continue to expand as new ministry needs are revealed and more workers come alongside to innovate. Global data accessibility is transforming how data is collected, interpreted and strategically applied. As the body of Christ continually expands and diversifies, the goal for global data is stewardship, ownership, and utilization by a body that better reflects today's church.

In addition, an entirely new field of study and expertise around data science, data analysis, and data engineering has burgeoned and matured within just the last decade. Recent advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning further propel the field of data forward at ever increasing rates towards presently unimaginable frontiers. Indeed, at the time this paper is read, we should anticipate whether our current perspectives on global ministry data will still be relevant.

The global church is at a pivotal junction in respect to the modern data revolution. It stands on the inherited foundations of a core group of ministry datasets generated by a select group of dedicated workers (almost none of whom were salaried), and a future where the opportunities and applications for global ministry data and access to the gifts of a wide pool of data professionals and practitioners are seemingly endless. In an emerging world where everything is computable, up-to-the-minute data relevance is absolutely mandatory for informed ministry strategy. The question is not one of data relevance or collection, but of data integration and interpretation. The church must be adequately staffed and equipped to navigate this new era.

The core competencies of data literacy, data collection, and specifically, data interpretation become undeniably essential ministry functions of the global church. The Community of Mission Information Workers (CMIW)[8] calls the body of Christ's attention to the need of engaging and equipping the global church in the ministry of data as an essential element to facilitate Great Commission efforts in the coming decades. The ministry of data must be integrated into the fabric of today's maturing global church.

Global Data Consolidation, Local Data Proliferation

There are certain developments involving ministry data that justify special attention.

Consolidation of regional and global ministry data into key resources

Sources such as the Joshua Project[9], the Global Status of Evangelical Christianity (GSEC) as reported by the International Missions Board (IMB) for the Southern Baptists,[10] Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana (COMIBAM),[11] and The Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI)[12] are often utilized for church planting and discipleship strategies. Other works and sources, such as the Center for the Study of Global Christianity,[13] Ethnologue,[14] and Progress.Bible[15] are more academic in their focus and research. We recognize that not all of these are Western in source nor global in scope; this move toward inclusivity is a welcomed development. These sources are the backbone to many well-reasoned and funded ministry strategies, sometimes to the extent that they gain preeminence over the knowledge and realities of the people they strive to represent. The challenge for these globally reputed datasets will be the strain of maintaining accurate representation while their influence and authority both expands and consolidates.

Rapid expansion of what constitutes ministry data itself

This includes what is measurable and worth measuring, how to identify it, and who can access it or effect it. Consequently, there is an increased preference for firsthand research and its data sources. Opportunities for crowdsourced data[16] are getting noticed and niche focuses illustrate how data often might need to be specific to a ministry's needs. Projects once considered under-prioritized, difficult to fund, or impractical to support by traditional avenues may now be captured through technical innovations as simple and accessible as GPS tools available via smartphones.[17]

Both developments — the move towards a consolidation of global data and the proliferation of local data opportunities — are meeting pressing needs and may appear to be the next step in the evolution of data and information. However, they also have the potential to become unnecessarily at odds with each other. But this does not necessarily need to be the case as both have strategic value if fostered interdependently.

Value and challenge of global data

Global datasets have great value in building consensus, providing a comprehensive overview, and helping inform high-level strategy and resource allocation. At the same time, data sources are far from infallible which may be counterintuitive to some end users. Christian mission strategists are dependent on information for perspective, strategic decision making, deployment, and even project funding, regardless of those datasets being imperfect or unavailable in 'real-time.' Of course, providing perfect data is much easier said than done.

Global data is hard to collect, and the organizations and networks that help collect it are vastly under-staffed, under-funded, and under-resourced. It requires an immense amount of contribution, curation, and context. What might not be readily understood by those that use mission information is that each individual piece of mission information has the opportunity to be curated and adjusted to fit within the context of the whole. By their very nature, global datasets require agreement of terminology and metrics, which do not always currently reflect the unique nuances of each community or situation. This is not inherently misleading, as statistical details, populations, and demographic changes occur constantly and such elements need to be reconciled. Yet, in actuality, whoever owns and curates the data owns and informs the perspective it reflects. This can result in anything from inadvertent misrepresentation to outright omission or oversight. This not only creates opportunity for misaligned strategy, but can perpetuate unease between local communities and the data authorities that purport to represent them. It must be said that any adverse effects of consolidated global data were unforeseen and unintended.

Occasionally, funding models require paywalls, and sensitivity becomes a large enough obstacle that even basic public accessibility to

ministry data (especially to the Majority World church) becomes a major obstacle. How can the utility and relevance of global data be trusted when local communities face barriers that affect their ability to contribute to or even access global datasets?

Value and challenge of local data

Conversely, the value of local data or particular data lies in its proximity to the actual source of truth, not just geographically or contextually, but temporally as well. A person currently living in a Romani clan in Eastern Europe, a village in West Africa, a jati in India, or a particular generation in China, all have different priorities for how they perceive their own self-representation. These may change more rapidly than global datasets are currently able to accommodate. Particular (local) data emphasizes not only accuracy and nuance of depiction and identification, but also local ownership. In this way, data is not only valued, interpreted, and communicated at a local level, but owned at a local level; external validation becomes secondary. Data is not extracted from communities, but owned and managed by them. This can reflect anything from terminology, metrics used, collection methodology, distribution rights, and strategic application. The tradeoff here is that global aggregation and a seat at the global data table is often the cost of local ownership and self-identification.

Contrary to global data, local data faces the intentional limitation of its scope. The lack of standardized terminology, metrics, and collection methodology may make global aggregation difficult until data normalization and transformation occurs. Local data and particular data become difficult to integrate, face a barrier of low interoperability, and multiply the potential barriers of access and validation. Ironically, inundation of multiple sources of data can unintentionally subvert the clarity of ministry strategy by creating discord and disunity if there is confliction. It should be stated though that confliction and deviation are a normal part of data science. However, by multiplying the voices, platforms, applications, and connections between disparate datasets without careful intentionality, one runs the risk of collapsing the integrity or utility of the entire platform of ministry information. This could result in strategic chaos, which would be catastrophic for global missions strategy.

Local data will also exacerbate the issue of security and sensitivity. Granular data can just as effectively be used *for* ministry strategy as it can be used *against* ministries. There are concerns that increased data accessibility may result in undue persecution or a limitation (or even severance) of ministry opportunities. Data ownership, stewardship, and access are very legitimate concerns, and there may very well be situations where local or particular data is best kept far from the eyes of global access. Finding the right balance between visibility and sensitivity has been and will increasingly continue to be a point of tension. Perhaps there is an immediate future where data systems can accommodate the needs and challenges of both global data systems and local data knowledge. We, as a missions information community, feel that is the path forward.

Data as a Ministry of the Global Church

The tension between the merits of global and local data will be an essential topic to tackle and diffuse as the church grapples with the implications of ministry data in a digital age. Often, global data and local data are inherently viewed as at odds with one another, especially when the church is forced to choose between two competing values or two competing data systems in pursuit of a singular source of truth. But as ministry data increasingly serves more than one purpose or perspective, the balance between multiple or conflicting datasets and data systems will need to be something the church is able to come to terms with. Might new data systems and approaches be discovered that allow these discrepancies? We hope so.

Undervaluing and Underfunding Data as a Ministry

The false dichotomy between global and local data is most primarily fueled by a long-perpetuated poverty mentality with regards to funding data as a ministry and building capacity for its collection, analysis, and inter-

pretation. If the global church does not have the value, capacity, or desire to fund the stewardship of missions information work, then ministry data is reduced to its bare minimum — a singular list written from a singular, often unadaptable perspective of a world that is becoming increasingly complex. This is to the global church's own detriment.

Undervaluing and underfunding data as a ministry severely hampers the opportunities we have as members of the global church to enhance Great Commission vision and strategy. Data can and should serve the church in a multifaceted array of ways. Data can act as a global repository or index, or it can inform nuanced strategy at a local level for a certain issue, paradigm, or cause, championed by a local contingent. It can serve as a platform for inclusivity, crowdsourcing and collaboration, or it can serve to demonstrate authority and credibility. It can identify trends. It can predict the future. It can help engender representation. Multiple conflicting datasets can actually help hone accuracy by offering different perspectives and inviting increased collaboration.

"Undervaluing and underfunding data as a ministry severely hampers the opportunities we have as members of the global church to enhance Great Commission vision and strategy."

Welcoming and Supporting Data as a Ministry

The biggest enemy to the usefulness of robust ministry data is the lack of value and investment in data literacy by the global church. Data as a ministry in and of itself is evident throughout Scripture as a God-given gift, from census collection to architectural blueprints to recording lineages. It is requisite for understanding and essential as a guide for righteous Great Commission ministry. The ministry of data must be welcomed, nurtured, stewarded, and funded. Capacity must be expanded with generosity and open hands. Data sharing, data teaching, data interoperability, data access, data contribution, and data stewardship are healthy components of a ministry essential to the service of the body of Christ.

By utilizing existing technologies, platforms, and related connectivity tools, data as a ministry can be properly developed. Online data literacy programs can be included as mainstays in ministerial education. In addition, those who currently work in missional information can remain open to new and innovative, even prodigious opportunities that new tools and perspectives might provide, recognizing that these opportunities are revealed and directed by the Holy Spirit. In promoting data standards and interoperability, new voices and perspectives can be valued and added without compromising the existing integrity of the missional data system as it stands today.

Could the body of Christ, as much as it is able, support the impartation of data competencies not just in local ministries, but in global networks? We recognize this as a part of the development and maturity of the global church. It can be tempting to view data as something clinical, sterile, or even proprietary. But we must not forget what this data is ultimately serving, and who it is ultimately representing — God's glory reflected among Christ's bride.

Supporting ministry data is supporting the nervous system of the body of Christ, a system that supports functionality in nearly every aspect of the global missional community. This is indispensable to the accomplishment of the Great Commission. In the decades to come, mission information as a ministry should be prioritized, valued, and embedded as an integral part of the discipleship and maturity of the global church, for the global church, and owned by the global church. We underestimate the value of data as a ministry of the global church to our own detriment. The stewardship of Great Commission data is more indispensable than ever to the pursuit of Great Commission strategy in this digital age.

Endnotes

1 Jason Mandryk. *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

2 Todd M. Johnson and Gina Zurlo, eds. "World Christian Encyclopedia Online." World Christian Encyclopedia Online, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, n.d.). Accessed Jun 21, 2023, https://brill.com/view/db/wceo.

3 Fortune Business Insights. "The impact of COVID is accelerating digital connectivity trend and it will influence the growth of the Information technology market in the near future." Accessed June 21, 2023. https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/impact-of-covid-19-on-information-communication-and-technology-ict-industry-102769.

4 Richard Edelman. "Pandemic Fuels Culture of Institutional Mistrust." World Economic Forum. January 13, 2021. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/pandemic-mistrust-government-global-survey/.

5 "Calvary Chapel Dayton Valley vs Sisolak." Last modified July 24, 2020. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19a1070_08l1.pdf#page=12#page=13.

6 Samuel Escobar. *Changing Tides: Latin America and World Mission Today*, 2002.

7 Lausanne Movement, "Len Bartlotti - Lausanne Movement." Accessed July 5, 2023, https://lausanne.org/leader/len-bartlotti.

8 "Welcome to the Community of Mission Information Workers! | Community of Mission Information Workers," n.d. https://www.globalcmiw.org/.

9 Joshua Project. "Joshua Project: People Groups of the World | Joshua Project." https://joshuaproject.net/.

10 PeopleGroups.org. "PeopleGroups.Org." https://www.peoplegroups.org/.

11 "Comibam Internacional – Cooperación Misionera Iberoamericana." https://comibam.org/es/.

12 The Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI) Is a Network of Networks Focused on Catalyzing African National Initiatives and Mobilizing the Resources of the Body of Christ in Africa for the Fulfillment of the Great Commission. "The Movement for African National Initiatives (MANI) Is a Network of Networks Focused on Catalyzing African National Initiatives and Mobilizing the Resources of the Body of Christ in Africa for the Fulfillment of the Great Commission." https://maniafrica.com/.

13 Center for the Study of Global Christianity. "Center for the Study of Global Christianity | Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary." Last modified June 27, 2022. https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity.

14 Ethnologue (Free All). "The World." https://www.ethnologue.com/.

15 ProgressBible. "ProgressBible." https://progress.bible/.

16 "Etnopedia - Unreached People Profile Translation." https://etnopedia.org/.

17 Fred Zahradnik. "GPS for Driving, Sports, and Boating." *Lifewire.* Last modified January 29, 2020. https://www.lifewire.com/gps-for-driving-and-sports-1683301.

Authors

Andrew Feng serves as the US Director for Indigitous which engages young leaders to use their giftedness beyond the four church walls. Andrew advises on global strategy and partnerships for mass collaboration. He is exploring the possibility of crowdsourcing missions via remote work.

Lara Heneveld is a missional information worker serving with Team Expansion. A co-facilitator for the Community of Missional Information Workers, she also assists Harvest Information Standards and formerly directed researcher and data curation for Finishing the Task from 2007-2019. Her mentors include Dr. Paul Eshleman, Dr. Jim Haney, Dan Scribner, and Chris Maynard.

Rodrigo Tinoco is a missional information worker and SEPAL missionary. He is Brazil's National Coordinator at Faith Comes by Hearing and affiliated with the information alliances CMIW (Global) and APeM (Brazilian). A researcher of Latin American languages, he has worked ten years in ASIA and USA, currently serving in Brazil. He is married to Sarah and they have 4 children.

Danny Weiss works in the cross-section of the integration, interpretation, and visualization of mission information. Formerly the project director of Stratus.earth for Radical, he currently works in the research and application of demographic trends and multilingual overlap for unfoldingWord, a ministry dedicated to the resourcing and equipping of the Global Church to meet their own translation needs.

CHURCH FORMS IN A DIGITAL AGE

Darrell Bock, Jonas Kurlberg

Imagine it was 1974 and the first Lausanne gathering and someone asked what technology would be like in 2023. Who could even have entertained where we are now? Technology changes so fast, tying us together over distance and time, and making us all much more aware of each other. Who could possibly predict where we will be in 2050?

> ***"A compelling argument can be made that human creativity and the drive to make things derives from the imago Dei."***

The Lausanne State of the Great Commission series of articles includes a number of articles on ministry in a digital age. Our contribution is a paper on ecclesiology, and includes reflections on the issues that need consideration concerning churches' use of digital technology in gathering for worship and fellowship. These reflections are also meant to be forward looking, preparing the church for a possible future world in the coming decades. This is a challenging task, not only because it is difficult to foretell which innovations will be realised, but also because it is difficult to predict the socio-political impact of the use and user adaptation of such technologies. What we can do is to exemplify the kind of theological reflection that is necessary by exploring issues concerning current forms of digital church and making some tentative suggestions. Therefore, we are left with thinking through the challenges, strengths, and limitations we need to consider about digital use in general, as we move forward with the hope of the gospel and the grounding of new generations in the church.

Basic Presuppositions about Technology

At the outset it is worth highlighting a few basic presuppositions. First, an essentially positive affirmation of technology can be drawn from the Christian doctrine of creation. A compelling argument can be made that human creativity and the drive to make things derives from the imago Dei. That is, there is something innate about our making that reflects the nature of the creator God. If technology is (partly) tools that extend human capacities, then God's invitation to Adam to name the animals (Gen 2:19) can be seen as an early act of human co-creation and technological innovation (language). This is not to suggest that technology plays a wholly positive role in Biblical narratives. Even in the earlier parts of Genesis we see an ambiguity worked out. On the one hand, human-created technology in the form of an ark becomes the conduit of God's salvation during a chasmic flood, and on the other hand, a tower becomes a symbol of human hubris and greed.

Second, however, we cannot simply view technology in utilitarian terms, as tools that can be used to different ends. Through technology we remake and recreate the world resulting in new human cultures and environments. Therefore, when we come to a gathering for worship, technology shapes the practice and influences our experience thereof in often subtle ways. For example, in some Protestant traditions there has been a drive towards 'simplifying' worship and to such ends removed any visuals or objects that are seen as distracting from true worship. However, whether we worship in a bare walled warehouse or an ornamented cathedral the environments of these two technologies have an impact on worshippers' experience of worship, although different ones. Their different symbolisms communicate and reinforce different values and theologies. This then raises questions about what kinds of liturgical spaces are created when we worship on digital platforms.

Types of Digital Church

To stay faithful to its nature and tasks, it is important that the church grapples with the implications of digital adaptation and reflects on some of the ecclesiological issues at stake. A helpful analytical framework in this regard

is John Dyer's five fold typology of digital church. It emphasises, firstly, that digital communication technology comprises a variety of platforms and their usage and impact differ. Secondly, it emphasises that how churches negotiate these is linked to their tradition and ecclesiological outlook. Five types of digital church are explained:

- *Online church* refers to the ways in which many churches have websites, emails, social media channels, and admin software to effectively communicate and organise.
- *Broadcast church* follows a TV-broadcasting logic by which services are broadcasted on digital platforms but there are limited possibilities of engaging.
- *Interactive church*, in contradistinction, may use video-conferencing for services but actively encourage interaction with and between participants.
- *Hybrid church* refers to practices whereby participants are welcome to join services onsite or online through live streaming.
- *VR-church* is when worshippers join live sessions in immersive digital spaces and typically interact through avatars.

It is naturally possible that a given church falls within several of these types. Many local churches have a social media presence or use email to communicate, and might live stream their services. Further, online and offline modes of gathering and community building are increasingly interconnected. More often than not, digital technology is used to supplement and further the practices of local churches. For instance, digital communication is regularly used to communicate and organise in-person events. Or many churches might emphasise an in-person gathering for a weekly service while using digital technology to connect during the week. WhatsApp groups provide means to mobilise prayer and Zoom becomes a means for regular small group fellowship for those with a busy work or family life.

Factors that Influence Technological Adaptation

Each of these types of digital church embodies different ecclesiologies. Churches which are more hierarchical in structure have tended to adopt a *broadcasting* logic when streaming services. The lens of the camera in such services focuses on the priest who is seen as a mediator of God's presence to the people. Some churches who are more sacramental might typify *online church* but, because of the emphasis placed on physical location in worship, are reluctant to stream services online. Evangelical churches with a more 'low church' ecclesiology tend to use the technology to invite participation and, therefore, have sought to implement *interactive church*. Most evangelical churches would argue that believers gathered in Jesus' name constitute the essence of church. Community building when gathering is therefore essential. Yet, for many, *VR-church* seems to be a step too far. To date, churches in VR-environments remain a marginal phenomenon. Proponents of *VR-church* tend to emphasise the missional opportunities and the possibilities of introducing the gospel to those who would normally set their foot in on-site churches.

Practical considerations naturally also come into play. As the churches came out of the COVID-19 pandemic, many morphed into *hybrid church* attempting to cater to those who were not able to join for on-site worship. Others, after the exhaustion from the stresses of the pandemic, dropped streaming altogether as the burden became too great. Further factors that come into play are the demographics of the congregation. The level of resources and know-how will have implications for how local churches adopt digital technology. This means that conversations about churches' use of digital technology requires both theological and practica l wisdom.

As this discussion illustrates, churches' adaptation of technology is dependent on a number of factors, which lead to different forms of digital church. This demands a continuous negotiation in order to best understand what digital provisions give us and where they might fall short of theological and biblical ideals.

Therefore, the remainder of this paper will focus on the challenges, strengths, and limitations we need to consider about digital use in general.

Challenges

Part of the challenge is not knowing exactly where all of this goes in the next few decades. Today, there is much discussion about AI and where it could and will take us. Can it develop to a point where it becomes its own entity with a 'mind' of its own? Will it come with an imprimatur of science and technology over it so that anything goes, and will we be discerning about what it offers us or where it limits us? Will the facilitation of many processes leave humans asking questions about what they are to do to steward the world better (as Gen 1 asks of us when it calls us to subdue the earth in a functional manner)? For all that technology offers, even in the church, can we steward its resources wisely? Part of that judgment requires appreciating its strengths and limitations.

Another challenge relates to how this medium processes information. It is bidirectional and interactive. This means people post information but then it gets circulated in all kinds of responsive forms. Information is not circulated as a collected outline but in bits and pieces. Therefore, is not really vetted, and information and misinformation can mix. This requires diligence on our part ignorer to understand what we should accept as genuine information versus information framed for us in ways that do not correspond to reality. The fact that information works more like bullet points pursued in any order rather than through an outline, means we think and process information differently than in a book medium. Does this impact the way we deliver, teach, and preach biblical content so that listeners who are used to processing information in one way can absorb what Scripture teaches?

A final challenge is with regard to who gets to speak. An accompanying issue to this is that of resource imbalance, which may preclude some from being able to speak whose voice needs to be heard. This means that moments of participation will need to be conscious and open to these voices. The digital world can level this field and the church universal can 'gather'. When that happens there should be concern that all these voices have a chance to speak and are given access to share in the conversations that will result. The danger is that those who lack resources will not be heard and will be marginalised. These dynamics are likely to continue and may even be exacerbated as technologies develop that require resources in order to be utilised. Intentionality is required in this endeavour.

Strengths

A great strength of technology is the way it gives access to people and between peoples across distances and cultures. The church as a whole can consider in new ways how to reach people in remote areas instantly and how to convey the vast amounts of information we possess.

> ***"A great strength of technology is the way it gives access to people and between peoples across distances and cultures"***

One challenge within the strength is that information is not only verbal but visual. This means there is the potential that the visual can be manipulated in order to make that which is false, or misleading, look true. Long gone are the days when it was a few authoritative voices who processed information for us. Now we have niches of information, a full auditorium of voices, and the possibility of the voices heard operating in a silo. How does the church handle that less centralized feature as information goes out in all directions and time zones? As Neil Postman famously remarked in his book Technopoly, technology changes everything. Much like how the Roman road system linked the Roman Empire together and allowed the gospel to spread more easily, so technology opens up a different kind of mental road system. But because technology comes at us in so many forms, it can be overwhelming, which

requires not just adoption but also reflection. The Joshua Project estimates that by 2035 all people will have access to the internet. Most of the new users will be in places where gospel exposure has been minimal. Combined with the possibility of misinformation, how does open access need to be monitored? Can it even be monitored?

We are already seeing the impact of technology in how we do church and in how people feel about being physically gathered together. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this option of how to do church, as many churches now stream as they also gather. People are choosing to attend in one way or the other and occasionally mix the proportion of how they attend. The questions surrounding what is doable versus what is best remains. However, it is unrealistic to think the digital option will go away and, therefore, more discussion about best practices is needed. This includes serious consideration of how to cross cultures with content coming from one region of the world to another, as well as the sorting out of what reflects one culture to the detriment of another.

Limitations

Perhaps the core limitations within technology have already been noted. First, the flow of information is so open-ended that it is hard to know what is accurate and what is not. Second, what technology can become and what it might replace is still undetermined in many spheres. While the church has often adopted such cultural developments and pursued their expansion in ways that serve the gospel, doing this in ways that actually reflect and advance the gospel in substantive ways will require the development of many who have expertise to help us be discerning about what is taking place, what is being developed, and what those developments may mean. Innovation without such reflection could be counterproductive. Yet, ignoring innovation will leave the church behind in how to reach people when many different kinds of groups are aggressively reaching out by all means necessary to impact how people think and live.

How to work on building genuine community in the midst of such connections is another challenge that many see as a limitation. However, as technology adds depth and capability to how it works, some of these challenges can and will be minimized. The difference between a wired telephone of the past with no visual component and how visual we can be now with an iPhone to stay in touch with missionaries, ministry partners, friends, and family is obvious to all of us. It remains to be seen how such capabilities will expand. Many of us have developed friendships and connections with people and organisations where we have never physically been. Technology makes this possible and the capabilities are likely only to expand in this direction. Working at home versus in an office in another city is but a symptom of all of this. Things that seemed unlikely or impossible years ago are now becoming more common. Who knows what the future holds here?

Conclusion

Reviewing where we may be headed shows that challenges, strengths, and limitations do not function as clean boxes but interact with each other as technology develops. How those combinations develop and what the results become requires continued reflection on the principles that should guide their wise use and implementation. Some of those principles include:

- Concern for the accuracy of what comes our way by technology.
- How the medium builds community in meaningful ways.
- Awareness of the choice of medium and how each type shapes perception with its own set of strengths and weaknesses.
- How our churches and organisations end up reaching people who otherwise might be neglected.
- How we remain sensitive to cross-cultural dynamics, discerning which voices get to speak into our efforts so we reflect contributions from the whole of the church.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is simply being able to keep up with how digital provision comes in such an open-ended way and at such a fast pace. This means Information Technology people may need to not only be digital technicians, but also people who grapple with the medium itself. Pastors and church leaders will also need awareness of these issues as decisions are made both locally and denominationally. Attention also must be given to which sites give us the best and worst kind of information. Finally, all of us require some level of digital awareness so that the strengths of the medium can be applied while its limitations are also addressed.

Authors

Dr Darrell Bock is Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at the Seminary's Hendricks Center.

He also serves on the boards of Wheaton College and the Institute for Global Engagement

Dr Jonas Kurlberg is the Director of Taught Postgraduate Studies and Deputy Director of the Centre for Digital Theology at Spurgeon's College. He is also the chair of the Global Network for Digital Theology and a member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group.

PROCLAMATION EVANGELISM IN A DIGITAL AGE

Desmond Henry, Lisa Pak, Nick Parker

Understanding Proclamation Evangelism

Proclamation evangelism rests upon the presupposition that God, as divine proclaimer, reveals himself through his word, calling humanity into a covenant relationship. As the messenger of eternal salvation, God's authoritative and faithful proclamation brings about redemption in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), offering hope to all who respond to his call. Understanding God as the ultimate, creative, eternal innovator and proto-evangelist gives credence to our posture toward the development and adoption of innovative evangelistic approaches in the digital age, and moving toward 2050. Drawing inspiration from the commissions of Jesus,[1] Christians have embraced innovation and creativity, boldly proclaiming the good news from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Through diverse approaches, they continue to engage with the world, bringing hope, reconciliation, and the message of salvation to all.

> ***"Understanding God as the ultimate, creative, eternal innovator and proto-evangelist gives credence to our posture toward the development and adoption of innovation evangelistic approaches in the digital age."***

The purpose of this article is to examine proclamation evangelism in the context of the digital age, taking a missiological perspective and looking towards the future. We will discuss the present realities, challenges, and opportunities and provide strategies for engaging in meaningful dialogue while remaining true to our missional calling.

Proclamation Evangelism and the Digital Age

Each age has brought unique challenges and opportunities, and the believers of each generation have done their best to leverage the latest technologies and innovations in obedience to Jesus' Great Commission mandate. Examples of this abound in the New Testament, where we see Jesus employ various innovative methods of proclamation evangelism during his ministry—using parables (Matt 13:34–35; Mark 4:30–34), signs and wonders (John 2:1–11; John 9:1–7), and dialogue and questions (Matt 16:13–16; John 4:7–26). He proclaimed his message to the masses in marketplaces (Matt 11:16–17; Luke 7:31–35), to the religious in synagogues and the temple (Luke 4:15–30; John 8:2–52), and in many different spaces. Jesus proclaimed the good news in diverse settings, including homes, near water wells, on mountainsides, and along shorelines, even utilizing a boat as a platform for preaching.

Creative proclamation evangelism is also demonstrated throughout church history. Some such examples include papyrus scrolls, the use of stained glass windows to visually depict biblical stories, the printing press, the distribution of gospel tracts during the Great Awakening, the microphone, and the onset of the age of the radio and live broadcast television. In short, technological advancement and proclamation evangelism have always gone hand in hand, because the church has been called out (*ekklesia* in Greek) to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth: 'But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?' (NLT).

WHAT IS MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL AGE?

The Cape Town Commitment states: 'We embrace new opportunities for global mission through advances in technology and communication, recognizing the potential to reach every person with the message of Christ.'2 Since Cape Town 2010, we've seen incredible advances in technology, particularly in tech that connects people, making our world smaller than ever before. With 5.16 billion people now accessing the internet and 4.76 billion of those active on at least one social media platform, our world is 'connected' in a new way. We are actively engaging in online communities while sitting in the comfort of our own homes.

> ***"These exponential advancements of the digital age present an unprecedented opportunity for the proclamation of the good news."***

These exponential advancements of the digital age present an unprecedented opportunity for the proclamation of the good news. It is now possible, at least in theory, to imagine a world where we can reach everyone with the good news. The borderless nature of digital cyberspace means that we can now have access to individuals from nations and cultures who were previously, for all intents and purposes, assumed to be restricted and/or unreachable. Simply put, we have entered into a reality where no one is unreachable.

Through social media marketing, ministries are now able to reach more people in one day with a single ad than many crusade evangelists could during a month of outdoor meetings—and at a fraction of the cost. The onset of the digital world has exponentially accelerated the rate of connections and multiplied the number of touchpoints. As we look to 2050, the interconnectivity we are increasingly experiencing will require believers to embrace new strategies and approaches in digital and in-person evangelism, utilizing various forms of multimedia, social platforms, and interactive technologies to effectively communicate the good news. In the words of Carl F. H. Henry, 'Good news is only good news if it gets there in time.' Much work remains to get the good news in front of the masses who are unreached or otherwise inaccessible.

At the writing of this article in mid-2023, Starlink is currently rolling out their service across the African continent, providing first-time access to the internet to millions of people. This increased accessibility coupled with the steadily decreasing cost of data may mean that access to the internet will in the near future not be seen as a luxury, but rather as a human right. It is all-pervasive, according to Shoshana Zuboff, a Harvard professor: 'The digital realm has been transformed into a vast, continuous data stream that captures, monetizes, and shapes every aspect of our lives.'[3]

There is no doubt that the digital age is upon us. And yet, like so many novel innovations and technologies, access to this new digital world is still limited.[4] Digital deserts exist in vast pockets around the world, most notably in developing nations, which is important to note for the global church, since the developing nations are where so many of the remaining unengaged, unreached people groups (UUPGs) live.[5]

Still, interest and necessity—e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic—are pushing even the latest adopters to venture into this brave new digital world, and leaders of all sectors are actively investing in digital solutions and innovation. So much so that it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we may be entering into the golden age of digital development.[6] Digital strategies are essential for the church in this modern world and are integral to the reaching of the least and the lost. In nations where access to the good news is prohibited or severely restricted, the creation of secure digital portholes and channels allows for access in a way that mitigates exposure in circumstances where anonymity is safety.

And as the best minds of the world's businesses, governments, intelligence agencies, banks, and other institutions battle it out to secure their corner of the digital world, the best minds of God's people need to apply themselves to the application of these tools to get the sal-

vation message of Jesus Christ out to those who have never heard. And they are. Many ministries that have pioneered the use of technologies for mass outreach and evangelism continue to lead in innovation and in the development of evangelistic tools and are actively incorporating digital evangelism into their existing strategies. These ministries include the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association,[7] the Luis Palau Association,[8] Pioneers (through their Media to Movements strategy), Cru, and the Jesus Film Project. Newer ministries and organizations, such as Global Media Outreach (GMO), Christian Vision (CV),[9] OneHope, Renew World Outreach, and Jesus.net, are also actively developing tools for the digital age.

But parachurch ministries and organizations are not alone in their digital evangelism efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the local church into the digital world, and churches, although restricted in terms of physical gatherings, have found that through online portholes, they were able to interact not only with congregants, but also with people outside the church who may never come to a physical church building. In other words, for the first time, a church's 'community' was no longer bound by a geographical location.

Online discipleship courses such as Alpha (which launched Alpha online post-COVID-19), online communities like FaithTech, and Bible studies through apps like YouVersion have opened up the digital door for people to encounter Jesus through these new mediums and channels. Moreover, Bible agencies like Biblica and SIL are exploring how AI could help accelerate the translation of Scripture into minority languages.

Our connectedness brings an opportunity to share the good news through the Metaverse, esports, gaming platforms, social media, and streaming platforms, in addition to the traditional broadcast media and anything hybrid and in between.[10] Still, many challenges remain, both internal and external, that we must consider regarding the proclamation of the good news in the digital age.

Internal Challenges

The biggest challenge that ministries face in this digital age is that of perceived success. With the nature of social media and the aggressive algorithms that promote content at all cost, it is very easy to 'share' the good news with millions of people at a time and think that it's making a difference, when in reality these numbers don't reflect true gospel engagement. This in part is due to how social platforms report data and the metrics they use. For instance, the number of people 'reached' doesn't mean the number of people who have viewed and engaged with the content. Leveraging digital technologies ought to lead to community transformation and real world impact. This can be measured through responses (comments and messages), people attending physical spaces (church service or events) and the establishment of real community (this could be both physical or digital).

We also cannot assume that as we proclaim the gospel across these digital platforms, people are being discipled and connected into genuine faith communities. The challenge here is to make sure that evangelism doesn't happen in a vacuum, but rather in collaboration with churches and ministries who are able to engage and facilitate conversations with seekers.[11]

> ***"The biggest challenges that ministries face in this digital age is that of perceived success."***

Many people also don't consider the culture of content consumption that exists in the world. Anything done in an online environment is seen to have a shelf life. Therefore, ministries can often find themselves consumed by the drive to produce more content that is bigger and better than before. And while the spirit of excellence is applauded, this desire to become bigger, better, and more 'viral' often leads to ministries negating the message of the gospel in pursuit of clicks, likes, and views. Proclamation evangelism, however, regardless of the medium, is about proclaiming the good

news without compromising the message. The tools of proclamation may evolve and follow trends, but the message has always been the good news about the truth of who Jesus is. And this is always relevant to all people and in every age.

This leads to the final internal challenge that we face not only as ministries, but also as individual Christians: unity in our wonderful diversity. As much as we love that the world is connected and smaller, this smaller connected world also means that everyone now has a voice, and often those voices have differing opinions and ideas about God, church, and the world we profess to love and serve. Still, we must recognize that our strength in unity lies precisely in our differences. In genuine John 17 unity, if we are to truly make an impact in this digital age, we need to do so from a place of unity, humility, grace, and love, allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit.

External Challenges

By 'external challenges' we refer to those factors that are outside the control of individuals, churches, and ministries. As much opportunity as there is for evangelism in the digital age, we currently find ourselves in unchartered territories.

One approach to the digital space asserts that no one can (or should) own it, and all people are equal in it, regardless of their physical location or demographics.[12] In fact, what we see now is that our 'tribes' are no longer restricted to a geographic location, but exist cross culturally, in online communities.

It is very easy now to find someone who believes the same thing as you, and this confirmation bias means that communicating the truth is often received as communicating 'personal' truth. This shift in the understanding of the very nature of truth leads to a challenging environment when proclaiming the good news.

At the same time, despite the porous nature of the digital world, more governments are increasing their efforts to secure their digital borders and censor content in their countries. This isolates individuals in these countries and instils fear. In some instances, governments have completely switched off the internet for strategic intervals (*e.g.* Ethiopia, Iran, Uganda).

This rise in censorship means that although we live in a digital society, our methods of outreach need to be hybrid in nature, consisting of both online and offline strategies.

Beyond Proclamation to Collaboration

Digital proclamation isn't the only opportunity that our digital landscape offers. In fact, leaders in the mission world have already been working to un-silo the traditional fields of Scripture translation, evangelism, and church planting so that together, they can have a greater impact and lasting sustainability (*e.g.* Finishing the Task[13]). Bible translation and evangelism work together to increase effective and meaningful Scripture engagement, which then leads to discipleship in communities and healthy multiplying churches. In the same way, leading Christian digital innovators are exploring how digital proclamation can lead to online discipleship and authentic Christian communities, *i.e.* churches.

> ***"(...) leading Christian digital innovators are exploring how digital proclamation can lead to online discipleship and authentic Christian communities, i.e. churches."***

One example of note is a recent collaborative study conducted by the digital team co-led by Aaron Thomson (head of product for Jesus Film), Raeli Miller (Jesus Film), Thomas Harley (One Hope), and Justin Murff (Strategic Resource Group).[14] The study focused on digital strategies in the MENA region and explored how digital platforms might be effective in connecting interested individuals and new believers from a Muslim context to others in their local areas who could answer their questions about faith and be the first contact point.

The study centered around prayer and demonstrated that connecting digitally over prayer could be a strategic pathway in moving Muslim background believers into a faith journey. Even-

tually, after mutual trust is established, the initial online contact could be complemented by in-person meetings with local church leaders and mentors, which increases the likelihood of an individual staying the course of the spiritual journey and joining a faith community, whether online or in person.

In other words, digital proclamation and access to the good news can lead to prayer communities, personal discipleship, and even digital church.[15] Thus, digital resources are fast becoming an indispensable tool of proclamation in the least-reached and hardest to reach places. Specifically in the hardest to reach places, digital portholes offer a degree of anonymity and social distance that allows those in potentially hostile contexts to explore Christianity in safety.

The study's summary findings were as follows:

- Outsiders need access on their terms.
- There must be a mutually agreed-upon purpose that prioritizes progress.
- Trust must be an integral part of any digital community. Sustainability starts with trust.
- Relationships beyond the regular meetings are important.
- Hosts who are empowered to own the front-end of the online experience increase retention in digital communities.
- Prayer is the most valuable interaction in the digital community experience.

However, the report cautions against 'moving on' from analogue strategies. Rather, the suggestion is to embrace digital proclamation in addition to the traditional methods. The Roman roads and the Silk Road are still used today, in addition to planes, trains, and automobiles. The conveniences that a digital world offers may tempt us to believe that digital is superior, but this would be technological hubris. The digital world, born out of the modern and industrial ages, may seem to us to be the most efficient and direct route, but digital strategies, innovation, and efficiency do not necessarily translate to efficiency or superiority in the field. Rather, any digital tool/resource created for a particular region and/or people group must consider the context in which the tool/resource will be used. In many rural areas of the world, digital access is limited for a variety of reasons. Therefore, digital tools must marry well with indigenous solutions.

Conclusion

Proclamation evangelism is here to stay but embraces the use of innovative approaches in the digital age to share the good news. The digital era we are accelerating into presents unprecedented opportunities for reaching people globally. Ministries and churches are leveraging social media and digital platforms to engage with individuals and communities. However, our many challenges include the need to measure true gospel engagement and avoid compromising the message for the sake of popularity. Unity and collaboration among believers are crucial in this interconnected world. We must also navigate the shifting perception of truth and the rise in government censorship. Beyond proclamation, collaboration between Scripture translation, evangelism, and church planting is essential for lasting impact. Digital resources offer opportunities for prayer communities, personal discipleship, and digital church, particularly in hard-to-reach places.

Endnotes

1 It is now widely recognized that the New Testament contains multiple passages that could be understood to be Great Commission texts. Ed Stetzer unpacks the four commissions of Jesus, making the case that other than Matthew 28:19f, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46–49, and John 20:21–23 should also be considered as equally valid commissions. Refer to the following for greater detail: John Piper and David Mathis. *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). Accessed June 9, 2023. https://document.desiringgod.org/finish-the-mission-en.pdf?ts=1439242122.

2 "The Cape Town Commitment." *The Lausanne Movement.* October 2010. Accessed June 9, 2023. https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment.

3 Shoshana Zuboff. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York City: PublicAffairs, 2019).

4 Read more here: https://fortune.com/2023/03/01/starlink-satellite-internet-africa-spacex/

5 This book explores innovative and unconventional methods for reaching UUPG's, including the use of digital technologies: Peyton Jones. *Reaching the Unreached: Becoming Raiders of the Lost Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

6 This resource may be a helpful one to engage as it relates to the moral and ethical considerations such development in this field may bring: Klaus Schwab. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2017).

7 You can learn more about BGEA's digital evangelism strategy, called 'Search for Jesus', here: https://searchforjesus.net/

8 The Palau Association shares that in their experience, with USD 1 you can get a gospel ad in front of 1,800 people, of which 31 people will click to read the gospel presentation, and 6 will indicate a decision for Jesus. People who indicate decisions for Jesus through Hope With God are then given the opportunity to grow in Jesus through their highly engaged Facebook community of nearly 20 million people around the world. You can read more about this strategy here: https://www.palau.org/hopewithgod

9 Christian Vision, a leading voice in digital evangelism, uses Facebook campaigns as a way to digitally reach people around the world who have never heard the gospel or the message of salvation. Though their National Pioneers Initiative (NPI), they deploy digital pioneers (online responders) and pioneers on the ground (similar to a traditional missionary) to help evangelize and disciple. Read more online: https://www.cvglobal.co/the-power-of-digital-evangelism/

10 For a detailed opinion paper on the Metaverse from a multidisciplinary perspective explore: Yogesh K. Dwivedi et al. "Metaverse beyond the hype: Multidisciplinary perspectives on emerging challenges, opportunities, and agenda for research, practice and policy." *International Journal of Information Management* 66 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102542.

11 CV, as an evangelism ministry, has always believed that discipleship happens within the context of relationship, and that relationship should sit within a local church. For this reason, whenever possible, CV will always provide an online seeker with an opportunity to connect with someone in their physical community. This individual would be connected with a local church and would then take this online seeker on a discipleship journey. This model also allows for online evangelism to be done at scale, without creating pressure 'downstream' for volunteers who may help with large volumes of seeker engagement and response.

12 Much has been written on this topic by numerous authors and from varying perspectives. This will accelerate in our age. Vaidhyanathan argues that Google's expanding reach and control over information, communication, and commerce have profound implications for privacy, democracy, and the overall landscape of knowledge: Siva Vaidhyanathan. *The Googlization of Everything: (And Why We Should Worry)*. 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2011). Crawford, for instance, contends that AI systems are not neutral or objective, but rather embedded with power structures, political influences, and significant environmental costs: Kate Crawford. *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (London: Yale University Press, 2021).

13 'Finishing The Task unites and mobilizes the global body of Christ to courageously take up the mantle of catalyzing, multiplying and supporting church planting movements in every unreached people group and place, until everyone, everywhere has access to a Bible, believers and a Body of Christ.' Read more about their unique approach here: https://finishingthetask.com/wp-content/uploads/FTT-Global-2020-Update.pdf.

14 Thomson, Aaron, Tom Harley, Raeli Miller & Justin Murff. *Bottom of the Funnel: Summary* (Orlando, 2022).

15 This study underscores the growing recognition of the potential of digital tools and platforms in fostering meaningful connections and providing access to resources for individuals seeking spiritual guidance and support in challenging contexts.

Authors

Desmond Henry is a missional thought-leader, professor of missiology, author, pastor, and speaker who serves the global church in evangelism and mission. He is married to Lara and has three daughters. He serves as the executive director of the Global Network of Evangelists for the Luis Palau Association and is passionate about elevating evangelism globally.

Rev Dr Lisa Pak currently works alongside Rick Warren on the Finishing The Task (FTT) lead team. Her previous experience includes serving as a Regional Director at the Canadian Bible Society, in addition to her pastoral experience in the United States, South Korea, Singapore, and Canada with a particular focus on the Korean Diaspora community. She is a second-generation Korean Canadian and Toronto native, ordained by the Korean Association of Independent Churches and Missions (KAICAM). She holds a MDiv and a MABL from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and has earned her DMin in Leadership at Tyndale Seminary. She is passionate about diverse and young leaders, women in leadership, and global missions.

Nick Parker is the Global Partnerships lead for the evangelism ministry Christian Vision (CV). Having studied Public Relations, Nick spent four years working in the production and events industry before joining CV's community department in 2013. Initially, he served as a Community Specialist before being promoted to Community Manager. In 2022 Nick stepped into his new role as Global Partnerships lead, looking at how CV can strategically partner with churches, ministries and individuals to further The Gospel.

DISCIPLESHIP IN A DIGITAL AGE

Dave Benson, Natasha Edwards, Guichun Jun, Eva Nappier

The State of Discipleship in a Digital Age

Welcome to the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'

In today's world, digital devices and platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives. This has led to the need for the church to consider the current state and future of discipleship ministry in relation to the digital landscape.

The digital age began when the Third Industrial Revolution gave rise to digital electronics, including telecommunication, broadcasting, computer, and the internet in the latter half of the 20th century.[1] With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution in the early 2010s, the digital age has reached a new phase with the convergence of technologies through the development of the Internet of Things (IoT).

This new era of digitalisation was solidified with the COVID-19 pandemic which limited in-person gathering. The proliferation of communication technologies advanced rapidly during the lock-downs, bringing about the 'death of distance' – we can immediately interact with and potentially disciple most every distinct people group (*ethnos*) across the planet, for everyone is now my neighbour (Matthew 28:18–20).[2]

A conservative estimate for the number of internet users worldwide was 5.16 billion in 2023, or 64.4 percent of the global population.[3] This unprecedented digitalisation has affected multiple aspects of our daily lives, including culture, social interactions, business, entertainment, education, and even religion.

The church's mixed response

The church has been slow to respond to the development of the digital age, especially concerning its disciplemaking ministry and mission. Discipleship has been overlooked in the church for decades, as Dallas Willard rightly pointed out that discipleship is the biggest omission from the Great Commission.[4] A recent study by Barna Group reveals that only 1 percent of American church leaders believe that today's churches are effectively discipling new and young believers.[5]

Beyond America, this issue is a concern for the worldwide church, impacting every place. The comprehensive 'Analysis of Lausanne 4 Listening Calls' revealed that the 'Need for Discipleship' is the number one gap and opportunity in serving the Great Commission globally.[6]

This phenomenon is not unrelated to the repercussions of digitalisation. Generally speaking, the decline of people's religiosity began long before the internet and social media, but it has accelerated and intensified dramatically since their arrival.[7] Additionally, increased awareness of secularism and atheism in the 21st century has been conditioned by digitalisation.[8] The waves of secularisation and digitalisation affected all aspects of society, and the church was no exception. The priority of discipleship has diminished with greater distraction than ever and fewer believers fixing their eyes on Jesus. This correlates with wider society's fixation on novelty in the here and now, captivated by our screens.[9]

Many churches have embraced digital devices and platforms such as podcasts, church websites, social media, and streaming services. However, these digital tools are primarily used for evangelism and church growth, only rarely for discipleship.

> ***"Many churches have embraced digital devices and platforms (...) However, these digital tools are primarily used for evangelism and church growth, only rarely for discipleship."***

The possibilities of information power and boundary-less disciplemaking

To anticipate future disciplemaking, it is crucial to acknowledge the distinctive charac-

teristics of this new phase of the digital age and find ways to incorporate them into our discipleship practices. We currently live in an age of integrated intelligence which enables access to a comprehensive understanding of any topic through information technologies such as AI, big data, and hyperconnectivity among many systems and devices. Digital infrastructures and platforms enable us to build and extend human networks to share information and life experiences.

In light of this, we can identify two characteristics of the digital age, which may contribute to discipleship positively:

As digitalisation advances, the traditional system of *information power is being decentralised*, shifting towards a more polycentric model of communication. This allows believers from all walks of life to contribute their perspectives, leading to a healthier community of discipleship.[10]

The advanced technological capacity enables us to overcome the barriers of time and geography to meet other disciples and hear their narratives of following Jesus. By sharing personal narratives of discipleship in both local and global contexts, believers can be inspired and challenged to follow Jesus as stories have the power to draw attention, foster engagement, and facilitate actions.[11]

These characteristics of the digital age may enable believers to seek truthful information for spiritual growth, build relationships in the digital space, and participate in religious activities, such as Bible study, prayer meetings, and worship services, regardless of time and geography.

These positive aspects could be well-regarded and adapted as beneficial in the context of the church's disciplemaking ministry. Many more people are using the internet to explore their faith and connect with others on their spiritual journeys.[12] It is encouraging to see that churches in contexts where digital technologies are advanced are actively exploring and experimenting with new avenues of discipleship to direct this spiritual desire of younger generations toward actively following Jesus.

By embracing innovative approaches that are relevant to their specific contexts in the digital age, churches can continue to develop and multiply disciples in the future.

The Effect of Discipleship in a Digital Age

The world

Looking toward the world in cyberspace 2050,[13] issues of identity will be paramount and greatly impact our call to make disciples of all the nations. Who am I, who are we, and what do we live for? From social media identities to avatars in the Metaverse, these questions will be ever present and pressing. Focusing on one facet, our work is an especially strategic area in which we are formed as disciples and use our gifts in following Jesus. However, generative AI is projected to automate and thus replace 300 million full-time jobs, as robots do better what a quarter of humans once prided themselves on, and the rest of us increasingly work online managing their output.[14]

"By embracing innovative approaches that are relevant to their specific context in the digital age, churches can continue to develop and multiply disciples in the future."

People will need an identity deeper than their job provides, and yet a better story of why their tech-driven labour matters.[15] In this context of insecure work and identity, the prospect of being grafted into a global family bearing Christ's name – where our primary vocation is to love God and love others in networks of genuine trust as we cultivate the planet toward *shalom* (holistic flourishing) – is good news indeed.[16]

The church

This is the identity offered through the ecclesia, reinforced as we corporately learn to follow Jesus in our particular time and place.[17] The plural of disciple is church, and we exist as a learning community defined by holistic spiritual practices which shape each member to live as Jesus would if he were you.[18] What

makes for transformative education is thus an essential concern for the church. Churches must discern among many online resources, ensuring that knowledge translates into practical wisdom in everyday life.[19]

This aligns with insights from learning theory, which suggests that 70 percent of learning occurs informally in everyday life, 20 percent through community interactions, and only 10 percent through formal interventions.[20] Digital networks can help Christians connect beyond physical gatherings as the scattered church, sharing timely resources to grow together in the whole of life.

Churches, then, must help their people become 'wise peacemakers' – reflective practitioners who can *listen* to what's going on and why in their context, *imagine* what should be going on as they contextualise diverse digital sources that fuel their discipleship, *create* change that aligns with the kingdom, and learn to *communicate* the gospel in a way that is truly good news in their time and place.[21] We especially need wisdom to be fruitful followers of Christ in the digital spaces where we increasingly spend our time.[22]

'The Last Supper' Sculpture in Cirencester Abbey, by Peter Barnes (2019), composed of 50,000 computer keyboard keys with Bible



quotes threaded throughout the mosaic. Photos taken by Trevor Cooling, used with permission.

The Great Commission

The digital age may be leveraged to augment our Great Commission efforts to make disciples, but only if our approach *enhances*, rather than displaces, the embodied practices at the heart of following Jesus together.[23]

God's medium to bear the gospel and make disciples was not a detached tweet; redemption and sanctification did not depend on digital means but rather were embodied, incarnated, as the 'the Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood' (John 1:14, MSG).[24] Becoming disciples who disciple all people groups happens in a community of character where – as we practice giving and receiving love – we are shaped to bear God's faithful presence in the world.[25] As such, digital resources are best utilised to enhance focal practices (such as table fellowship), which make tangible God's kingdom and are most transformative when we are physically gathered.[26] Data devoid of a physical frame is digital gnosticism.

Consuming resources without accountability to act decisively makes for virtual disciples. As we practise the way of the kingdom, our head, heart, and hands – formed in wisdom, virtue, and the skill of peacemaking – synergise to serve *shalom* as a whole-life witness.[27] Against the implicit values of technology, especially ease and efficiency, disciplemaking requires 'friction' to grow in 'anti-fragility' and learn how to sacrificially love the world as Christ loved us.[28]

With these principles in mind, we may now consider fruitful ways forward at this cyber-juncture.

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

The digital space is where the people are, whether we like it or not. The question becomes, will we enter in (1 Corinthians 9:22)? We have an unprecedented opportunity to infuse discipleship learning into the everyday life of every believer by saturating their digital consumption with disruptive re-directions to the embodied life of following Jesus.[29] Multitudes stand in the valley of decision. Moment by moment, they are deciding on something.[30] If we are not present in the digital space, pressing people toward inconvenient Christ-like following, they will simply decide on something easier.[31]

WHAT IS MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL AGE?

As we advise discernment regarding digital consumption and its inherent dangers, we can trust the gospel of Jesus Christ to retain its superseding power, cutting through the impediments of the digital landscape, and allowing us to leverage hi-tech tools to shape our hearts in synergy with face-to-face guidance (1 Corinthians 11:1).[32] Paul's 'asynchronous discipleship' through letter writing to Rome – a fledgling community of believers he'd never physically visited – sets a noteworthy precedent.[33]

Following are three categories of discipleship opportunities now present in the digital age, offering concrete examples for further exploration in the endnotes.

Access to the tender places:

- *Privacy:* Digital avenues of discipleship circumvent the bystander effect. Interacting mostly on a private, individual basis, people in the digital space are more open to deep consideration and honest responses.[34] Disciples share socially unacceptable struggles and take challenging discipleship to heart in digital exchanges where fear of judgment is removed, bringing their most private questions and problems to the internet.[35] We can meet these needs compassionately, nudging difficult conversations toward embodied discipleship relationships.
- *Immediacy:* Digital communication offers the opportunity to disciple people through the most painful moments of life – during a mental health crisis, at the scene of trauma, in a marital fight – immediately.[36] In these moments, we desperately need discipling but seldom feel up to calling on a church leader for guidance.[37] This could lay the groundwork for an ecclesial culture of confessional honesty.
- *Equality:* In the digital discipleship space, we can give every person a voice.[38] Its leveling effects may be helpful for discipling those who have been traumatised by authoritarian church structures unreflective of the heart of Christ. These same digital platforms can bridge churchless believers back into physical fellowship.[39]

Including the excluded:

- *Governmental:* The web provides us the means of supplying discipleship materials and inclusion in discipleship communities to people in religiously hostile nations.[40]
- *Financial:* Many digital discipleship resources are free, making them available to those who would have otherwise been content-impoverished due to the lack of funds.[41] Digital resources enable understaffed or small churches to augment their modalities of discipleship without the need for a large budget or hiring more leaders.[42]
- *Situational:* Digital communities, streaming events, and virtual meetings offer a means of participation for the truly housebound, such as the immuno-compromised, mothers of tiny babies, and people who live in remote, rural, and undeveloped locations.[43, 44]

Reaching far and wide:

- *Range:* Digital platforms enable us to reach more people, further, and faster.[45] Built-in tracking and data analyses provide digital insights to help us maximise effectiveness by matching particular discipleship topics to particular communities.[46]
- *Frequency:* Online communities and discipleship resources invite daily peer-to-peer interaction, encouragement, support, and connection at a level of frequency that would be time-prohibitive and invasive if attempted in person.[47]
- *Scope:* Digital discipleship communities foster identification with the global church.[48] Where digital isolation rends us from our historical identity as the people of God, digital tools can reconnect us to the worldwide body of which we are a part.

In addition to the categories above, the digital age presents the distinct opportunity to emphasise in our discipleship embodied connection, face-to-face interaction, slow and steady commitment, and physical proximity as direct antidotes to the isolation, utilitarianism,

and abstraction by which the digital age has harmed our humanity.

Challenges

What, then, are the challenges that our digital age poses for advancing the Great Commission? The first will be *leveraging digital tools for disciplemaking* without losing sight of the vital role of enfleshed relationship in the process. Relying too heavily upon digital tools could work against the formation of Christ-like character if excessive emphasis is placed on content delivery rather than on real life interactions and the expression of faith in community.[49] Exercising discernment around how our digital tools can facilitate greater engagement with God and with one another without falling into the trap of reinforcing passive consumption will be important.[50]

The second is the reality that the *digital world is a formation machine*.[51] Every technological advancement changes how human beings think, behave, and relate.[52] The digital world can misshape us by reinforcing unhealthy habits and rehearsing liturgies that are embedded with falsehood.[53] Therefore, in a world where technology is changing at a rapid pace, our disciplemaking models will need to:

- Uphold a vision of what flourishing looks like, not just as followers of Jesus but also as human beings in our time and place.[54]
- Engage with reflective practices that will grow self-awareness and media literacy as we live and engage in the digital era.[55]
- Adopt habits and practices individually and communally that will counteract the negative impact of living in a digital world. For example, intentionally practising hospitality.[56]

Finally, there is the challenge of *contextualisation* for both Christian content creators and leaders who are curating digital content for use in disciplemaking communities. As the world becomes increasingly digitally-connected, discerning how digital resources will assist and not harm followers of Jesus – as they learn to love God and one another in the midst of diverse contexts – will be vital. There is a risk of cultural homogenisation, such as amplifying Western ideas at the expense of enabling the gospel to find its fullest expression in the local context.[57]

Navigating these challenges will require intentional, vigilant strategies. It will include creating opportunities for meaningful connections, curating reliable and relevant resources, establishing accountability structures, fostering self-discipline, and leveraging technology to facilitate deeper engagement. A wise, humble, prayerful, and discerning approach will help us navigate the challenges and maximise the potential for impactful disciplemaking in the digital age both now and into the future.

Key Resources

Across this article, we have referenced many resources. Like the discovery of nuclear power, digital developments hold promise and peril for disciplemaking – so we need help to make sense of our situation as this technology becomes 'universal', affecting everything.[58] However, sourcing experts along isolated disciplinary lines is part of our dilemma rather than a solution to 'wicked problems' surrounding the trajectory of the Great Commission from today to 2050.[59]

We need a Spirit-led and prayer-full integration of expertise, guided by God's Word, to respond well. We need wisdom to discern what is timely for developing disciples who follow Jesus in their particular and complex digital context.[60]

What, then, are the *human* resources within the global church – especially within the Lausanne movement – which must be brought together as we listen, finding a better way forward through divine conversation?[61] How might they help us answer these crucial questions?[62]

Theology Working Group and *church planting:*

- What does it mean to bear Christ's image in a digital age as embodied beings?
- How do we best form whole-life disciples, and how might virtual gatherings help or hurt this process, especially for those physically isolated from church?

- What is best practice in online education for transformation?
- What is the purpose, theologically understood, of work, and technology – as spheres where we serve as disciples – and how is this formed or deformed in this digital age?

Media engagement, technology, and *Scripture engagement:*

- How might digital communication augment face-to-face practices, or distort the disciplemaking process?
- Based on industry standards, what are the best practices for not only broadcasting information but networking toward transformation?
- How might we leverage the strengths of decentralised information power and readily available resources to support place-based Scripture engagement?[63]
- What technological innovation will help people connect an ancient biblical word to their modern context, guarding against digital imperialism from more tech-savvy cultures?

Business as Mission, tentmaking, and *workplace ministry:*

- How can we equip every believer to find their identity in Christ – habitually guarding against deformation from being constantly 'on' – and become fruitful in their tech-driven labour amidst automation and precarious work?
- How can we tilt digital work and AI to serve the common good and disciple the nations, rather than damage the fabric of community and endanger life and livelihood?

Cities, *disability concerns*, and *health for all nations:*

- How might technology network groups pursue a kingdom movement to disciple their city with streamlined coordination?
- How does screen time impact our brains (mental health), bodies, and communities? How might we augment the good and restrain the bad in our disciplemaking for life to the full?
- What physical spaces, practices, and resources are needed to disciple the growing number of 'digital refugees' who are left behind and out of community, and to form in-person relationships for the isolated and anxious?

Ministry collaboration and *ministry fundraising:*

- How might cryptocurrency and digital media foster partnership– giving and receiving disciplemaking resources – for the persecuted church?

Younger Leaders Generation and *Lausanne Generations Conversation:*

- What platforms exist to connect disciples cross-generationally, so the questions and answers of young and old alike interact to form wise peacemakers in this cultural moment?[64]

Prioritising interdisciplinary conversations is key to close this gap in the Great Commission. As we move deeper into this digital age, spaces for discipleship seem to only continue to grow and emerge. May we step into these spaces with wisdom, seeking to further the Great Commission and disciple our digital world with faithfulness.

Endnotes

1 This convergence of all technologies includes robotics, but the commonality is computer programming and communication between all devices. See Steven E. Schoenherr, 'The Digital Revolution' (2004), https://web.archive.org/web/20081007132355/http:/history.sandiego.edu/gen/recording/digital.html.

2 Frances Cairncross, *The Death of Distance 2.0: How the Communications Revolution Is Changing Our Lives* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2001).

3 Simon Kemp, 'The Changing World of Digital in 2023,' *We Are Social* (January 26, 2023), https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2023/01/the-changing-world-of-digital-in-2023/.

4 Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006).

5 Barna Group, 'New Research on the State of Discipleship,' Research Releases in Leaders & Pastors (December 1, 2015), https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-ofdiscipleship/.

6 Global Listening Team, 'The Evangelical Church Interacting between the Global and the Local,' *An Executive Analysis of Lausanne 4 Listening Calls* (2022), https://lausanne.org/l4/global-listening/the-evangelical-church-interacting-between-the-global-and-the-local.

7 This is particularly seen in the West, but there is a general correlation between digital penetration and decreasing religiosity, seen – for instance – in China's cities versus rural life. See, Eli Gottlieb, 'Analog Faith in a Digital Age,' *Religion & Politics* (March 17, 2021), https://religionandpolitics.org/2021/03/17/analog-faith-in-a-digital-age/.

8 Teemu Taira, 'Secularism, Atheism, and Digital Media,' in Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022; online edn., Oxford Academic, 20 Oct. 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.013.7.

9 Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 1–16.

10 However, as one reviewer – Kamal Weerakoon – observed, 'there is a counter-movement of information power re-centralisation in privately owned meta-platforms including Meta, Amazon, Google, and Microsoft.' This is not value-neutral, and often tilts algorithms and content away from Christian ways of life and identity, even censoring or misrepresenting our beliefs. See, for instance, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/amazon.accused.of.censorship.after.removing.christian.philosophers.trans.critical.book/136412.htm.

11 As Andy Bannister pointed out in review of this article, however, humans are finite, with a limited capacity to sustain large social networks without these relationships becoming shallow. See Roger Bretherton and Robin Dunbar, 'Dunbar's Number goes to Church: The Social Brain Hypothesis as a Third Strand in the Study of Church Growth,' *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 42, no. 1 (2020), 63–76, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0084672420906215.

12 For example, one study showed that 59% of practising Christian Millennials say they have searched for spiritual content online. See, Hannah Stevens, 'Church in a Digital Age,' *Transmission* (Spring/Summer 2019), https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/explore_the_bible/bible_in_transmission/files/2019_spring/Church_in_a_digital_age.pdf. Additionally, 25% of Internet users (28 million people) in America have accessed religious or spiritual information online at one point or another. This is an increase from survey findings in late 2000, which showed that 21% of internet users – or between 19 million and 20 million people – had gone online to get religious or spiritual material. See, Elena Lasen, 'CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online,' *Pew Research Center* (December 23, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2001/12/23/cyberfaith-how-americans-pursue-religion-online.

13 By *cyberspace*, we mean 'the complex environment resulting from the interaction of people, software, and services on the internet by means of technology devices and networks connected to it, which does not exist in any physical form.' See National Institute of Standards and Technology, 'Cyberspace,' *NIST Glossary* (December 2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.8074v2.

14 World Economic Forum, 'The Future of Jobs Report 2023,' Insight Report (May 2023), https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/. For a Christian interpretation of these trends, and a richer anthropology leaning into our distinctiveness as humans, see https://licc.org.uk/resources/the-robot-will-see-you-now/ (2022), http://www.johnwyatt.com/, and John Wyatt and Stephen N. Williams (eds.), *The Robot Will See You Now: Artificial Intelligence and the Christian Faith* (London: SPCK, 2021).

15 Ethan J. Brue, Derek C. Schuurman, and Steven H. Vanderleest, *A Christian Field Guide to Technology for Engineers and Designers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022). James Bruyn – Assistant Professor at Leder School of Business, The King's University, Edmonton – explores the discipleship opportunity this presents in his unpublished 2023 paper, 'Understanding the Spiritual Challenges of the Contemporary Corporate Workplace,' https://bit.ly/SpiritualChallengesContemporaryWork.

16 Gordon Preece, 'Rehumanizing Precarious Work: Vocation in Location Versus a New Priesthood of Cosmopolitan Techno-Creatives,' in *Transforming Vocation: Connecting Theology, Church, and the Workplace for a Flourishing World*, ed. David Benson, Kara Martin, and Andrew Sloane (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 88–107; John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Why You're Here: Ethics for the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13–63 (excerpt, 'Is That Why Christians are in the World?' at https://www.johnstackhouse.com/post/is-that-why-chris-

tians-are-in-the-world). On the necessary transformations in ontology and epistemology as part of discipleship in the digital age, see Guichun Jun, 'Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere: With Special Reference to Lordship, Followership and Christlikeness in the Concept of Public Discipleship,' *Transformation* 39, iss. 2 (2022), 111–121, https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788211062462.

17 Matt Jolley, 'What Is a Whole-Life Disciple?' LICC (2021), https://licc.org.uk/resources/what-is-a-whole-life-disciple/; see also https://youtu.be/DOOd1G2R7Pw.

18 Ross Hastings, 'Vocation from Union with Christ: Overcoming Dualisms in the Calling of the Church,' *The Regent World* 33, no. 1 (April 20, 2021), https://world.regent-college.edu/leading-ideas/vocation-from-union-with-christ--overcoming-dualisms-in-the-calling-of-the-church; Matt Jolley and Dave Benson, 'What Are Spiritual Practices?' LICC (2021), https://licc.org.uk/resources/spiritual-practices/.

19 Simon Foster, 'What Helps Disciples Grow?,' Saltley Faith & Learning Series no. 2, edited by Ian Jones (Birmingham: St Peter's Saltley Trust, 2016), https://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg/; Paul Wetzig, 'Faith in the Digital Age,' Unpublished report prepared for the Uniting Church of Queensland (December 12, 2019).

20 ICETE, 'Characteristics of Effective and Fruitful Nonformal Theological Education,' The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (April 2023), http://icete.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Characteristics-of-effective-and-fruitful-nonformal-theological-education.pdf. See also David Heywood, *Kingdom Learning: Experiential and Reflective Approaches to Christian Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2017); Jenny Rogers, Adults Learning, 5th ed. (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2007). On the 70–20–10 principle and the Kolb cycle, see https://702010institute.com/702010-model/. And for application of these principles to 'flipped' and distance learning, see Diane Hockridge, 'Rethinking Our Approach to Student Formation in Australian Theological Education,' in *Theological Education: Foundations, Practices, and Future Directions,* ed. Andrew M. Bain, Ian Hussey (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 200–214. Diane Hockridge is the online education specialist for Australia's largest consortia of theological colleges, The Australian College of Theology. See https://ridley.academia.edu/DianeHockridge for more. For ways these principles are being used in the global church, supported by affordable technology to increase digital penetration to even the least reached parts of Africa, see https://icete.academy/course/index.php?categoryid=15, https://youtu.be/w3l1SB8zyv0, https://chatterbox.co.zw/, and https://thewell.systems/.

21 See Dave Benson's 'Wise Peacemakers' (2021) 5-part blog series starting at https://licc.org.uk/resources/wise-peacemakers-part-1-of-5/. For an example of this process applied to discipleship in a digital age, see Matt Jolley, 'Rage Against the Machine' (2021) Wisdom Lab and 2-part blog series at https://licc.org.uk/resources/wisdom-lab-rage-against-the-machine/.

22 Dave Benson, 'Being Fruitful on Facebook: Wisdom for the Web,' LICC (November 5, 2020), https://licc.org.uk/resources/being-fruitful-on-facebook-wisdom-for-the-web/; Jodi Hunt, 'The Digital Way: Re-imagining Digital Discipleship in The Age of Social Media,' Journal of Youth and Theology vol. 18 (2019), 91–112.

23 Quentin Schultze, *Habits of the High-tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002). For a critique of disembodied discipleship that cultivates 'brains on a stick' through information dissemination, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Cf. 2 John 12 where John uses letter-writing technology to disciple, but longs to gather.

24 Michael Pucci, 'The Gospel and Human Poverty,' in *Hearts Aflame: Living the Passion for Evangelism*, ed. Michael Tan (Singapore: Genesis Books and Eagles Communications, 2008), 222–224. Of course, God's revelation included language, inspiring Scripture. But this all pointed toward the embodied 'Christ event' (Hebrews 1:1–3).

25 While digital devices and platforms can be useful tools for discipleship, true growth as a disciple comes from being part of a local community where face-to-face interactions can provide inspiration and challenge with accountability. See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); David Fitch, Faithful Presence: *Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016); Dave Benson, 'The Ecclesial Apologetic for God: Becoming a Good Church in the Eyes of a Watching World,' Lausanne Movement Europe (2021), https://www.lausanneeurope.org/the-ecclesial-apologetic-for-god-becoming-a-good-church-in-the-eyes-of-a-watching-world/.

26 'Focal practices' comes from Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), as unpacked and actioned by Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017). See also: David Fitch's work at https://sevenpractices.org/; Matt Jolley, 'Rage Against the Machine: What Do We Do Now?' LICC (2021), https://licc.org.uk/resources/what-do-we-do-now/; Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), https://www.thecommonrule.org/.

27 Dave Benson, 'A Litany of Practices,' *Practical Theology* (January 7, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2019.1565080/. For more on tailoring spiritual practices for this digital age that are embedded in our virtual and physical frontlines, see https://licc.org.uk/resources/how-to-change-your-habits-and-let-god-change-you/ and https://licc.org.uk/resources/research-embedding-spiritual-practices-and-seeing-the-benefits/, embedded in LICC's 2023 course, 'Growing on the Frontline', available at https://licc.org.uk/ourresources/growing-on-the-frontline/.

28 Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Anti-Fragile: How to Live in a World We Don't Understand* (London: Allen Lane, 2012); John Wyatt, 'Welcome to the Metaverse,' *Connecting with Culture* LICC Blog (November 26,

2011), https://licc.org.uk/resources/welcome-to-the-metaverse/.

29 James R. Reed III and Lori C. Reed, *Reimagining the Great Commission: 21st Century Digital Discipleship* (np: 2019), 10.

30 Andrew Palau, 'Made to Share,' presentation, The Luis Palau Association (Beaverton, OR: February, 2023).

31 Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 12.

32 Julie Anne Lytle, *Faith Formation* 4.0 (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2013), Kindle Locations 2685–2689.

33 Physical presence in a church gathering doesn't guarantee we are mentally present. Conversely, through our union in Christ by the Spirit, we may be physically absent but still practising 'comm-union' (1 Corinthians 5:3). Prayer and Scripture engagement, for instance, are transformative in disciplemaking though they don't depend upon being bodily with another person. As such, whether in person, on zoom, or as an avatar (from Hinduism, literally meaning 'incarnation') in the Metaverse with VR Church, limiting distraction and being truly *present* – giving intentional attention and prayerfully focusing on 'with-ness' in that moment – is critical to discipleship in every context. See Janet Maria Sewell, interviewed by Joel Forster, 'Virtual Reality, a Useful Tool in the Hands of the Persecuted Church?,' *Evangelical Focus Europe* (June 26, 2023), https://evangelicalfocus.com/life-tech/22565/jan-sewell-church-and-virtual-reality.

34 Timo Gnambs and Kai Kaspar, 'Disclosure of Sensitive Behaviors across Self-Administered Survey Modes: A Meta-Analysis," *Behavior Research* 47 (2015), 1237–1259, https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-014-0533-4.

35 George Barna, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 107. See also https://www.cvglobal.co/from-instagram-to-church/ for a real-life example.

36 Imagine the individual who steps outside in the midst of a bitter fight with their spouse and searches 'considering divorce', or 'what does God say about suicide', in YouVersion Bible reading plans.

37 Adam Joinson, 'Social Desirability, Anonymity, and Internet-Based Questionnaires,' *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers* 31 (1999), 433–438, https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03200723.

38 For example, no church authority or permission is required for any individual to invite other church members to an online Bible reading plan where they can discuss the nuances and life application of the Scriptures via an embedded chat feature.

39 YouVersion's church-finding feature offers this opportunity, as does the first-of-its-kind connectivity and resource platform, Gloo (https://www.gloo.us/). Alpha helps new Christians and spiritual seekers in need of discipleship to connect for spiritual growth in either in-person or in online communities. See https://alphausa.org/try/ for more.

40 This is, of course, unless they fear surveillance, unable to stay a step ahead of their anti-democratic, censorious government. For how this has played out in China, see https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/21/world/asia/china-surveillance-investigation.html, https://anglican.ink/2023/01/19/chinese-new-year-of-weaponised-surveillance-against-christians/, and https://www.opendoors.org.au/world-watch-list/china/. For a global perspective, see David Lyon, *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018); also John Lennox, 2084: *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

41 Free digital Bible resources such as YouVersion, Blue Letter Bible, The Bible Project, Public Reading of Scripture, and Theology of Work offer a searchable digital Bible, thousands of devotionals and reading plans (available in most languages) that can be shared and worked through with a group, and much more, providing opportunities for interaction, conversation, and mutual accountability. See https://prsi.org/, https://www.blueletterbible.org/, https://www.bible.com/, https://bibleproject.com/, https://prsi.org/, and https://www.theologyofwork.org/ for more.

42 For resourcing pastors and leaders, multiple Christian organisations, such as Gloo and Alpha, provide free online training and equipping for discipleship best practices as well as inspiring and practical information on creating a discipleship-forward church culture. See https://www.gloo.us/ and https://alphausa.org/ for more.

43 Online discipleship mentoring through The Mentor Ministry, JesusCares.com, Gloo, and Unite Life pair Christians and spiritual seekers all over the world with caring, well-trained mentors who provide a safe place to bring doubts, hard questions, and prayer requests for personal struggles through one-on-one email and text messaging. This resource is particularly useful for those in remote areas where there is not a local church body available to help, or where education and resources are extremely limited. See https://tmm.io/, https://www.jesuscares.com/, https://www.gloo.us/, and https://unitelife.com/ for more.

44 Life Church, the Church from which the YouVersion ministry developed, is one of many now offering virtual reality church experiences in the Metaverse. See https://www.life.church/metaverse/ for more. Yet, facilitating in-person gathering is the goal.

45 One example is translation of the Bible and discipleship resources into nearly any language in the world via AI systems such as google translate: https://translate.google.com/. Wise interpretation of data is key, though, as 'clicks' don't form character.

46 Consider the way discipleship material could be shaped around the felt needs of a community based on web or social media insights telling us which topics are being engaged with the most often by our online community.

47 Jesus.net (https://jesus.net/), Got Questions (https://www.gotquestions.org/), and Made New (https://madenew.hopewithgod.com/), are digital discipleship resources offering multiple avenues of self-paced/self-guided learning and support for believers as they seek a deeper understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ. In addition, digital technologies can make a profound contribution to the area of spiritual practice to augment the in-person, embodied practices of joining voices in worship, partaking communally of the Lord's Supper, praying for one another directly, and so on. Many apps currently exist to promote and facilitate Biblical meditation (Abide, https://abide.com/; Verses, https://www.getverses.com/; Soultime https://www.soultime.com/), practicing the presence of God (Hallow, https://hallow.com/; Dwell, https://get.dwellbible.com/paid-search/), and developing a daily prayer life (Lectio365, https://www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/; Inner Room, https://innerroom.app/). Daily Scripture notifications, or SMS messages, or in-app reminders to pray, meditate on scripture, or engage in a discipleship discussion can co-opt digital systems to strengthen consistency of implementation of embodied spiritual practices.

48 Imagine the power of a live time of worship and prayer, with believers from many nations across the globe, to heighten our awareness of the worldwide fellowship of the saints.

49 In the Lausanne 4 Global Listening Calls report nearly all groups represented reflected upon the remarkable opportunities that digital tools offer, whilst also recognising that digital content could not replace the need for 'personal, humanised connections.' See https://lausanne.org/l4/global-listening/the-evangelical-church-interacting-between-the-global-and-the-local for more.

50 Wetzig, 'Faith in the Digital Age.'

51 Mark Sayers, *Strange Days: Life in the Spirit in a Time of Upheaval* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017).

52 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2020), 45; Jean Twenge, 'Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation,' The Atlantic (September 2017), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/; Jean Twenge, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

53 James K. A Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 29; Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World, or, Why It's Tempting to Live as if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), chapter 2. See, for instance, Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (London: Vintage, 2019). Lanier coins the acronym 'BUMMER' ('Behaviours of Users Modified, and Made into an Empire for Rent') to describe the deformative power of social media and related digital technologies.

54 James K. A. Smith, *How (not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2014).

55 Schultze suggests that it is irresponsible to adopt every technology without having a critical eye as to what the consequences will be. See Quentin J. Shultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). Benjamin Windle, 'Excerpt: Better Questions and Disciplines for Digital Church Innovation,' *Leaders and Pastors Barna Ideas Release* (February 2, 2022), https://www.barna.com/research/excerpt-disciplined-digital/. For an example of reflective practices, see Matt Jolley, 'Rage Against the Machine: What Do We Do Now?' LICC (2021), https://licc.org.uk/resources/what-do-we-do-now/.

56 See https://sevenpractices.org/ for more. This creates an opportunity for the church to provide meaningful places of face-to-face community centred around the Lord's supper for disciples who are 'digital refugees' by virtue of not being able to keep up with and fully engage in community as the technology continues to develop.

57 Matthew Lee Anderson, 'Christianity and Globalization: A Unity in Diversity,' *Mere Orthodoxy Blog* (June 12, 2008), https://mereorthodoxy.com/christianity-and-globalization-a-unity-in-diversity/; The Gospel Coalition India, 'Discipleship in a Digital Age,' TGC (May 10, 2022), https://in.thegospelcoalition.org/article/discipleship-in-a-digital-age/.

58 Carr, *The Shallows*, chapter 5; Akos Balogh, 'As a Christian, I Went Down the AI Rabbit Hole: Here are 12 Things I Discovered,' Blog (2023), https://www.akosbalogh.com/blog/as-a-christian-i-went-down-the-ai-rabbit-hole-here-are-12-things-i-discovered-nbspnbsp; Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture, and Computer Technology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013); John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011).

59 Jon Kolko, *Wicked Problems: Problems Worth Solving* (Austin: AC4D, 2012), online at https://www.wicked-problems.com/1_wicked_problems.php. See also John C. Camillus, 'Strategy as a Wicked Problem,' Harvard Business Review Magazine (May 2008), https://hbr.org/2008/05/strategy-as-a-wicked-problem. In short, wicked problems 'cannot be definitively resolved. … They have innumerable causes, morph constantly, and have no correct answer.'

60 On wisdom for adaptive leadership in complex times, see Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

61 See https://lausanne.org/all-issue-networks, also https://lausanne.org/l4/lausanne-generations-conversation for these partners. And on 'divine conversation', see Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life: Embracing Attentiveness in a World of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 157: 'The practice of conversation is a sacred act. … We could modify the practice of *lectio divina* slightly to create a *conversatio divina*, the practice of sacred conversation. The foundation of *conversatio divina*

is the belief that God is present in and guides the conversations we give him as offerings, and some that we don't. We listen not only to another person but to the voice that speaks in, through and in spite of human voices. Then we are free to let go of tight agendas and the need to steer the conversation where we think it should go. We open ourselves to letting it go gently off course and to taking surprising directions and divine detours' (p157). For an example of this, see https://aiandfaith.org/.

62 *Every* network, across every region, has a contribution to make. By highlighting these few, we are hopeful it will spark each group to consider the questions they must raise, and the resources they might bring to address this gap.

63 Further, we need to discern how each mode of Scripture engagement – book, digital, oral – impacts retention, understanding, and transformation. As one digital theologian suggests, 'The new patterns of Bible engagement available to us – reading Scripture on a screen, sharing Scripture on social media, searching in a language we do not speak, hearing Scripture in the car, and so on – are no more neutral than the advent of the printed Bible several centuries ago. In this digital era, I would encourage you to mix old and new, memorize not just search, meditate not just share, listen not just read, do not just hear. As you use different forms of media to encounter God's Word, reflect on them with others in your faith community, and work together to make choices out of conviction than convenience alone.' See John Dyer, *People of the Screen: How Evangelicals Created the Digital Bible and How It Shapes Their Reading of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), excerpt at https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/december/dyer-bible-apps-software-screen-printing-press.html.

64 As the first generation of iPhone and internet kids come of age, developing relationships with tech-savvy young people and simply taking an interest in where they're finding connection – for better or for worse, observing and engaging in their cultural world – is essential.

Authors

Dr Dave Benson is a leading thinker and researcher on the role of faith in 21st Century Western culture. Formerly a high school teacher, pastor, then public theologian at Malyon Theological College in Brisbane, Australia, he is now Director of Culture and Discipleship at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC). Dave.Benson@licc.org.uk

Natasha Edwards is Pastor for Discipleship and Communities at Venture Church in the UK. She hails from Australia and holds degrees in music and theology, with a master's degree from the London School of Theology. Tash is Honorary Chaplain to Christians in Government where she encourages a few thousand Christians to be all out for God in their workplace. tash@venture-church.org.uk

Rev Dr Guichun Jun serves as Research Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. He is an ordained minister who has experienced various ministry contexts in both Korea and the UK. Guichun's research interest is to understand the lived experiences of local congregations from both local and global perspectives. gjun@ocms.ac.uk

Eva Nappier is the Digital Evangelism and Discipleship Strategist at the Luis Palau Association, where she engages daily with new believers through a 20 million-strong social media community. She orchestrates content strategies to engage diverse audiences from nearly every nation. A worship pastor of 20 years and seminarian at Covenant Theological Seminary, Eva resides on the coast of California. eva.nappier@palau.org

REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



CARIBBEAN



CARIBBEAN

Denise Margaret-Thompson, Anthony Oliver, Joy Wilson

Stretching from the northern tip of Latin America up towards North America and Mexico, the Caribbean is an archipelago of over 7,000 islands with over 44 million people speaking four major languages and multiple indigenous dialects. Boasting exquisite natural beauty and popular for its beaches as a holiday destination, the Caribbean faces significant social, financial, and environmental challenges. Meanwhile, the Caribbean church has been in decline, numerically, spiritually, and in missional impact. Caribbean societies are under severe threat from natural disasters, climate change, global pandemics, and the morally vacuous global culture.

Caribbean leaders participated in Lausanne listening calls from September 2020,1 to July 2023 (Lausanne Caribbean Leaders' Conference in Georgetown, Guyana)2 in preparation for L4 2024, with consensus on the following five key global topics shaping the region to 2050:

1. The Gospel and Mission in the Marketplace and the Diaspora

2. Spiritual Healing and the Mental Health Challenge

3. Caribbean Youth and the Church

4. The Environment/Creation Care and the Gospel

5. The Caribbean Church and the Disciple-Making Challenge.

The Gospel And Mission In The Marketplace And The Diaspora

Caribbean people are on the move in and across the region and the world. The concept of the Gospel and Mission in the Diaspora and the Marketplace with church members in every sphere of activity, however, is still to be embraced/taught as a legitimate, logical sphere of mission for every church member. Caribbean Leaders identified several gaps in accelerating the Great Commission in this regard: including a lack of understanding of integral mission, inadequate, incomplete discipleship, language barriers, intergenerational differences, and socio-economic challenges.

Some reasons cited for the gaps included: a restrictive 'missionary' concept, a poorly developed Christian worldview, and inadequate training in skills, understanding, knowledge, mission, and vision to enable God's people (including children and youth) to be effective witnesses in every sphere. A sharp dichotomy between 'sacred and secular' dominates the paradigm of Caribbean evangelical communities.

Two factors support the achievement of the Great Commission: The increasing availability of the Scriptures in specific indigenous languages of our peoples and technology providing virtual, asynchronous access to high-quality training at reasonable costs and great flexibility. Caribbean leaders further affirmed the opportunity and challenge for greater collaboration and resource sharing for researching, customizing, and offering gospel presentations and programs (including sports evangelism) to specific demographics, and bringing together subject/research specialists to produce effective, educational training videos for the various demographics, eliminating competition and duplication of efforts and extending/expanding collaboration with youth and professional Christian fellowships across the region and the world.

Spiritual Healing And The Mental Health Challenge

While Latin American and Caribbean countries consistently report higher levels of happiness than national economic fundamentals would predict, they also exhibit a high prevalence of mental health conditions with depression and anxiety disorders on the rise.3 These mental health conditions, highly prevalent in all countries of the world affecting one in eight people, is a growing crisis needing urgent transformation in the current context where our

countries invest the smallest portion of their national budgets in mental health care.[4]

Untreated mental health challenges lead to suicide, and suicide rates continue to rise, with suicide being the third leading cause of death among 10- to 19-year-olds in the Caribbean Region.[5] The call for the Caribbean church is for immediate acknowledgement and community collaboration and action as transformational intervention strategists and leaders in discipleship and ministry. In every community we can contribute to a holistic health approach with equal attention being given to mental health as well as the physical and spiritual health of our people across every demographic—children, youth, seniors, and retirees (violence that occurs in the developmental years of early childhood makes children particularly vulnerable).

> ***"In every community we can contribute to a holistic health approach with equal attention being given to mental health as well as the physical and spiritual health of our people..."***

Specifically, there must be a consistently balanced approach between the spheres of spiritual healing and psychiatric, psychological, and other therapeutic intervention strategies in addressing mental health conditions and challenges. There is also a need for positive social interaction together with the development of social and emotional skills to strengthen resilience.[6]

Caribbean Leaders affirmed the need for destigmatization of people facing mental health challenges in and out the church, implementing more mental health training to design holistic interventions including prioritizing mental well-being in theological education; research in understanding the church's role in assisting individuals with mental health issues; cultural factors influencing mental health in the Caribbean; effects of parental drug use on children's mental health and prevention strategies and emotional screening assessments.

Caribbean leaders also affirmed the establishment of holistic regional clinics for mental health, networking with mental health professionals for referrals and support as well as educating the church (starting campaigns against mental health stigma, training mental health coaches, listening to people living with mental health challenges and collaboration with mental health professionals, education systems, families, special-needs homes and support groups).

Caribbean Youth And The Church

More than 11 million youth (15–29), reside across the Caribbean with 60 percent of our population under 30 years old.[7] The Caribbean church needs to accept, understand and adapt methods to the major cultural shift among our youth if we are to reach, engage and develop 'NextGen' leadership for the Caribbean evangelical church.

With seven distinct generations living side by side in the Caribbean today, it is vital for the three generations of older leaders in active church leadership[8] to understand the Gen Z and Millennial generations of youth (high schoolers to young adults) who represent the region and the church's future, aspirations, and hopes. We must redefine our mission to this demographic and be willing to share true intergenerational leadership with youth (including those raised in the church) who are leaving traditional evangelical congregations. Efforts to reach and engage them need to be accelerated. Even as they claim 'spirituality' but reject traditional forms of organized religion.

Caribbean Leaders posited the need for greater authenticity, genuine fellowship, a redefinition of mission, holistic youth involvement and personal care in reaching, engaging, mentoring, and sharing leadership on the great commission with the youth demographic. This relationship-centered approach over mere religious dogma requires consistency between leaders' words and actions, a shift in the traditional mindset on missions, missionaries, and discipleship at church for their home, school, and marketplace ministry development. This includes active listening and addressing difficult social justice issues

of concern to this demographic, who are the subject-matter experts for reaching and discipling their peers.

As subject-matter experts for this demographic and social media content creators/contributors, their knowledge and cynicism about the global church's participation in colonization, slavery and reparation issues, results in their perception that the church is not addressing these issues and hinders their engagement with the gospel. If this is not addressed, we are at risk of losing a generation, especially where highly respected Caribbean politicians and academics on the regional and global stage have been very vocal but the evangelical church seems to sidestep the issues.

> ***"...cynicism about the global church's participation in colonization, slavery and reparation issues, results in their perception that the church is not addressing these issues and hinders their engagement with the gospel."***

The Environment/Creation Care and the Gospel

The Caribbean faces acute, far-reaching environmental issues including deforestation, flooding, loss of mangroves and coral reefs, rising sea levels and increasingly frequent incidents of category five hurricanes.[9] In addition, invasive species, overfishing, new diseases and deleterious effects of climate change add to the immediacy of our environmental challenges. Caribbean youth identified lack of environmental awareness in the education system as a major issue of concern to them.[10]

The Caribbean church, however, does not consider the environment/creation care as a significant part of our gospel mandate. Despite its impact on every sector—health, the economy, social services, and education, it remains a largely ignored aspect of our Christian stewardship. Because of a limited and deficient theological view pertaining to integral mission, barriers and contributing factors include dominion theology, an imbalanced eschatology of Christ's return, short-sighted and misguided political policies and priorities. Some bridges identified for redressing this included teaching on whole-life stewardship, embracing a kingdom culture mindset, and sound interpretation of Scripture including understanding and honoring God's priorities about all of his creation.[11]

Major concern that our mission emphases continue primarily on the souls of people and not sufficiently the created world as mandated in Scripture, leaves the 'Jamaica Call to Action', 2012 even more urgent today.[12] Other relevant issues include Trinidad and Tobago's record cancer rates (perhaps linked to the greenhouse gas emissions from oil production over the past century). Research suggesting that oil production executed near human dwellings correlate with higher-than-normal levels of cancer,[13] triggers concern for Guyana and Suriname's significant escalation in oil production. In addition, evidence of highly toxic pesticides and fertilizers in the food chain suggest severe health challenges. The church must therefore educate its people and society about these issues. Further, our communities are affected by inconsistent waste management policies and practices with negative impact on health (Governments/Technocrats need to be held accountable). There is a need for a paradigm shift in not just thinking but practice in the church as it pertains to creation care and the gospel.

The Caribbean Church and the Disciple-Making Challenge

In general, the Caribbean church does a fairly good job with evangelism but falls short in discipleship, with room to significantly improve our disciple-making among all categories of people and demographics: the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole community. The forced separations and technology challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic further restricted discipleship efforts.

The challenges and solutions to the issue of disciple-making in the Caribbean have been identified in the foregoing discussion of our most critical global issues:

- The gospel and mission in the marketplace and the diaspora: Every church member —

from children through youth and retirees—called, spiritually formed, trained and commissioned as missionaries in their spheres of operation and influence nationally, regionally, and across the world. As we go, sent to make disciples!

- Spiritual healing and the mental health challenge: Acknowledging the reality of mental health challenges, taking a balanced, prayerful approach between the spheres of spiritual healing and psychiatric, psychological and other therapeutic intervention strategies in spiritual formation for discipleship.
- Caribbean youth and the church: Acknowledging and addressing the cultural shift of our youth will require a paradigm shift in our thinking and practice if we are to reach, engage and develop solid, biblical 'Next Gen' leadership from youth including our willingness to engage around their social justice issues and concerns including the church's legacy of involvement in slavery, colonization, and indentureship.
- The environment/creation care and the gospel: The Caribbean church must embrace the theological imperative of creation care as an integral part of our gospel mandate and Christian stewardship, given its impact on every sector and our disciple-making obligation.

Additional stumbling blocks in disciple-making for the Caribbean church include issues like evolution, the new atheism, human sexuality (including LGBTQ issues and pornography) and race. Sharing the gospel holistically requires connecting with people's hearts and minds; understanding historical economic and educational social-class gaps and distinctions; minimizing competition and increasing collaboration between para-church organizations and churches.

Between Now and 2050: Regional Considerations

Beyond the above five global issues, Caribbean Leaders identify the following three unique, inter-related concerns for the Caribbean church in achieving the Great Commission by 2050:

Political and economic instability

Continuing and rising economic, social, and political volatility in the Caribbean impacts negatively on our disciple-making efforts. The break-down of law and order across institutions in Haiti, the Guyana-Venezuela border issue, the persecution of Christians in Cuba, and economic stagnation and political repression continue to spur migrants to flee these countries.14 Climate-driven food and water insecurity, slow economic recoveries, and accompanying high levels of crime and violence will likely sustain migratory outflows among believers and non-believers alike.

Crime and violence

The Caribbean has some of the highest violent crime rates in the world and is considered one of the most dangerous regions of the Americas with one-third of the world's homicide deaths, which is five times higher than North America and ten times higher than Asia.15 Crime and violence (including property crime, money laundering, tax evasion, homicides, drugs, terrorist financing)16 have become growing concerns, with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) declaring this a public health emergency in 2023.17 Crime and violence affects mental health, productivity and freedom of movement causing rampant migration across the region, affecting Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Haiti.

Endemic and pervasive corruption

Caribbean governments and societies have been historically vulnerable to corruption, bribery, and nepotism across every sector with seventy-four percent of people on average believing politicians frequently use public resources for their own benefit.18 The Caribbean church must acknowledge this reality in spiritual formation and discipleship, preparing every member to live in integrity in the marketplace.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Great Commission

In conclusion, as discussed earlier, Caribbean people are people on the move within the region and around the world, with sub-

ject-matter and research expertise across every sphere, access to technology that allows us to develop and provide virtual and asynchronous high-quality training at reasonable cost, and availability of scriptures in almost all the indigenous languages of the Caribbean. In addition, there are opportunities for further training and scholarships to continue building capacity across every sphere including mental health.

The challenges in achieving the Great Commission for the Caribbean include:

- The need for collaboration so that efforts are not duplicated, competition and silos are minimized, partners are welcomed, and resources are shared.
- A redefinition of missions and missionaries that trains the whole church to understand that the role and mission is whole-life discipleship without any sacred/secular dichotomy, accomplished by every church member (children, youth, and retirees) making disciples wherever they go:
- Widespread mental health challenges, denial and stigmatization, inadequate treatment and insufficient budgetary allocations to address the same.
- Severe threat of climate change and environmental challenges affecting every sector.
- The need for education that meets the needs of Caribbean people, with education that equips them to function in, engage with and leverage the present realities of technology.

We must encourage and theologically equip the church to engage around the biblical responsibility for social justice problems including the mental health, environmental and education challenges above, and the unique interrelated Caribbean challenges of crime and violence, political instability and endemic and pervasive corruption.

Endnotes

1 Lausanne Movement, 'Analysis of Lausanne 4 Listening Calls', *https://lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Evangelical-Church-Interacting-between-the-Global-and-the-Local-Global-Listening-Team-Report-21.11.03.pdf*

2 Lausanne Movement, 'God on the Move: Beginning with Guyana', *https://lausanne.org/about/blog/god-on-the-move-beginning-with-guyana*

3 Yenny Guzman-Ruiz. Think Global Health, 'A Neglected Challenge of Mental Health', 2023, *https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/neglected-challenge-mental-health*

4 World Health Organization (WHO), 'World mental health report: transforming mental health for all', Geneva, 2022, *https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356119/9789240049338-eng.pdf?sequence=1*

5 WHO. Suicide *https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide*

6 WHO, 'World mental health report'.

7 Caribbean Youth Dialogues, 2022, *https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/2022_caribbean_youth_dialogues_outome_report.pdf*

8 The Greatest Generation: 1901–1924. The Silent Generation: 1925–1945. War, Great Depression Traditionalists. Baby Boomers: 1946–1964. Post World War 2. Generation X: 1965–1980. Millennials: 1981–1996. Generation Z: 1997–2012. Zoomers or Centennials. Generation Alpha: 2013–2024. Digital Natives.

9 David Bookless, Presentation on 'The Environment/Creation Care and the Gospel', Lausanne Caribbean Leaders' Gathering, July 2023, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS2B00lU8OQ&list=PLYGxDL2dvuo5jL-B9HNdHQUHAQqVjzxUt8*

10 Caribbean Youth Dialogues, 2022.

11 Bookless, Presentation.

12 'We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation. Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress, and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbors. and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to 'urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility' (CTC I-7-A).' Creation Care and the Gospel. Jamaica Call to Action. 2012. *https://lausanne.org/statement/creation-care-call-to-action*

13 Jill E. Johnston, Esther Lim and Hannah Roh. Impact of upstream oil extraction and environmental public health: A review of the evidence. Science of The Total Environment. Volume 657, 20 March 2019. Abstract. *https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969718348381*

14 Global Trends. FIVE-YEAR REGIONAL OUTLOOK Latin America and the Caribbean. 2021. *https://www.dni.gov/files/images/globalTrends/GT2040/GT2040-5-YR-Regional-2021317-Latin_America.pdf*

15 Crime in the Caribbean—stats & facts. 2024. *https://www.statista.com/topics/7680/crime-in-the-caribbean/*

16 Crime in the Caribbean.

17 DECLARATION BY HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE. 2023. *https://caricom.org/declaration-by-heads-of-government-on-crime-and-violence-as-a-public-health-issue/*.

18 World Justice Project. Corruption in the Caribbean Report. World Justice Project's 'Corruption in the Caribbean' Report Shows Majority Believe Public Officials Corrupt. 2023. *https://worldjusticeproject.org/news/world-justice-project%E2%80%99s-corruption-caribbean-report-shows-majority-believe-public-officials-0*

Authors

Dr Denise Margaret-Thompson is a former professor with over 30 years of experience in teaching, technology innovation and commercialization, program management, research and administration. She is co-founder and executive director of the Caribbean Fine Cocoa Forum, Volunteer Coordinator of the Caribbean Fellowship of Evangelical Students Graduate and Faculty Ministries (CARIFES-GFM), and past director of the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies. Dr Thompson currently serves as National Associate Director of Black Scholars and Professionals (BSAP), a focused ministry within InterVarsity/USA-GFM.

Dr Anthony Oliver, national of Trinidad and Tobago, served as academic dean and principal of Jamaica Bible College, academic dean and acting president of the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology (CGST), and dean of academic affairs at the Caribbean Nazarene College. He is president of Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA) and adjunct professor at three theological institutions in the Caribbean. Dr Oliver was recently appointed President of CGST. A motivational speaker who represented various organizations and churches internationally and was the pastor of the Westside Community Church in Westmoorings, Rev Dr Oliver is married to Maverlin, for thirty-seven years and they have two adult sons.

Dr Joy Wilson Tranformational Leader, leadership development, coaching and counselling consultant; serves government and private organizations, as member of the Lausanne Caribbean leadership team and with another international Christian non-profit organization. This author of two books and her husband are co-founders of a family life and community development non-profit organization. Married for over 36 years, they are parents of four and grandparents. Dr Wilson enjoys cooking, reading, swimming, interacting with, and helping people.

EAST ASIA



EAST ASIA

Bolortuya Damdinjav, Hyung Keun Paul Choi, Chulho Han, Masanori Kurasawa, David Ro, Vanessa Hung Wong Wai Ling

Introduction

East Asia is comprised of 1.7 billion people representing 21 percent of the world's population encompassing regions such as China, the Koreas, Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Mongolia. These regions are experiencing significant demographic shifts, sociopolitical upheavals, rapid technological advancements, and evolving intergenerational dynamics.

East Asian countries share fundamental cultural characteristics rooted in Confucian teachings. These teachings emphasize hierarchy, social order, and meritocracy. Collectivism prevails, emphasizing obligations to family and society, often at the expense of individual interests. Religious diversity exists, with Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity coexisting. China has adherents to these religions, but the majority are atheist communist who do not identify with any specific faith. There has been recent growth in house church movements especially between 1970 and 2020.

Socio-economically, East Asia has experienced rapid development, with countries like Japan, South Korea, and China playing significant roles. Urbanization, industrialization, and technological advancements have transformed the region. Geopolitical competition exists, but it's essential to recognize both cooperation and division within East Asia. China, Japan, and South Korea are major players in East Asia, with China's population exceeding 1.3 billion, Japan's around 126 million, and South Korea's approximately 52 million.

In summary, East Asia's rich cultural heritage, religious diversity, economic dynamism, and complex politics shape its vibrant and diverse landscape. Each of these factors influences the church's mission, outreach strategies, and community engagement.

This paper aims to analyze the key issues highlighted in various reports and suggest strategic directions for the church in these regions. Four critical themes emerge from the analysis: demographic changes, technological advancements, intergenerational dynamics, the evangelization of East Asia, and the rise of Asia and its contribution in a Majority World missions. Each of these themes will be explored in detail, providing insights and recommendations for the church's future path.

Demographic Changes and Sociopolitical Influences

Aging Population & Declining Birth Rates

One of the most significant demographic challenges in East Asia is the aging population coupled with declining birth rates. Japan, for instance, is experiencing a dramatic population decline, with over 40 percent of municipalities potentially disappearing by 2050 due to a sharp decrease in the working population.[1] Similarly, South Korea faces rapid population aging, necessitating policies for the elderly and highlighting the decline in youth engagement in churches. These demographic shifts have far-reaching implications for the church, impacting everything from attendance and engagement to financial stability and community outreach.

The aging population poses a unique challenge as churches need to address the spiritual and social needs of older congregants. This includes providing services and programs tailored to the elderly, such as senior fellowship groups, pastoral care for the homebound, and accessible facilities. Churches must also find ways to integrate older members into the broader church community, ensuring they remain active participants rather than passive observers.

Declining birth rates and youth engagement further complicate the situation. With fewer

young people attending church, there is a risk of a generational disconnect that could lead to the gradual erosion of church communities. To counter this, churches need to develop targeted youth programs that address the interests and concerns of younger generations. This includes creating spaces for authentic engagement, leveraging technology to connect with digital natives, and fostering environments where young people feel heard and valued.

Migration

Migration is another critical factor, especially in Japan, where the increase in foreign workers has led to cultural frictions and the emergence of ethnic and multicultural churches. Hong Kong also faces significant demographic shifts due to emigration, particularly following the enactment of the National Security Law, leading to a substantial loss of church members and financial resources.[2] The influx of foreign workers in Japan has resulted in the need for churches to adapt to a more multicultural congregation. This presents both challenges and opportunities.

On the one hand, cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. On the other hand, multicultural congregations can enrich church life by bringing diverse perspectives and experiences. Churches must strive to create inclusive environments where all members feel welcome and valued, regardless of their cultural background. In Hong Kong, the mass emigration of Christians has significantly impacted church demographics and finances. Many of those who have left were economic pillars and leaders within their churches, leading to decreased offerings and a shortage of skilled volunteers and leaders. This has put additional pressure on the remaining members and has highlighted the need for churches to develop sustainable financial and leadership structures.

Political & Social Unrest

Political and social unrest have profound implications for churches in East Asia. The political tensions between China and Taiwan, North Korea's military threats, and internal social movements, like those in Hong Kong, have caused divisions within church communities. These sociopolitical dynamics can create an environment of fear and uncertainty, impacting the church's ability to function effectively and fulfill its mission. The imposition of laws like Hong Kong's National Security Law has led to a climate of fear and emigration among Christians, significantly impacting church attendance and financial stability. These laws often restrict religious freedom, limiting the church's ability to operate openly and engage in mission work. Hong Kong churches are beginning to face the same pressures and restrictions that Christians in China have faced. The church in Taiwan could be faced with a similar scenario with a growing threat of a China invasion.

In regions where religious freedom is under threat, churches face the challenge of maintaining their witness while complying with restrictive laws. This can involve navigating complex legal landscapes, facing potential persecution, and finding creative ways to continue their ministry. For example, unregistered house churches may become more prevalent as official church gatherings face increased scrutiny and regulation. Already the size of the unregistered churches is double the registered churches. The impact of restricted religious freedom extends beyond church operations to the broader mission of evangelism and discipleship. Churches must find ways to share the gospel and disciple believers in environments where open religious expression is limited. This requires innovation, resilience, and a deep commitment to the Great Commission.

Impact on the church and recommendations

Churches must foster intergenerational communication and community-building. Young people often feel disconnected from the elder generation, yet they appreciate authentic, non-hierarchical communities that offer real connections and mentorship. Creating opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and activities can help bridge this gap. For example, mentorship programs where older members share their wisdom and experiences with younger congregants can build meaningful relationships and mutual respect.

Addressing the needs of an aging society through holistic ministry approaches is crucial. This includes providing care for the elderly and involving them in church activities, which can help maintain their engagement and support. Churches can establish senior ministries that focus on physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, offering services like health clinics, counseling, and social events.

To attract and retain young people, churches must innovate in their outreach methods. This could involve using social media and digital platforms to communicate and connect, offering contemporary worship services, and organizing events that resonate with youth culture. Additionally, involving young people in leadership roles and decision-making processes can foster a sense of ownership and commitment.

Churches should embrace multiculturalism and foster kingdom-minded collaborations among the diverse ethnic groups within their congregations. This can involve offering services in multiple languages, celebrating cultural festivals, and promoting cross-cultural understanding through education and dialogue. By doing so, churches can build stronger, more cohesive communities that reflect the diversity of God's kingdom. Establishing robust support systems for emigrants can help maintain connections with those who move abroad and provide continuity in spiritual support and community. This could include online services and prayer groups, pastoral care via digital platforms, and initiatives that connect emigrants with local churches in their new locations. Maintaining these connections can help emigrants feel supported and continue their spiritual growth despite geographical separation. For churches in areas with high levels of immigration, integrating new members into the existing community is crucial. This can involve creating welcoming committees, offering language and cultural orientation classes, and providing opportunities for new members to serve and contribute. These efforts can help new immigrants feel a sense of belonging and purpose within the church community.

As for the increased persecution and pressure within China, Hong Kong, and potentially Taiwan, the church should prepare not just to survive under more persecution, but continue to grow stronger in depth under suffering, respond in love while under attack, and expand through evangelism within and missions abroad as seen in the example of the book of Acts and the early church. In a polycentric mission world, China will no doubt be one of the key leaders of global Christianity and world missions in the coming century.

Technological Advancements

The advent of the digital age has revolutionized how churches operate. The widespread use of the Internet, accelerated by the pandemic, necessitates a reevaluation of traditional church forms and the exploration of digital communities. Digital transformation offers both opportunities and challenges for churches, impacting everything from worship services and pastoral care to outreach and evangelism.

Digital platforms provide new ways for churches to connect with their congregants and reach broader audiences. Online worship services, virtual Bible studies, and digital prayer groups have become common, allowing churches to maintain community and engagement even when physical gatherings are not possible. These digital initiatives can enhance the church's reach and accessibility, making it possible to minister to people who may not be able to attend in person. However, the shift to digital also presents challenges. Not all congregants may have access to or be comfortable with technology, creating potential barriers to participation. Additionally, the digital landscape raises concerns about cybersecurity and the ethical use of technology. Churches must navigate these challenges carefully to ensure their digital ministries are inclusive, secure, and effective.

Technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI) and automation present both opportunities and challenges for the church. These technologies can enhance communication and resource management but also raise ethical questions and affect job markets. AI and automation can streamline administrative tasks, improve data management, and enhance decision-making processes within the church. However, they also bring potential ethi-

cal dilemmas and societal impacts that churches must address. AI has the potential to transform various aspects of church operations.

For example, AI-driven analytics can help churches understand congregational needs and preferences better, allowing for more personalized ministry approaches. Automated systems can handle routine administrative tasks, freeing up staff to focus on more meaningful ministry work. However, the use of AI also raises concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the dehumanization of pastoral care. The broader societal impact of AI and automation includes potential job displacement and shifts in the labor market. Churches must consider how these changes affect their congregants and communities and find ways to support those impacted by technological disruptions. This includes offering retraining programs, providing support for those transitioning to new careers, and advocating for ethical and equitable technological practices.

Impact on the church and recommendations

Embracing digital platforms for ministry can help churches reach a broader audience and stay connected with members who prefer online engagement. This includes developing robust online services, offering virtual small groups, and creating digital resources for discipleship and spiritual growth. By leveraging digital tools, churches can enhance their ministry and extend their reach beyond physical boundaries.

Ensuring cybersecurity and addressing ethical concerns related to digital engagement are essential to maintaining trust and integrity in online ministries. Churches must invest in secure digital infrastructure, provide training on safe online practices, and establish clear guidelines for ethical use of technology. This helps protect congregants' privacy and ensures that digital ministry efforts are conducted responsibly. Training church leaders to be proficient in new technologies can help integrate these tools effectively into church operations. This includes providing ongoing education on digital tools, encouraging innovation in ministry approaches, and fostering a culture of adaptability and openness to change. By equipping leaders with the skills and knowledge to navigate the digital landscape, churches can effectively harness technology for ministry. Facilitating discussions on the ethical implications of AI and automation can position the church as a thought leader in these critical areas.

Churches can host forums, workshops, and study groups on the ethical use of technology, drawing on theological and ethical perspectives to guide these conversations. Engaging with these issues helps the church provide moral and ethical guidance in a rapidly changing technological landscape. Supporting congregants affected by technological disruptions is crucial. This can involve offering retraining programs, providing support for those transitioning to new careers, and advocating for ethical and equitable technological practices. By addressing the broader societal impacts of AI and automation, churches can demonstrate their commitment to social justice and community well-being.

Intergenerational Dynamics

The generational divide within churches, particularly highlighted during social movements in Hong Kong, has caused significant disruptions. Young people often feel unsupported by the church, leading to disengagement and emigration. This generational disconnect is a significant challenge for churches, impacting everything from attendance and engagement to leadership and mission.

In Hong Kong, the social movements from 2014 to 2019, and the subsequent enactment of the National Security Law, have led to significant polarization within society and the church. The divide between supporters and opponents of the movements has caused fractures in church communities, with some members feeling unsupported or marginalized. This has resulted in decreased attendance and engagement, as well as financial challenges due to the emigration of many middle-class Christians who were key contributors to church life.

Generational gaps are not unique to Hong Kong. Across East Asia, younger generations often feel disconnected from tradition-

al church structures and practices. They may perceive the church as out of touch with contemporary issues or find it difficult to relate to older leadership. This can lead to disengagement and a decline in church participation among younger people.

In Hong Kong, there is an aging trend among missionaries, with a significant portion over the age of 60, posing challenges for sustaining long-term mission work. This trend reflects broader demographic changes and highlights the need for strategic planning and leadership development within mission organizations.

The aging of missionaries poses several challenges. First, there is the practical issue of physical and mental stamina required for mission work. Older missionaries may face health challenges that limit their ability to serve effectively. Additionally, the aging of the missionary workforce can lead to a leadership vacuum as experienced leaders retire without sufficient successors to take their place. This aging trend also highlights the need for renewed focus on recruiting and training younger missionaries. Without a new generation of mission workers, the church's global mission efforts could face significant setbacks. Encouraging young people to consider mission work and providing them with the necessary training and support is crucial for the future of mission efforts.

Impact on the church and recommendations

Actively involving young people in church leadership and decision-making processes can bridge the generational gap and foster a sense of belonging. This includes creating spaces for authentic engagement, leveraging technology to connect with digital natives, and fostering environments where young people feel heard and valued. By involving youth in leadership roles and providing opportunities for them to shape church activities and programs, churches can build a more inclusive and dynamic community.

Developing targeted discipleship programs that address the unique needs and perspectives of different generations can enhance spiritual growth and unity. This includes offering intergenerational Bible studies, mentoring relationships, and service opportunities that bring together people of all ages. By fostering a culture of mutual learning and respect, churches can bridge generational divides and strengthen their community.

To attract and retain young people, churches must innovate in their outreach methods. This could involve using social media and digital platforms to communicate and connect, offering contemporary worship services, and organizing events that resonate with youth culture.

Additionally, involving young people in leadership roles and decision-making processes can foster a sense of ownership and commitment. Implementing succession planning for missionary work can ensure a smooth transition and continuity of mission efforts. This includes identifying and mentoring potential leaders, providing opportunities for younger missionaries to gain experience and develop their skills, and creating clear pathways for leadership transition. Succession planning helps maintain the stability and effectiveness of mission work across generations. Encouraging youth participation in mission conferences and training programs can inspire a new generation of missionaries.

"Encouraging young people to consider mission work and providing them with the necessary training and support is crucial for the future of mission efforts."

Hosting events like mission conferences, workshops, and training programs tailored to young people can spark interest and commitment to mission work. Providing mentorship and support for young missionaries can also help them navigate the challenges of mission life and build sustainable careers in mission work. Promoting collaboration between older and younger missionaries can enhance mission efforts. Creating opportunities for intergenerational teams, where experienced missionaries work alongside younger ones, can facilitate knowledge transfer and provide mutual support. This collaboration can help

bridge the generational gap and ensure the continuity of mission work.

Evangelization of East Asia

The mission to evangelize East Asia, including reaching out to unreached people groups (UPGs), remains a crucial aspect of the church's mandate. East Asia is home to many UPGs, including remote areas in China, rural communities in Japan, and various ethnic minorities across the region. These groups often have little to no access to the gospel, making mission work among them both challenging and essential. The church must prioritize identifying these groups, understanding their unique cultural and social contexts, and developing tailored strategies to reach them effectively.

China, with its vast and diverse population, presents significant opportunities and challenges for evangelization. Remote regions and ethnic minority areas often remain unreached, requiring innovative approaches to ministry. Similarly, in Japan, where less than one percent of the population identifies as Christian, rural communities often remain untouched by the gospel. Effective evangelization in these areas requires a deep understanding of local cultures and the development of culturally relevant methods of evangelism.

Taiwan church leaders have been meeting annually for Future Church conferences led by Taiwan CCCOWE and Taiwan Lausanne focusing on several areas including Gospel-Centric Community to emphasize truth as a safeguard for faith, establishing the kingdom of God as a sovereign authority, and creating strong relationships founded on identity in Christ. Holistic discipleship focuses on support for family life, mental health, personal development and physical health and not just spiritual disciplines.

Mongolia offers a model of significant church growth and maturity since the establishment of its first modern Christian church in 1991.[3] The goal of having at least one church in every county and subdivision of the capital city is an ambitious yet necessary mission to ensure widespread discipleship and community support. This model can inspire similar efforts across Northeast Asia. Developing a strategy that focuses on church planting, discipleship, and sustainable growth is crucial for the overall health and expansion of the church in the region.

Having experienced natural disasters and man-made disasters associated with huge earthquakes such as the Nankai Trough Earthquake in Japan,[4] many people are pondering their own destiny, and the situation is casting light onto the true value of the gospel presented through the church. The church is becoming more aware of the need to engage with the local community and live out the gospel and its mission in socially relevant ways—so called holistic ministry. In preparing for a major earthquake and experiencing its actual hardships, the church can actively contribute to community collaboration and engage in sharing the gospel with people through 'words and deeds.' This kind of holistic ministry also calls for Kingdom-minded collaboration among the East Asia region with innovative and redemptive mission entrepreneurship to advance the gospel, not only during natural disasters but also in time of political and economic hardships.

"In preparing for a major earthquake and experiencing its actual hardships, the church can actively contribute to community collaboration and engage in sharing the gospel with people through 'words and deeds.'"

A crucial aspect of effective evangelization in East Asia involves the development of self-theologizing efforts. Local churches must engage in creating theological frameworks that resonate with their unique cultural and social contexts. This process, known as self-theologizing, allows churches to develop doctrines and practices that are both biblically sound and culturally relevant. By engaging in self-theologizing, churches can ensure that their teachings and practices are meaningful and impactful within their specific cultural settings. This approach also empowers local church leaders and congregants to take ownership of their faith, fostering a more robust and authentic Christian witness.

Impact on the church and recommendations

To effectively evangelize East Asia, churches must engage in strategic planning and innovative outreach. Identifying UPGs and understanding their cultural contexts is the first step. Churches can leverage partnerships with global mission organizations to access resources and expertise. Training local missionaries who understand the language and culture of UPGs is also crucial. These missionaries can use culturally relevant methods to share the gospel, ensuring that it resonates with the target communities.

The use of technology can enhance evangelization efforts. Digital platforms can provide access to biblical resources, virtual discipleship programs, and online worship services for those in remote areas. Additionally, leveraging social media can help spread the gospel message to younger generations and tech-savvy individuals.

Churches must also develop support systems for missionaries working in challenging environments. This includes providing financial support, mental health resources, and continuous training to help missionaries adapt to changing circumstances. Building strong local church networks can provide a support base for missionaries and help sustain long-term mission efforts. Encouraging short-term mission trips can also inspire church members to engage in evangelization and develop a heart for missions. These trips can provide firsthand experience of mission work and help build relationships with local communities.

Promoting prayer for UPGs and mission efforts is essential. Churches can organize prayer groups and events focused on interceding for specific regions and people groups. Prayer can empower and sustain mission efforts, bringing spiritual support to both missionaries and the communities they serve. Finally, fostering self-theologizing efforts within local churches is crucial. By developing theological frameworks that resonate with their unique cultural contexts, churches can ensure that their teachings are relevant and impactful. This approach also empowers local leaders and congregants to take ownership of their faith, fostering a more robust and authentic Christian witness.

Polycentric Majority World Missions

While Asia has been focusing on evangelization within their own indigenous contextual, cross-cultural mission sending is becoming an important theme. Korea has been sending over 22,000 missionaries since 2020[5] but has been plateauing due to an aging missionary force and a decline of younger generation involvement.

Taiwan and Hong Kong church both have around 600 to 700 missionaries sent. While the Hong Kong church leaders are dealing with a crisis of disillusioned youth, Taiwan church leaders have recently emerged with global missions as an important. However, most of the overseas Chinese missionaries in Asia and around the world are working among their own Chinese diaspora. Mongolia is a young church with a small missionary sending force but the highest in percentage compared to the number of Christians.

China is the only country in Asia with a significant rise of cross-cultural missions sending abroad coming from the rapid growth of the persecuted house church movement. The Chinese house church is focused on sending overseas cross-cultural missionaries 'to the ends of the earth' with the prime focus is to send missionaries in the direction 'back to Jerusalem' on the silk road and in the same direction as President Xi Jinping's economic and geopolitical One Belt Initiative.

China's mission momentum was also instrumental in the launching of an Arise Asia, a youth mission conference that has emerged into a movement with a challenge to 'go to where there is no gospel'. Arise Asia is mobilizing younger cross-cultural workers to be involved in cross-cultural missions. Asia's future global mission impact is bright with potentially thousands of young people giving their lives to go cross-culturally to unreached peoples, cities, and regions in the world where Christ is still not known.

Conclusion

The churches in East Asia face a complex array of challenges and opportunities as they move towards 2050. Addressing demographic changes, sociopolitical influences, technological advancements, and intergenerational dynamics will require strategic planning, innovative approaches, a commitment to holistic ministry and missionary sending. By embracing these themes and adapting to the evolving landscape, the church can continue to fulfill its mission and remain a vital force for spiritual and social transformation in the region.

The journey ahead may be challenging, but with resilience, adaptability, and a focus on community and collaboration, the church in East Asia can thrive and make a lasting impact. Through intergenerational ministry, holistic community engagement, digital innovation, strategic planning and global missions sending, the church can navigate the complexities of the modern world and continue to be a beacon of hope and transformation. By addressing these critical areas, the church can also support its growth and expand its missionary efforts, ensuring that the Gospel reaches all corners of East Asia and beyond.

Endnotes

1 Hundreds of Japanese towns at 'risk of disappearing', Bangkok Post, 2024. 24. Apr, https://www.bangkokpost.com 2024. 1. Jun

2 https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202006/30/P2020063001015.htm 2024.19.May

3 "Christinity in Mongoloa", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Mongolia

4 The Nankai earthquakes (南海地震, Nankai jishin) are major megathrust earthquakes that affect the Nankaidō (Southern Sea Circuit) region of Japan.

5 "The Status of Korean Missions as of December 2023", Korea Research Institute for Mission (KRIM), https://krim.org/2023-korean-mission-statistics/ 2024.10. May

Authors

Bolortuya Damdinjav became a Christian in 1993 when she was a university student. In 1998, she started serving the Mongolia Mission Center, a YWAM affiliated ministry as a school leader and then an executive director for a total of 17 years. In 2015-2016, she did her graduate studies in Intercultural studies at Wheaton College, IL. Then she returned to Mongolia and have been serving Mongolian Evangelical Alliance as a head of the Research Department. Bolotuya is an EXCO member of Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) and recently commissioned as a director of the Study and Research Commission of AEA. Also, she am an associate member of One Challenge Intl and cooperate with their Global Research Team.

Dr Hyung Keun Paul Choi is an ordained pastor of Korea Evangelical Holiness Church. He received his doctoral degree (Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies) from ESJ School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary in 2000. He had served the Lausanne Movement since 2004 as IDD for East Asia. Currently he is professor of Mission Studies at Seoul Theological University in South Korea. He serves the Korea Lausanne Committee as general secretary. Also, he serves the 2024 Seoul-Incheon 4th Lausanne Congress as associate congress director and a member of Theology Working Group.

Rev Chulho Han previously worked at IVF Korea and IFES East Asia, and as the director of MISSION KOREA, he played a pioneering role in the Korean youth and college student missionary mobilization movement. He currently serves as the President of Mission Partners Korea and Perspectives Asia. He also serves as Vice-Chairman of the Lausanne Committee of Korea. He participated in the program team for the Lausanne 2024 Congress.

Dr Masanori Kurasawa was born in Nagano, Japan in 1952, he became a Christian at 18, and studied theology and missiology at Tokyo Christian Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States. He was involved in theological education at Tokyo Christian University for 33 years, and served as the fourth TCU president for 8 years. Currently, in addition to pastoring at a local church, he is a professor emeritus at TCU and a chair of the Japan Lausanne Committee.

Dr David Ro serves as the Executive Director of Arise Asia, an emerging missions movement arising in Asia among Millennials and Gen Zs. He is also the Regional Director for the Lausanne Movement in East Asia. After several years of pastoral ministry, David joined OMF to reach urban students and young people in East Asia. David previously served as the Director of the Christy Wilson Center for World Missions and Adjunct Professor of Church Planting and Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has an M. Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an MBA from Peking University, and a Phd from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies with expertise on the missions movement from China.

Vanessa Hung Wong Wai Ling graduated from Columbia Biblical Seminary in 1993 and received her master's degree in Mission. In the same year, she joined the Hong Kong Association of Christian Missions as a researcher till now. During these 30 years, she wrote many articles and conducted several research projects on Hong Kong Missionaries. She also translated many renounced mission books, such as *On Being A Missionary*, into Chinese.

EPSA

English, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking Africa



EPSA (ENGLISH, PORTUGESE, AND SPANISH SPEAKING AFRICA)

Raymond L. Bukenya, Joseph Byamukama, Rudolf Kabutz, Hesbone Kang'e, Racheal Mutesi Kwetolaku, Rosemary Mbogo

Introduction to Lausanne EPSA Missions

Profound opportunities exist amidst immense challenges that characterize the missional landscape in the Lausanne EPSA region[1] for English, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking Africa within the global priorities of missions by reflecting on the 40 themes of the Lausanne State of the Great Commission Report (SoGC).[2] We see hope in the gospel when exploring the key missional themes in the context of Africa including the rise of secularism and Islam, utilizing media, building trust, and engaging youth and women for embracing our missional responsibility. We hope to envision you as a leader in the Lausanne EPSA Region. And we hope to inspire you as a leader in the global community in your missional priorities for strategic collaborations with leaders in the EPSA Region.

The focus areas express the unique voices of leaders[3] of the EPSA Region of the Lausanne 4 Africa and Middle East Gathering[4] (L4AM) held in Addis Ababa in November 2023 on the themes of the SoGC Report. The missional priorities were identified for:

- Prophetically discerning and sensing God's heart for the context of the people in both the current realities and Africa of the future;
- Calling the church in Africa to lead by embracing responsibility for missions both within Africa and global spaces of significant priority and need;
- Guiding the spiritual journey and developing community in preparation for the unfolding role of the church in Africa for the common mission so that the African church is called, equipped, available, and open for collaboration with the global church for transformative gospel impact;
- Inspiring transformative actions going forward for developing and nurturing the church's increasing impact and influence.

We will focus on the African context to highlight key themes, challenges, and opportunities—outlining ways for strategic engagement for future generations of missions.

Key global issues like political instability, social inequity, and the rise of non-wholesome Christian gospel movements have significantly shaped Africa's mission landscape, together with the African historical influences of traditional religions, neo-colonial worldviews, and extractions of Africa's natural resources. Polycentric Christianity, which emphasizes cultural sensitivity, localization, and partnerships with local believers, is especially effective in addressing these challenges. The implication is that no single culture should, or even successfully could, dominate mission work in Africa. Rather, we want to see the unique aspects and strive to make use of our diverse contributions from the continent to the global mission field. This may call for a redefinition of 'community' in global missions to include a wide range of relationships, cultures, ethnic dynamics, urban environments, and engagements with the African diaspora. Shifting from a Western-centric model to a polycentric Christianity model and underscoring the importance of collaboration between different cultures, churches and mission organizations.

> ***"The implication is that no single culture should, or even successfully could, dominate mission work in Africa."***

The church in Africa has a unique ability to serve in global missions, even reaching the other continents, by contributing unique cultural perspectives, experiences, and passion. For example, Asia, with over 4.2 billion people in 2024, has a significant percentage of unreached peoples. The few evangelical Chris-

tians (4.2 percent) in Asia lack the capacity to reach the whole continent. Africa, on the other hand, boasts of over 600 million Christians. As Africans, we have the potential to reach both our continent and strategic regions of Asia. Moreover, by 2100, Africa's population will constitute about 40 percent of the world's population.[5] Thus, when we as African Christians mobilise the African Church around this vision, we will gain a strategic opportunity to send a substantial number of missionaries to regions of the East (like India) and into regions of the West, where, through significant secular influence, communities have again become mission fields.

We will look at some of the unique challenges and opportunities facing the African community and end by seeing how these can stimulate better collaboration, harmonizing complexities with the goal of sustainable mission efforts that can have a greater impact on the global stage. We hope this article will inspire, encourage and foster an environment of collaboration that will help you to proactively live out the Great Commission better in your own culture and context.

Rise of Secularism in Africa

Although secularism is widely thought of as a Western phenomenon, it is slowly and surely taking root in the African continent. Unfortunately, the increasing prevalence of secular lifestyles in Africa diminishes the ability of the church to mobilize people to be sent into missions. This secular trend is specifically affecting the younger generation, diminishing the number of people from Africa available for missionary work. In essence, the African faith community is gradually facing a shortage of adequately trained and available individuals for mission work. Moreover, the prevalence of individuals who profess to be Christians but live as functional secularists further makes it difficult for the church in Africa to mobilize sufficient resources for missions. The growth of secularism and the 'nones,' those who leave the church, not by switching from one faith to another, but rather by claiming to have 'no religious affiliation,'[6] should be a concern for all African Christian leaders who intend to remain contextually relevant. Three key reasons contributing to this rise of secularism are: a lack of discipleship, unhealthy church and state relationships, and unanswered questions of young people.

Lack of Discipleship

A critical reason for the rise of 'nones' is the lack of discipleship of young people tired of a religious 'dead tradition' that does not inform their daily lives. Many traditional Christian denominations in Africa are more concerned about their institutional stability than the spiritual shaping of parishioners, since when the truth of the gospel is not embraced in the pulpit, then hope is lost within the pews. The implication is that the faith of many calling themselves believers will not have Christ and the gospel at their core identity. African congregations must place the gospel—God's mission—in their teachings above the maintenance of institutional structures. This is seen in Africa's younger generations who are often attracted to the 'newer' churches that often lack sufficient training for presenting the pure gospel. By actively focusing on the gospel's transformative power, the African church can be a tangible beacon of hope amidst even the most challenging environments.

Unhealthy Church and State Relationships

Another likely reason for the rise of the 'nones' in various African countries is the compromised close relationship between protestant denominations and the state, hampering the prophetic voice of the church in the community. This results in push back against a brand of Christianity that is unconcerned with social-economic and political injustices. When the spiritual leaders do not speak into their contexts, hope is shifted from the gospel to promises from national leaders. The implication of a growing secular state is that faith convictions will become constrained into 'personal' spaces. We urgently want to take advantage of current favourable environments where open free speech is tolerated to demonstrate how the gospel is relevant in public society.

Unanswered Questions of Young People

One more factor to why particularly the youth are leaving the church is because they think

Christianity is anti-intellectual. The church must invest significantly in Christian polemics and apologetics so that Christian youths must know why they believe what they believe. We want to show the church's youth and the 'nones' that the Christian faith is both true and reasonable.

In short, the church should recognize the conducive environment stimulating the increase of the 'nones' in Africa. We want to anticipate and prepare to counter an imminent decline in belief in Christianity, which is aggravated by the self-focus of Christian institutions, the seeming irrelevance of faith in the public square for the common good, and the harmful effects of the prosperity teaching. When new followers of Jesus experience a living, vibrant faith, they can continue their journey within the Body of Christ expressed as a wholesome witness within their communities.

Rise of Islam

In Africa the growth of Islam as a distinctly contrasting alternative belief system has often been challenging for the church in Africa. The SoGC Report[7] describes an increase in the Muslim population in sub-Saharan Africa from 250 million to nearly 670 million between 2010 and 2050. In the same period, the Christian population in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to grow exponentially from 517 million to 1100 million, meaning that by 2050 half the world's evangelical population will be in Africa.[8] However, the Muslim population is expected to grow at a rate of 170 percent, faster than the Christian population—increasing at only 115 percent. Yet, our interaction as African Christians with Muslim communities is still deficient. But why—when the gospel offers such a greater hope, even to Muslims?

Consider for example, the recent personal experience of one of the authors at a funeral: A 13-year-old boy had fallen off a motorbike when manoeuvring Kampala's pot-hole-infested roads and was tragically hit by a speeding car. At the burial, attended by several community members, the Muslim cleric addressed only the men while the boy's mother and sister sat in a tree shed weeping—with neither solace nor pastoral support. Though some women sympathized with the mother, others murmured about how she may have ritually sacrificed her son to save their family from poverty! When burial time finally came, the grieving mother erupted in lament, 'Oh God, what did I do to deserve this kind of punishment? That's not my son they are taking to bury—that's a headless thing!' All eyes in sight were teary. On turning, she locked eyes with the author and recognized her, and said, 'My dear Aunty, I am so glad you are now here with me!' There were undoubtedly numerous Christians present at the funeral. However, despite their desire to offer prayer and convey a message of hope to the mother, they recognized their limitations in providing her adequate support in this time of need.

Amidst the despair many Africans encounter by the lack of hope in Islam, such as the mother in this story, here are four ways that we as Christians can turn the challenge of Islam in Africa into an opportunity by offering eternal hope to our Muslim neighbours:

First: We realize Muslims differ in their religious commitments, interpretations of their faith, and expressions in various sects and movements. There are notable Muslim scholars, Muslim extremists, affluent Muslims and also poor ones. Yet all Muslims need the hope of the gospel within their unique contexts.

Second: We maintain a presence as authentic Christ-like people when integrating with Muslims. This presence can dissolve distrust and demonstrate God's love for Muslims in our communities.

Third: We recognize that Islam is a multifaceted religion. We investigate and understand Islam's unique characteristics in each space to convey the gospel of Christ clearly and meaningfully.

Fourth: We continuously equip ourselves to engage effectively with Muslims through appropriate storytelling of biblical truths and living authentic lives within our shared local communities.

Digital Life through Technological Hope

The SoGC Report estimates that globally, people spend about two hours daily on social me-

dia.[9] In Africa, this digital life presents challenges with the rise of 'self' above 'community' in the virtual settings. This means that young people find temporary 'fulfilment' alternatives online than in lasting faith. Therefore, this is a prominent missional opportunity that we Christians want to use digital technology to facilitate communication, evangelism, and discipleship in innovative ways. Online discipleship platforms have the potential to reach remote and restricted areas where traditional missions face challenges. In certain countries within the EPSA region, traditional methods face challenges due to political and religious restrictions, as in North Africa. However, digital evangelism[10] has a unique ability to reach many unreached people groups[11] in local languages through social media, online chat rooms, and digital discipleship programs.

One young man, searching for answers about faith, discovered an online Bible study,[12] received personalized discipleship[13] through virtual meetings and, despite the risks, eventually decided to follow Christ. The digital platform provided support to eventually connect him in-person with disciples in his region. His testimony is one of many that has inspired and illustrated how digital tools can enable local followers of Jesus to become disciple-makers. inspired others to explore the Christian faith, showing how digital tools enable local followers of Jesus to become disciple-makers amidst their communities.

We want to equip the youth—who are predominantly occupying the digital realms in Africa—with sound discipleship through trusted messages with preferred oral and visual online content to foster spiritual growth and deepen faith. To help us navigate the ethical challenges of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, we want to develop a theology of media, in turn, inspiring active and meaningful church participation in digital realms. By integrating traditional gospel broadcasts with the digital landscape, we can have a critical impact on contemporary missions. Through technology and media familiar to people in Africa, we aspire to equip disciple-makers, address social justice concerns, and speak hope into issues relevant to our context.

Trust Issues

Besides the rise of the 'nones,' the influence of Islam, and the challenges provided by digital platforms, the mandate to partner with God to take the gospel of Jesus Christ as a message of truth and hope into the world is obscured by dark clouds of deceit, distrust, and despair. Our world is a theatre of increasing scepticism and mistrust of any authority, whether of individuals or institutions like governments or even the church. Such mistrust is amplified by widespread partially true or false messages, often through media propaganda.

The Global South is home to the majority of the world's Christians today. Yet, ironically, regions like Africa are registering decreasing trust in the church and religious texts. Though significant trust exists for family, friends, and social media, young people consider the church to have minimal influence on culture and hardly any influence on politics, finance, technology, and business.[14] The arrival of the visual era significantly shaped where people place their trust in the future, both globally and in Africa.

Given that African church leaders still enjoy a significant level of public trust compared to their counterparts elsewhere globally, they have a responsibility to harness this credibility as respected voices in society. This involves honestly evaluating their possible contributions to the growing mistrust in the church and then reflecting on how their actions and messaging may rather cultivate trust in the gospel and its messengers.

Engaging African Youth

Africa has the world's youngest population and also the fastest-growing population. With this rise of young people, the continent is increasingly facing youth-related challenges like unemployment, crime, drug and substance abuse, illiteracy, lack of strong meaningful communities and multiple challenges arising from digital influences. Investments in magnificent buildings, extensive church programs and other conventional evangelistic efforts cannot alone have the greatest impact when reaching the youth. Rather investing in the lives of young

people with discipled mentoring, through experience, exposure and even adventure, they can be involved in God's mission.

From 'Believing to Belonging' Towards 'Belonging to Believing'

Previously, many young people embraced an ideology and were then moved into communities—for evangelism, people would hear the gospel, believe, confess faith and then join discipleship groups. However, more and more, young people 'want to belong' and 'want to fit in' even before they can come to hold or sometimes understand the conventions of the communities, they are a part of. This can negatively contribute to the growth of secularism, as the youth identifies with a worldview without having to evaluate the implications. Inversely, this is an opportunity for the church to foster communities where the gospel can slowly gain meaning in the minds and hearts of the youth.

Where and How to Start

Amongst the youth there already is a love and passion for the arts, sports, and media, so we can actively engage in those spaces as missional opportunities. The world of the future is shaped by the youthful generations and therefore efforts to encourage, mentor, empower, train, equip and build up the youth to drive transformational change are strategically important. When we as leaders draw on the youth for strategic planning of future missional priorities, we are not just sharing our vision for the future, but we are getting the youth to share in God's vision for His church. Our empowered youth can then develop as pillars of hope amidst secularist influence in Africa, growing love for their neighbours, building communities and being practically involved in God's mission.

Women in Missions

Women in Africa can play a major role in missions in a region where they are the majority in the overall church membership. They play vital and diverse roles in discipleship and community development, and their inclusion in leadership roles endorses their important missional role. The influence of women ranges from their ministry amongst children to being a force in micro-businesses and in the marketplace where ecclesiastical dogma does not restrict their significant leadership roles. Empowering the women as leaders in the church can drive transformative change.

In the Anglican Church in Uganda, for example, there are many women who have been significantly involved in pastoral and missional efforts, caring for the most vulnerable in society, and inspiring many people to follow Jesus. Rev Canon Diana Nkesiga[15] is a pioneering figure among them, leading a congregation as a female priest. She is recognized for her leadership role both in affluent and in impoverished communities, embodying compassion through her work. In her fight against HIV/AIDS and cancer, she established a foundation in memory of her late husband, who had succumbed to cancer, to support children with cancer by providing free counselling, food supplements, and medication.

In Kenya, the Maasai community has long faced challenges such as poverty, early marriages, and a lack of educational opportunities for girls.[16] Church and mission organizations[17] have been working to transform these communities through girl-child education and women empowerment programs to overcome challenges to shape healing communities.

Therefore, we want to develop strategies that promote gender equality within church structures and leverage women's full potential in advancing the mission field. However, intentional mentorship programs, theological education for women, and the inclusion of women in church ministry are also needed to empower them for strategic leadership roles.

Regional Challenges

The Great Commission's missional work in Africa faces unique challenges, from ethnic violence to illiteracy, persecution to false teaching and socio-economic disparities. These challenges often stem from historical grievances, economic inequalities, injustices, corruption, and poor theological training. While these factors pose significant challenges, they also present opportunities for major impact

of the African church in missions. Some of the specific larger issues are:

Rise of Cultic Prosperity and Gnostic Movements

The cultic movements with unfulfilled promises of wealth and health, lead some to doubt their faith and others to question Christianity altogether. The prevalence of these cultic prosperity and gnostic movements is a significant catalyst for the increasing number of 'nones' in Africa. As the socio-economic conditions of these followers improves, their perceived need for God diminishes. We want to respond to these cultic and gnostic phenomena by offering a convincing theology of suffering, love, and sacrificial commitment, pointing to a greater hope in Christ beyond material fulfilment, while addressing individuals' existential and spiritual needs.

Addressing Ethnic Violence and Promoting Reconciliation

Active missional efforts in reconciliation and unity are needed to address ethnic violence, which at times divides even Christian communities. We want to spearhead initiatives promoting peace and reconciliation through inter-ethnic dialogue and joint action that not only heal divisions, but foster integration, and deter further violence. As the church we are in a unique position to address social injustice, cultivate reconciliation, and enhance unity across diverse communities, fostering a peaceful, cohesive society. By embedding justice and advocacy deep within our missional identity, we can better tackle systemic issues and visibly live out the gospel in the public sphere.

The reconciliation and peacebuilding in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide provides a compelling example of the impact of the gospel via Christian missions. They were facilitating open community dialogues amongst survivors from opposing ethnic groups, sharing their painful experiences, addressing ethnic divisions and trauma, providing a space to forgive each other and so promoting peace in their communities. These powerful stories of forgiveness and healing illustrate the power of the gospel in missions for reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Martyrdom and Religious Persecution

Revisiting the role of martyrdom is crucial for understanding its impact on mission work and the Great Commission in Africa. The story of the Ugandan Martyrs of 1886 has significantly influenced missional work but remains vulnerable to manipulation and propaganda. Martyrdom and religious persecution stories must be communicated in ways relatable to today's youth, who may distrust historical narratives, helping young people to see these stories as relevant to their own lives. Furthermore, we want to share present-day examples of faith and sacrifice that resonate with contemporary audiences and that inspire a deeper commitment to the Christian faith amidst persecution.

Missional Training and Discipleship

We want to integrate key aspects of missional work into theological training to equipping local leaders to counter the lack of wholesome biblical training:

- *Training for knowledge and obedience in context.* Christian discipleship for both literate and oral learners should emphasize 'obedience to Christ' over mere 'knowledge acquisition' in order to address the challenge of syncretism. The practical nature of the Christian faith allows the church to boldly, courageously, and wisely address local and global injustices while advancing the Great Commission.
- *Contextual whole-life discipleship.* We want to promote holistic discipleship that incorporates the youth, children and women. Also, we want to equip believers to engage with the creative arts and media for helping others grow spiritually. We want to mobilize and equip believers to integrate faith in their professional contexts. We desire to integrate holistic discipleship into all aspects of life resulting in personal and communal transformation for local and global witness.
- *Developing leaders in African contexts.* We want to embrace and recognize our African identity, culture, language and context when theologizing and dialoguing

with the wider Christian church. For our training of African leaders to serve the African Church, we would need to theologize as African Christians. We want our training for potential leaders in theological institutions to seek to address African issues.

- *Understanding 'witnessing' as 'local mission'.* In Africa, the concept of 'mission' often remains foreign and lacks a direct translation into various local dialects, while 'witnessing' is easily relatable. When we emphasize 'witnessing' over 'mission' we bridge cultural gaps, making sharing of the gospel message more practical. When African Christians then take ownership of 'witnessing' across major geographic or cultural boundaries, they themselves become actively involved in 'missions'.

As the African church we face significant challenges, however these also present opportunities. Amidst cultic and gnostic movements promising prosperity, a theology embracing sacrifice provides opportunities to share hope in Christ. Within conflicts the gospel offers reconciliation, peace, and unity. Through stories of people facing religious persecution, younger generations can be encouraged. This missional work is sustainable through continual training for contextual discipleship.

Regional Opportunities

Within the Lausanne EPSA Region, opportunities enable us to make significant contributions:

African Marketplaces for Missions

As the church in Sub-Saharan Africa, the marketplace provides multiple, daily opportunities where Christian professionals lead marketplace gatherings—in city centres, police stations, hospitals, or parliaments—for new avenues for discipleship. Such outreach during the workweek, unique in the African context, equips believers to live out their faith in difficult environments and counters the challenges of secularism.

As urban churches increasingly host business empowerment seminars, we want to enable sound theology to guard against detrimental prosperity gospel. The African business community is being mobilized to support missions through human and financial resources, which is a transformative shift from previous suspicions of worldliness. Even amongst the workplace leaders amongst members of parliament, movements such as the National Prayer Breakfast[18] and Capitol Ministries (CapMin)[19] are gaining momentum. Christian legislators and professionals influence their nations through these movements, giving the African church relevance in the public square. We want to embrace the strategic nature of the role of the marketplace in global missions.

Missional Collaboration Across Nations and Continents

Networking among churches, denominations, and Christian NGOs enables us to share resources toward more impactful missions. Globally, many Africans in the diaspora already are missional links between their local African churches and the communities abroad, also mobilizing resources for sending more missionaries from home. We want to equip more Africans for missions before migration, and also strategically mobilize the African in the diaspora for missions. Across Africa, national missions alliances are gaining momentum, serving as a unifying force for churches and mission agencies within nations to strategically address unreached populations. NEMA[20] in Nigeria is a prime example for fostering missions collaboration for over four decades by reducing competition, aligning resources and researching to inform mission strategies. A burgeoning movement within these alliances is amplifying African voices in missiology, addressing the scarcity of mission literature written by African practitioners. The AfMA[21] across Africa is actively encouraging the formation of national alliances for the African church to contribute to national, continental, and global missions efforts.

We, as the African church, can contribute to global Christianity by collaborating for the gospel to influence profound social change. When we address unique challenges faced by the African church and seize available opportunities, we can advance the Great Commission both locally and globally. The African church can be a key driver within global

missions by embracing our networked role to contribute significantly to missions to help bring hope through Christ.

Conclusion

We have highlighted key Great Commission themes for missions in the Lausanne EPSA Region of Africa. The sections offer strategic pathways for engagement with inclusive and culturally sensitive leadership, both through the physical and digital spaces, within polycentric Christianity.

We, as the African church, with our unique experiences, insights, and passions, have a pivotal role in prophetically discerning God's heart for people, and shaping the future of global missions. By acknowledging our unique circumstances amidst the most extreme contexts, we can continue to be equipped for becoming available with our significant capacity of dynamic, youthful and energetic contributions to embrace our important future role. As the African church we want to clarify our calling to deepen discipleship relationships, and to mature in sharing the gospel relevantly using various suitable skills in new contexts. By embracing our leadership role in missionary work in parts of the world beyond Africa, we can make valuable contributions of the gospel within the Great Commission.

This dynamic context of missions calls for our concerted collaboration with the global church to effectively fulfil the Great Commission. We, therefore, invite you, as the global church, to respond with urgency and innovative collective action to advance the Great Commission by encouraging and inspiring the African church. You, as the global church, can form an intimate harmony with the church in Africa to reach people within Africa, and then together with the African church, reach people in wider regions globally.

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate missional contributions from African Christian leaders of the L4AM Gathering of 2023. We acknowledge strategic ideas from Meshack Aburiri, Esther Chengo, Jacob Courtney, Bright Aboagye Obeng, Jesse Lulu, John A. Mayer, Chris Maynard, and Stephen Mbogo. We thank God for our combined EPSA report journey.

Endnotes

1 The Lausanne EPSA region (https://lausanne.org/network/epsa) is the English, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking region of sub-Saharan Africa. Many missional issues of the EPSA region overlap much with issues with those in the Lausanne Francophone Africa Region (https://lausanne.org/network/region-francophone-africa) and in the Lausanne MENA Region (https://lausanne.org/network/MENA) that includes North Africa, while some topics are distinctly different. In the writing we often refer to 'Africa' for brevity, yet typically refer to the Lausanne EPSA region of Africa.

2 https://lausanne.org/report

3 https://lausanne.org/about/blog/learning-from-leaders-from-africa-and-the-middle-east-at-l4am

4 https://lausanne.org/gathering/lausanne-4-africa-and-middle-east-gathering

5 In 2023, the population of Africa is around 1.4 billion; by 2100 it's projected to reach just under 4 billion, which is about 40 percent of the global population. https://ourworldindata.org/region-population-2100

6 See the State of the Great Commission Report in Sect. II on Secularism https://lausanne.org/report/hope/secularism

7 'Islam Today', in the State of the Great Commission Report. https://lausanne.org/report/hope/islam

8 The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050. Sub-Saharan Africa. April 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/sub-saharan-africa/

9 What is a Digital Life? Global Social Media—Global Reach. https://lausanne.org/report/digital-life/global-social-media

10 What is Digital Evangelism? https://www.centerforonlineevangelism.org/what-is-digital-evangelism/

11 Embracing Digital Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel Today. https://www.preaching.com/articles/embracing-digital-evangelism-sharing-the-gospel-today/

12 8 Digital evangelism methods every ministry should use in 2022. https://www.delmethod.com/blog/digital-evangelism-methods

13 Digital Discipleship: Definition, Strategies, & Warnings. https://justdisciple.com/digital-discipleship/

14 What is the Foundation of Trust? Key Information. https://lausanne.org/report/trust/cultural-influence

15 A brief life journey of Rev. Canon Diana Nkesiga. https://gayazaoldgirls.com/imt_team/rev-canon-diana-nkesiga/

16 Empowering Maasai Girls through Education. https://actiononpoverty.org/projects/empowering-maasai-girls-through-education/

17 Maasai Girls Education Fund. https://togetherwomenrise.org/programs/maasai-girls-education-fund/

18 Politics and Prayer in Africa. How the national prayer breakfast movement is impacting African nations and the next generation. https://lausanne.org/about/blog/politics-and-prayer-in-africa . The Kenya National Prayer Breakfast. https://npbkenya.org/

19 Capitol Ministries (CapMin) mobilizes Christians within their parliamentary leadership roles. https://capmin.org/

20 Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA). https://nemanigeriamissions.org/

21 Africa Missions Association (AfMA)

22 https://www.tangazo.org/

23 https://www.theocca.org/

24 https://veracityfount.org/

25 https://lausanne.org/leader/rudolf-kabutz

26 https://twr.org/africa

27 https://lausanne.org/network/media-engagement

28 http://www.lifeinabundance.org

29 https://messageuganda.ug/

30 https://inthegardenmissionsorg.reachapp.co/places/ufahari-girls

31 https://www.theocca.org/

32 https://www.aiu.ac.ke/

33 https://isar.aiu.ac.ke/

34 https://bygracetrust.org/

Authors

Rev Raymond L. Bukenya is the team leader and a founding member of Tru Tangazo Uganda.[22] He is passionate about proclaiming, clarifying, and affirming the truth claims of the Christian faith in an increasingly sceptical world amidst alternative worldviews, and trains others to do the same. A theologian, apologist and missiologist with training from the University of Oxford and the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics[23] and holds a Masters in Missions from the University of Winchester.

Joseph Byamukama is a Langham Scholar and the founder and team leader of Veracity Fount[24] in Kampala, Uganda. He earned his MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA, and is finishing his PhD in New Testament Intertextuality from Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. Joseph is interested in African Christologies and Trinitarian conversations.

Rudolf Kabutz[25] is a media communicator and foresight strategist. He serves as a Media Research Strategist for TWR Africa,[26] focusing on understanding future media user communities. Rudolf is driven by the global media network collaboration to reach people with hope. Utilizing tools to connect and equip individuals, he enables them to equip others. As a catalyst for the Lausanne Media Engagement Network,[27] he fosters intentional media engagement to transform society. His work, shaped by his Master's studies in nuclear physics and strategic foresight, influences future media communication paradigms.

Hesbone Kang'e is a pastor and the Chief Executive Officer of Life In Abundance.[28] He is a Christian development professional, with 30 years of experience in practical global missions, specializing in strategic leadership and governance of integrated Christ-centred, church-based and people-focused missional initiatives for sustainable transformation. He holds a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine Bachelors, a Postgraduate Diploma in Management, a Master of Business Administration, and an MDiv. He is a DMin candidate.

Racheal Mutesi Kwetolaku is the team leader for Message Trust Uganda[29] and the founder and president of Ufahari Girls Ministries[30] in Kampala, Uganda. She holds a bachelor's degree in commerce from Makerere University, Uganda, and a certificate in theology from the University of Oxford. She also trained in Christian apologetics at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.[31] She is a passionate evangelist and children's advocate.

Dr Rosemary Mbogo is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Administration at Africa International University.[32] She holds a PhD in educational leadership and administration from Biola University (USA). Her career objective is to train educational leaders and researchers to address African realities through relevant research approaches, fostering intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social flourishing. She also serves as the director of the Institute for the Study of African Realities (ISAR)[33], bridging academia and practitioners, and is a founding director of the ByGrace Trust,[34] empowering orphans, destitute and at-risk children through education, training, and mentorship.

EURASIA



EURASIA

Mirzabek Dosov, Alex Spichak, Ruslan Zagidulin

A Eurasian Portrait

For many years, this region has been considered as the Former Soviet Union only, except for the Baltic countries. Twelve countries are directly or indirectly viewed through the lens of the USSR. Such simplification led to the assumption that a portrait of a recipient of the gospel is a post-Soviet individual with some possible variation. In other words, if one draws a post-Soviet individual, he or she can depict missionary work. Since Moscow was the centre of Soviet space, many missionary organizations in the 1990s considered Moscow a springboard for missionary activity. By the beginning of the 2000s, it became clear that Ukraine, and then Moldova, were becoming an alternative, and often much more successful, the centre of missionary influence. The countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Far East were considered missionary fields. At the same time, independent missionary initiatives began to develop in predominantly Islamic countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

In the last 15 years, the situation in the region has dramatically changed. Russia's war in Georgia in 2008, the tightening of religious legislation in Central Asian countries in 2008–2009, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have completely changed the existing missional donor-acceptor ties in the region. Today, churches that have lost their former connections once again need the help of the global church in fulfilling the Great Commission. In this regard, collaboration and a polycentric approach to mission are needed more than ever.

In addition, the region is experiencing significant demographic shifts. The number of the young population of Central Asia is growing, while in Russia and Eastern European countries, the population is declining and aging. The landscape of diasporas has also changed over the past thirty years. People have returned *en masse* to their historical lands. Issues of identity and national identity have come to the fore, including for local evangelical churches. In order to call a young person to follow Jesus Christ and become his disciple, many churches have once again faced the question of what it actually means to become a disciple in a given context.

The issue of discipleship is critical from the perspective of local theology and developing a new generation of leaders. If for someone this is a challenge, complicating activities, most often for the older generation, then for others it is a challenge that leads to the creation of new movements in the region.

"In order to call a young person to follow Jesus Christ and become his disciple, many churches have once again faced the question of what it actually means to become a disciple in a given context."

Polycentric Christianity and the Former Soviet Union

Authentic Christianity is a dynamic journey with rhythms of growth, decline, transformation, and change. Like a living organism, it undergoes birth, maturity, aging, and renewal stages, flourishing unpredictably. Today, more than ever, we witness what missiologist Andrew Walls calls 'the massive southward shift of the Centre of gravity of the Christian world'.[1] In his book, Walls shows Christianity's historical adaptability across various contexts, cultures, and languages, arguing that it is a multifaceted, evolving faith. For instance, in the Former Soviet Union, we see how Christianity has adapted to the post-Soviet era, with the emergence of indigenous Christian leaders and the growth of evangelical communities. Drawing on the incarnation of Jesus,

Walls presents a theological rationale for contextualizing Christianity, illustrating its migratory nature and adaptability as a testament to its vitality. [2] We strongly agree with Walls, believing that this dying and rising process is rooted in the tension between the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. Contemporary Christianity's diverse cultural manifestations demonstrate its ability to integrate into different cultural landscapes, avoiding stagnation and remaining relevant.

During the Soviet era, Christians in this area were primarily isolated from the global Christian community due to political constraints. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, opportunities for partnership and collaboration arose. However, many Christian organizations and missions primarily focused on Eastern Europe and the Orthodox Christian context, overlooking the Muslim-majority regions, particularly Central Asia. Unfortunately, Western Christian organizations often view the region as an extension of Eastern European ministry. Despite the shared Eurasian identity, it is crucial to acknowledge the region's significant cultural, political, social, and religious diversity. We are heartened by the emergence of indigenous Christian leaders, particularly within the Muslim-majority areas. These leaders, navigating complex issues such as conversion experiences, oppression, persecution, social marginalization, and interreligious dialogue within their unique contexts, are the beacon of hope for the region. Today, there is a growing agenda to foster local and contextualized forms of Christianity and mission in the region. This shift is a direct response to years of neglect, where local Christians lacked—and in many cases, the situation remains the same—the resources and support needed for meaningful engagement with the global Christian community.

The prevailing pattern linking Christianity primarily with Slavic and Eastern European cultures is shifting, as evidenced by the conversion stories of many indigenous people from Central Asia. We anticipate this trend will continue, with more individuals from Islamic backgrounds embracing Jesus and establishing Christian communities that reflect their cultural and religious experiences. These communities may resemble existing ones in the Eurasian region, yet they'll carry unique nuances shaped by their cultural heritage. The challenge for various evangelical groups in the Eurasian region lies in fostering acceptance and love amidst differences. Can we learn to celebrate each other's distinct expressions of faith while remaining a united body of Christ? It's a question that calls for sincere reflection and action, a call for unity and acceptance in the face of diversity.

What is the Source of Hope?

During the 20th century, the people of the Soviet Union trusted its sociopolitical system. National, religious, and cultural identities played a secondary role, or even a barrier since individuals could improve their lives within their soviet identity only. In the nineties, after the Soviet Union collapsed, the Eurasian countries gained independence and found themself in an ideological vacuum, turning on free and democratic corporations, following Western countries. The economic growth in the region led these countries to the necessity to construct their own ideologies, which created tensions and even a new wave of military conflicts in the region. Thus, various sources of hope, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, traditional beliefs, as well as Atheism, have become aggressively competing. If the choice of religion or ideology was a private choice two decades ago, today, it is considered a threat. In these circumstances, evangelical Christians in Eurasia faced difficulty fulfilling the Great Commission because people perceived the proposed trust in Christ as an invitation to be part of American evangelicalism or to become supporters of the so-called 'Western values'. In addition to that, Eurasian evangelical churches do not impact the social life of their members very much, aiming to satisfy only spiritual lives. It also leads to mistrust or lack of trust in the churches as a social institution.

What is Community?

Since we have discussed that mission in the 21st century has taken on a fluid form, where mission resources, influence, and movements can originate from anywhere in the world and be directed to any other part of the world, we

must carefully reconsider how we understand and practice church as a community. This concept of 'liquid mission', coined by missiologist Andrew Walls, calls for 'liquid communities' that can match the fluidity and unpredictability of 21st-century missional flows. In this context, a 'liquid community' is one that is adaptable, flexible, and responsive to the changing needs and dynamics of its members and the world around it. Dynamic migration and resettlement patterns, systemic social injustice, structural corruption, lack of stability, poverty, and unemployment mark the Eurasian region. All of these factors contribute to the movement patterns in this diverse region. The displacement of people is further exacerbated by increasing military conflicts and actions in the region, leading many to leave their homes for safety. These conditions drive people to seek resources, space, and opportunities for a better life in different parts of the world. Both internal and external migration are common in the Eurasian region, with individuals from remote areas and villages moving to urban centres and urban dwellers emigrating abroad. This reality necessitates a church that can reconstruct itself as a fluid community, akin to a river flowing in different directions without boundaries regarding meeting place, structure, or time. Without this adaptability, the church will struggle to respond to the challenges of migration in the region, which are expected to accelerate in the coming decades. Returning to a simplistic yet profoundly biblical understanding of the church as a gathered community is essential. The church should refrain from nostalgia for a past when its halls were packed and from condemning those who have moved for various reasons. Instead, it should view migration challenges through a missional lens, recognizing the numerous new and previously unseen mission opportunities both locally and globally.

The inspiration for such a liquid church in the Eurasian region might be found in indigenous Evangelical communities in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia. These communities often embody a dynamic form of church that is not bound by traditional notions of meeting in one place but instead emphasizes relational networks, connectivity, mutual support and solidarity. The church is perceived primarily as a family with internal bonds and connections. They demonstrate a fluidity and adaptability that allows them to navigate the challenges of migration and societal change, offering a model for churches worldwide to reexamine their structures and practices, considering the fluid nature of their mission in the 21st century.

What is Fair and Justice?

Many evangelical communities across this region have not been actively engaging in social justice and the well-being of the people. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, this region has plunged into deep social, economic, and political issues and injustices. Corruption, inequality, unemployment, political oppression, and human rights issues were not only prevalent throughout these years but have also acquired a deep and structural dimension that dehumanizes many people's lives. Even three decades after the fall of communism, people's lives in this region have not improved, and there is no hope in this regard. While it would not be entirely accurate to say that the mission of evangelical churches in the Eurasian region is completely missing these issues, they are not bringing significant hope to these areas of life. There might be many reasons for this, but we would argue that the majority of these churches have a very narrow understanding of the church's mission. A holistic mission directly results from holistic theological convictions, which is undergirded by the biblical narrative. Such a reading of the biblical texts is not the case for most Evangelical communities in this region, whose fundamental theological convictions are fragmented, dualistic, and otherworldly. Propositional systematic theology is much more popular than biblical theology, and holistic mission is often associated with the Social Gospel. There should be a significant shift in the way we think and practice our mission if we want to bring transformation and healing to the suffering people in this region.

The Foundation of Trust

The foundation of trust is a severe issue in Eurasia that will shape evangelism in the region for decades to come. In Eurasia, the

competition for people's opinions on various issues, especially in the area of geopolitics, has become particularly acute. A vast number of media platforms have emerged that serve as a source of news and a means for most people to understand the news background. Most, if not all, of these media platforms are biased and unbalanced, created and funded to define public consciousness.

While some people close themselves off to certain worldviews and limit themselves to certain content and media groups, most people are getting used to the idea that no news outlet can be trusted and the truth is nowhere to be found.

This reality challenges us as followers of Jesus in the Eurasia region, as society sees us as just another self-interested group or set up to promote someone else's interests, showing distrust by looking for bias in our actions and words. The actions of some religious leaders who use their authority to promote interests unrelated to building the kingdom of God make the ground for such distrust even more fertile. Religious institutions are perceived as service organizations to promote the interests of major players in the geopolitical arena. Thus, in various places, including Ukraine, the Orthodox Church is perceived as a tool to promote the interests of Russia, and in Russia, the evangelical church is perceived as a tool to promote the interests of the West, which undermines the efforts of both churches to advance the gospel.

In this context, we, as followers of Jesus, should be especially careful to follow the biblical principles that form the basis for our interaction with the media, including our treatment of propaganda and news media platforms. As disciples and witnesses of Christ, we must be our own critical and analytical thinkers to understand and expose propaganda messages and to discern superficiality and bias in media, and through this, gain public trust that we are distinguished by honesty and integrity in our positions. It is especially important to support gifted ministers who could become the voice of the evangelical community in the media space, showing themselves as salt and light, contrasting with the false general background of propaganda in media platforms.

All Christians as a whole should be taught to take a stand in the context of propaganda and be a light, presenting a gospel that stands out from the general bias and falsehood by reflecting the truth that is so desirable to people who are fed up with propaganda and lies.

As followers of Jesus in the 21st century, we should not give up our presence in the media space because, for most people today, it is the primary means of receiving information. It is necessary to create evangelical groups in social networks. Particular attention should be paid to creating visual products, as they play a crucial role in visual perception in creating an affect (an emotion resulting in a physical or mental reaction) that leads to either disbelief or affirmation of the truth.

This will foster a perception of the gospel as an objective truth that exists independently of our personal beliefs, biases, and opinions. This is especially important in the coming decades, following the era of postmodernism, the rejection of objective truth, and mutual distrust and confidence in universal bias. Followers of Jesus must not only show integrity in the media space but also in their personal lives by demonstrating consistency in their actions with what they post on social media and media platforms.

What are the Emerging Demographics?

The demographic trends in the region vary widely. While the population of Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is growing, the European region is experiencing a decline. Russia serves as a prime example of this trend. These demographic changes are also reflected in the local communities, with some churches attracting younger congregants, particularly in urban areas. However, these shifts could lead to generational gaps and intergenerational conflicts.

It's becoming more challenging to disciple young people in the region because Gen Z has a general mistrust of social institutions, including the church. There is an urgent need to focus on youth culture, particularly in urban

settings where family influence may be weak. Peer discipline is one potential approach for fulfilling the Great Commission through discipling and discipleship.

Digital Life and Digital Communities and the Ministry in a Digital Age

Communicating with digital media has become an everyday activity for people around the world, including countries in Eurasia. Thanks to technological advances, physical distance does not prevent us from connecting with friends, families, coworkers, and church groups. Most of the followers of Jesus in Eurasia today are all involved in digital communities in one form or another, whether they realize it or not. During the pandemic, many churches in Eurasia used Zoom for worship services. This was the impetus for developing digital ministries and communities and even the emergence of digital churches in Russian and other languages of Eurasia. On the one hand, this opens up new opportunities for spreading the gospel and building the kingdom of God, but on the other hand, it can bring with it the danger of polarization, the fracturing of the evangelical community, and the loss of community and the real fellowship which has been one of the strengths of the evangelical movement.

Recognizing that we cannot stop the growth of digital communities in Eurasia, we need to think about training pastors and church ministers to minister in a digital environment, both inside and outside the church, and how to show genuine empathy through digital presence. Understanding ecclesiology in the digital world needs to be explored. How can we make a presence meaningful so that people are cared for and nurtured?

The advent of the digital age has radically changed how people interact with various forms of information. The digital presentation of information is becoming more effective. Therefore, creating resources that present gospel-related information in digital form is very important. These could be digital online libraries and other digital resources. A good example is the resource, www.azbyka.ru, created by the Russian Orthodox Church. This resource contains the principal works of all the Eastern church fathers, the works of theologians and leading representatives of this church. This all makes the theology of the church available for perception and study. The evangelical church also creates similar resources, but they are still presented in a narrow confessional view.

Digitalization has significantly changed the world of education. There is an emerging interest in online courses, which is a major trend in learning in the coming decades. As followers of Jesus in the 21st century, we must utilize the opportunities of the digital age to deliver the gospel.

That being said, there is a need to grow in understanding how to do discipleship in the digital age so that we are not limited to imaginary success. The nature of social media and content promotion on the internet allows for big numbers, thousands trained, and millions to whom the message of the gospel has been delivered. It is important to focus on making a difference in the lives of those impacted by digital ministries rather than limiting ourselves to metrics based on page views and visits. The use of digital technology should lead to community transformation and real impact on the world. This can be measured by training those who will competently carry out the ministry of discipleship in the digital world, allowing the gospel to penetrate people's hearts and change their lives truly.

There is also a challenge for greater partnership among evangelical organizations so that instead of disparate digital resources, quality digital platforms can be created that excel in effectiveness and gospel delivery. This will require tempering personal ambition and learning to join forces for a common purpose.

Endnotes

1 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 78.

2 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

Authors

Aleksandr Spichak has served in the area of theological education since 1999, and since 2005 has been an academic dean at TVSEMINARY. Since 2023 has served as the Executive Director of Theological Evangelical Association of Eurasia. Also serves as an elder at the Evangelical church Immanuel in Kursk, Russia. Aleksandr graduated from TCM International Institute (Vienna, Austria)in 2019 with Master of Divinity with an Organizational Leadership Concentration, he also holds PhD in Technical Sciences (2003).

Mirzabek Dosov Adjunct faculty member at the university Divitia Gratiae, Chisinău, Moldova and Tashkent Christian Seminary. PhD candidate at OCMS, Oxford, UK.

Ruslan Zagidulin graduated from Kyrgyz Technical University in 1998, majoring in cybernetics and engineering. He then attended Bishkek Bible School, earning another bachelor's degree in Christian Education in 2006. After part-time study until 2013, Ruslan earned a master of theology degree. His specialty was Biblical Studies, with a second specialty in Contextual Missiology.

EUROPE



EUROPE

Julia Garschagen, Luke Greenwood, Rolf Kjøde, Jim Memory, Usha Reifsnider, Janet Sewell

Reevangelizing Europe

At the end of the 14th Century, Lithuania, the last pagan nation in Europe, finally adopted Christianity. Given that this report seeks to 'capture the current state and trajectory of the Great Commission', Europe stands as an important reminder that our current state and trajectory does not establish with any certainty the future of the church. Europe was the first continent to be completely Christianized, but it was also the first continent to be substantially de-Christianized.

The authors of this article have reviewed the key global topics from the report and have identified five of those which have particular relevance for Europe today: the meaning of trust/truth; the place of community; the challenges and opportunities of the digital world; creation care and climate justice; and unprecedented demographic change. To those five global topics, we have added one our own: a shift in morality which is affecting how the 'good news' of the gospel is interpreted by many Europeans.

> ***"Europe stands as an important reminder that our current state and trajectory does not establish with any certainty the future of the church."***

As we seek to re-evangelize Europe, pastors, church planters, and Christian leaders in the workplace must not ignore the following six issues that are shaping our European present and future. They are constituent parts of the soil into which we are sowing the gospel. In each section, we explore how these issues are affecting society and the church, but also suggest some ways in which the church could respond and, in some cases, already is. And, since many of these issues are also important in other regions of the world, we offer up our reflections as a contribution to the global conversation on the state of the Great Commission.

Restoring Truth

The radical change in the European mindset over a relatively short time period is one of the greatest challenges for communicating the gospel on our continent. Personal experience has become key to validating truth, rendering objective all-encompassing truth claims as unethical claims to power.

Consequently, trust in the bigger overarching stories of, for example, religious institutions has declined. In European societies, this has contributed to a massive rise in individualism. As each person lives on their individual 'truth island'[1] and the distinction between the person and their opinion is set aside, discussion and critique of position becomes a threat which endangers democratic discourse.

In a time of social media, the postmodern project that aimed to bring down the power of authorities and institutions has in fact only passed on the power to those who voice their views the loudest and most polemically. Many people find themselves in a vulnerable and fragile position needing to constantly construct their own identity. This might well be one of the factors that plays into the rapid rise of mental disorders and gender confusion, especially among young people.[2]

Like all humans, Europeans are craving for orientation and meaning in life and spiritual practices are appreciated in different segments of the culture. However, few seem to look for help in the church. For many Europeans, the good news has become bad news: it is morally corrupt, intellectually naïve, and emotionally irrelevant. The leading question ahead of the church must therefore be: How can we live and speak of the power, beauty, and truth of the gospel so that Europeans perceive it as good news?

We will emphasize a few ideas here:

- The sending of the church implies that it is called to be in the public arena, includ-

ing the digital universe. The church must empower believers to be witnesses for Christ in all spheres of society, for example, in the universities, as businesspeople, and as professionals. We are called to help believers develop a Christian mindset that overcomes the split between the sacred and the secular.

- We therefore need to bring our Christian faith into fresh dialogue with the burning questions of society, culture, politics, science, and technology. Churches need to humbly leave room for critical questions, doubt, and conversation. In apologetics we will encourage debate not only on complicated intellectual issues but also delve into more existential questions touching upon the lives of ordinary people.
- The church must map the needs of people in their local communities in order to reach out with diaconal ministry. The church should be known for doing mercy and standing up for justice when people suffer. Mission includes both proclamation and social action, but the right to speak truth must be earned by living out discipleship in ways that build trust.
- The Christian home has an enormous capacity as a place for building warm relations and inviting people in. These are basic communities that can take the role of being 'church around a table' both for believers and non-believers in an atmosphere of trust.

The church in Europe needs a fully biblical understanding of truth, one that is both broad and deep—genuinely rational and deeply relational. The rationality of truth stems from the belief in a God who created in a rational and ordered way. The relational aspect flows from the revelation of Jesus as truth personified, who showed himself to be truthful by being trustworthy. So biblical truth is also about whom to trust.

This broader and deeper understanding of truth transcends both the narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment, often called modernism, and the opposition to objective truth that is at the heart of postmodernism.

Reshaping Morality

The huge epistemological change in how truth is perceived in Europe has already been described above. Among the many consequences, the shift in morality is perhaps one of the most significant with very particular impacts on the challenges for the European church.

In the past, people might have thought Christian ethics to be too high of a moral standard to even try to attain. Today Christianity is perceived, especially by the well-educated, the cultural influencers, and the younger generation, to embody negative values that are adverse to human flourishing. Contrary to what by many Christians perceive as a degradation of values in Europe, most contemporaries regard this morality shift as positive progress that takes society beyond Christianity.

The challenges for the church and the advancement of the Greater Commission are huge: Mission is seen as immoral because it imposes one's truth on others, which, by default, is a claim to power and a violation of the other person's rights. This has contributed to a further privatization of faith. Believers are reluctant to share their personal faith; Christian humanitarian organizations communicate little about their Christian motivation.

Especially for the younger European generation, values like authenticity, justice, and care of the environment are of primary importance. But they do not see the church represent those values. Hence, a significant number of young Christians deconstruct and leave the faith they were brought up in, even in evangelical churches.[3]

To add, many cases of sexual abuse and abuse of power across the denominations have come to light in the past decades. Often a non-victim-centred way of handling these cases have rendered the church as hypocritical and has strongly weakened its witness.

More than maybe ever before, the church in Europe must follow the call to humility and laying down of all earthly power.

- The church needs to fully recognize and apologize for the mistakes made in both

past and present; we need to demonstrate in word and deed that we care more about people than about protecting our systems of influence and power.

- To this end, the church should ask: 'What can we learn from society´s criticism? Might God be speaking through voices in society as a prophetic wake up call for the European church to seek repentance and integrity? Might it be that, for example, the passion for justice especially among the young generation actually mirrors something of Jesus´ passion for justice that we may have overlooked? If so, how can we partner in this endeavour, praising the good, where we see it, while at the same time humbly telling and living out the beauty and the truth of the gospel?'
- The church needs to be a welcoming, safe space for people from different minorities, walks of life, and backgrounds. In a pluralistic society with many different ways of living, we need to take seriously that Jesus didn't ask people to change before accepting his love but that it was his love that--often gradually--changed people. Loving, patient discipleship that is prepared to go the extra mile will play a key role.

Secular thinkers are beginning to realize how deeply European values are in fact rooted within the Christian framework[4] and how human rights and dignity presuppose an objective moral ground that cannot be found in secular relativism. A new conversation about moral orientation has started.[5] We need to enter this dialogue with wisdom and humility, showing why the Jesus we follow actually tells 'the better story'[6] and how the gospel is deeply good for the flourishing of the individual and society as a whole. Rather than just stating Christian truth, we need to show the plausibility structures of our faith.

Rebuilding Community

Europe is both one of the primary destinations for migration of all kinds and one of the most urbanized populations in the world, with 74.9 percent of Europeans now living in cities. The resulting diverse urban centres are strongly marked by a secular worldview, with its shifting views on truth and morality, and an increasingly digitalized lifestyle.

As all regions try to understand where some of the current global trends can lead, there is opportunity in observing the European context that already experiences the effects of globalism, secularism, materialism and digitalization in a deep way for decades. European cities are marked by a community that has never been so close and yet so far apart from each other. In our search for freedom and autonomy, we have become our own enemies, in many ways bringing about the destruction of family values and real community.

More often than not, the gospel is not available in a way that is understandable or relatable to the fast moving, secular-minded European urbanite. Our culture does not look to the church for answers, as it is often seen as a dead and empty tradition of the past. In addition, life in European cities has become so busy and distracted by the draw of a materialistic lifestyle that the majority don't take the time to truly consider spiritual questions, much less the gospel message.

"Our culture does not look to the church for answers, as it is often seen as a dead and empty tradition of the past."

But maybe the biggest challenge to the European community is the paradox of disconnectedness in a digitally connected age, loneliness in the crowd of the dense and affluent urban centres. The first ever EU-wide survey on loneliness, EU-LS 2022 finds that on average, 13 percent of respondents report feeling lonely most or all of the time, while 35 percent report being lonely at least some of the time.[7] A similar UK-based research found that one in four adults in the UK say they experience loneliness regularly and that levels are higher in young people.[8]

In fact, when it comes to future generations, Millennials and Gen Z are significantly marked by two clear heartfelt needs: lack of meaning and loneliness.[9] Many come to Europe in

search of the materially affluent lifestyle it seemingly promises, only to find that having it all isn't enough. Europe's young may not be physically hungry, but they are certainly spiritually hungry. As one London-based YouTuber puts it, 'No one is able to offer a meaningful connection. I feel unable to participate . . . wanting to be alone out of comfort and habit, but feeling desperately lonely. Feeling left behind.'[10]

The issue urgently needing the attention of the church looking ahead is the reality of a growing urban population around the world, well exemplified in Europe, that becomes increasingly disconnected, distracted, and void of meaningful community. The church is there, but the majority of the population is unaware. Europeans are growing old alone, in desperate need of the living community that the church of Jesus represents, but unable to find it or relate to it.

This calls for a major shift in our evangelistic strategy. For decades we have depended too much on the 'come to us' model, believing that if our churches are entertaining enough, or our events loud enough, people will come. And yet Europeans are no longer coming to us. We need to go to them, with a revived courage and conviction of Jesus' calling: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' (John 20:21, NIVUK).

That calling is echoing in the ears of a new generation of missionaries, with exciting stories appearing around the continent of the gospel proclaimed on European streets and central squares again. The mission Steiger[11] reaches secular young people in their own environment, like clubs or music festivals, starting long-term teams in cities. Last year alone they engaged in evangelistic actions in 45 cities, sharing the gospel with over 40,000 young people and starting Bible studies for skeptics in homes, cafes, and universities. The FEUER network[12] runs mission weeks in universities in almost every European country, and movements like Revive,[13] The Send,[14] and Circuit Riders are mobilizing and sending out thousands of young Europeans to reach their generation for Jesus.

Now is the time for the European church to step outside its comfort zone and go to a community that may seem too busy, or isolated, but that is deeply spiritually hungry.

Reconnecting Digitally

Today, we are living through a paradigm shift as we are stepping out of a primarily literary culture into a digital one, and as the church, we need to adapt our theological, missiological, and ecclesiastical thinking to this new reality. With Europe as one of the key continents leading the way in web-use globally, the European church has a responsibility to lead the way.

As with any new technology, new opportunities, challenges, and even dangers arise. The church has a responsibility to identify these and wrestle with them practically and theologically. Ultimately, technology affects people, and as these dangers manifest, the church needs to shepherd people through the new domain.

One of the biggest opportunities within the Web3.0[15] space is that of collaboration. As the church is trying to reach out to young people and engage workplace Christians, Web3.0 provides the perfect connection point.

For young people today, building community online is instinctive and a natural extension of their physical community. In 2023, 47 percent of 8–25 year-olds in the UK played community games online. Of those, 87 percent played at least three times a week.[16] Young people today spend hours online playing games and making friends from around the world. In 2011, 11-year-old Daniel decided he wanted to share Christ with his new online friends and so started his own church in Roblox, an online gaming environment. Within seven years Daniel had a church of 15,000 young people from fifty different countries. Today it has over 54,000 members.[17]

A pre-teen built a church with thousands of young people. This illustrates that many young people are not disinterested in Christ, but may be disinterested in traditional church models. Just as Paul used the medium of his day to mentor, teach, and even discipline from

a distance, we believe that there is a place for new church expressions within the Web3.0 space. Without walking away from traditional church models, could we encourage hybrid church models where some meet virtually and others meet in real life?

Similarly, innovation is possible when Christian leaders collaborate with those in the workplace. In an attempt to use recent technology and make theological training more easily accessible, Union School of Theology in the UK is currently building the first Christian metacampus where students will gather in their learning communities within virtual reality. This is to help students that wouldn't otherwise have easy access to a theological education geographically or financially. This new initiative is going to require contractors, UI/UX designers, among other experts in the field and is a great example of how to leverage new technology to solve old problems, such as the need for more widespread and easily accessible theological education.[18]

"Without walking away from traditional church models, could we encourage hybrid church models where some meet virtually and others meet in real life?"

Decentralization is a key ideology within Web3.0. This decentralization means that churches could operate with less governmental oversight, especially in contexts of persecution. This might not seem important today, however in 2018, the Bulgarian government tried to impose a new Religious Denominations Act, that would have severely restricted minority faith groups such as the evangelical church, limiting its foreign funding and theological education.[19] The law wasn't passed, however it did set a concerning precedent.

We need good theologies centred around the intersection of faith and technology to create frameworks within which the church can operate, but equally to help developers think through the theological implications of the new technology they create. Digital technology is still a niche topic and one that is struggling to gain a foothold within traditional theological training institutions.[20] However, this is a topic that needs to become more established as digital technology becomes a more permeating presence within our lives and churches.

Respecting Creation

'God saw that it was good' is a frequently repeated saying in the first Genesis story. Our calling as humans to dominion over creation must not be misused in any exploitive way. Rather, we are called to keep the garden, grow the earth, and cultivate the world on behalf of its Creator and rightful owner. The first issue in creation care in recent years is to take climate change seriously enough.

One previous chapter in this report has defined sustainability in creation care as a key topic for the evangelical body to highlight.[21] The request for sustainability connects many societal issues. The alarmingly high public debt in the great majority of European countries and the signs of climate change that we experience on our continent, have the ideology of consumerism as common background. The entire societal system is based on the idea of constant growth in consumption and welfare. The faith in 'sustainable' growth in all nations, a leading idea in the UN since the late 1980s, has been overly optimistic on behalf of the environment and at the expense of the Majority World. However, this dogma has been hard to challenge. We need to reintroduce the critical question about what sustainability is, and how Majority World voices might help us to understand it in the context of climate justice.

So far, the migration to Europe strictly because of climate change has been limited, but some of it is masked by other societal conflicts. Underneath much political instability and war, climate change is a push factor. Even though the European Union is leading the world on initiatives against global warming, Western consumption is also the main factor behind the global disaster. Thus, our nations have a higher moral obligation to act against the crisis. There is no sustainable way other than restricting our demands on common goods.

How does the church respond to the big issues of threat to sustainability demonstrated by climate change? In a biblical worldview these are not only political issues. Consumerism fosters greed and discloses our relation to the power that Jesus calls 'mammon'. Thus, the issues connected are spiritual by nature. Whom or what do we worship? A missional church needs to ask herself how this affects the formation of faith and discipleship in Europe.

One example of good stewardship is the Free Lutheran Church in Fredrikstad, Norway. Investing in solar cells combined with re-insulation and smart regulation of heating and light reduced electricity costs to one third of the price annually. This church won the prize for the most energy saving company in Norway in 2023. Eleven thousand Euros in only one local church indicates a big potential for the many churches in Europe.

Fostering alternative living as disciples of Jesus Christ has been part of our movement from the beginning. *The Lausanne Covenant* underscores the necessity that '[t]hose of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism'. [22] In *The Cape Town Commitment* this is further developed into a missional calling. As it claims that persons, societies, and creation 'are broken and suffering because of sin', it continues to proclaim that 'all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God' and thus 'must be part of the comprehensive mission of God'.[23]

Just like health care for generations has been a priority in Christian mission, caring for the health of creation is now pivotal to our priorities. About this analogy, see also the important study following Lausanne's Jamaica Consultation.[24] The Christian call to stewardship kills two birds with one stone. A simple lifestyle marked by giving reduces toxic emissions and empowers the church to take its mission to bring the gospel to Jews and Gentiles seriously.

While the church's mandate for political action is limited, each follower of Jesus still has a mandate to take political action. Our calling is to remind governments and people about our responsibility for God's creation. The church must foster Christians in Europe to work for necessary political change. Together with the churches in the Majority World, we need to develop biblical theologies about creation, nature, and stewardship that challenge the Enlightenment-paradigm of human dominance and exploitation, and foster mindsets and lifestyles that seek a redefined sustainability in balance with nature. The lack of theologies that integrate creation care and climate justice are barriers for the gospel for the younger generation.

Regarding Demography

Europe is undergoing unprecedented demographic change as a result of three interrelated dynamics: falling birthrates, an aging population, and sustained migration from the Majority World. Together these dynamics are transforming the societies of Europe and, with them, the context for mission in Europe from now to 2050.

Birth-rates across Europe have been below replacement level for many years. Some Mediterranean countries now have birth rates that are among the lowest in the world (Total Fertility Rates 2022: Malta 1.08, Spain 1.16, Albania 1.21, Italy 1.24, Poland 1.29).[25] The impact of this change has been ameliorated somewhat by migration into Southern and Western European countries, but in much of Eastern Europe populations are expected to decline by more than 20 percent by 2050.[26]

There have been other periods of European history with low birth-rates, but this is now combined with a second reality: a larger older generation to sustain. Europe's Old Age Dependency Ratio, the number of people aged 65 plus per 100 people of working age, is expected to rise from around 30 in 2015 to between 50 and 60. And in the case of Italy and Spain, it will rise to between 70 and 80 by 2050. This demographic imbalance is unprecedented. It will be pervasive in its extent, profound in its implications, enduring in its impact, and there is no going back.[27]

Flagging birthrates and aging populations inevitably lead to smaller workforces, and this

has had the effect of pulling millions of migrants into Europe over the last fifty years. The number of international migrants residing in Europe has risen from 64 million in 2005 to 87 million in 2020 overtaking Asia, and making it the largest destination for international migrants globally.[28]

Many European countries have tried to resist declining birth rates by offering prospective parents financial incentives, but these efforts have proven largely futile. What encourages parents to have children is not financial compensation but a society that truly values parenthood. Europe desperately needs a renewed and healthy vision for marriage, parenthood, and the family. This is an opportunity for the church. It must go beyond merely defending the traditional nuclear family, but rather reflecting deeply on how the local church might be a family to all.

Europe's aging population is already posing challenges for many European societies. As Old Age Dependency Ratios rise, the cost of sustaining pensions and healthcare for the elderly will become ever more problematic. Social care is already in crisis in many countries. Will churches seize the opportunity to be good news to Europe's senior citizens by reaching out to the lonely, giving care to those who need it, and contextualizing the gospel for third-age Europeans so they can preach hope, even in death, to those who have never heard it. And as intergenerational tensions rise--with younger generations being asked to shoulder the burden of the burgeoning generation of pensioners--will the church provide a model of a truly intergenerational community, where mutual support and mentoring between the generations is an example to the world of God's new society?

Yet perhaps the greatest challenge and opportunity for the church is migration. Migration into Europe, particularly of Muslims, has fuelled populist nationalism in many countries and sadly some Christian leaders have sided with the far-right in their rhetoric of 'defending Christian Europe'. Yet, out of the spotlight, many Muslims in Europe are turning to Christ. Moreover, millions of Majority World Christians now live, work, worship, and witness in Europe. African, Asian, and Latin American churches can be found in every corner of the continent. The challenge is to encourage them to do more than merely gather Christians from their own nations and ethnicities but to reach out to Europeans interculturally.

Sadly, post-colonial and nationalist thinking still influences ministry to and from the migrant communities. This is especially significant as financial and linguistic resources (an over-reliance on use of the English language throughout Europe) limits cultural and intellectual resources. Migrants and believers from host nations must learn to serve side-by-side as equals. The revival of the church in Europe will depend on how European and Majority World churches work together.

Conclusion

There was a time when Europe was seen as the heartland of Christianity. It was from Europe that missionaries were sent to the rest of the world to share the good news of Jesus. Today that flow has reversed, and millions of Majority World missionaries have been mobilized by the Holy Spirit to re-evangelize Europe. Yet they too must wrestle with the six issues we have highlighted in this article.

Today, Europe appears to have been thoroughly secularized. Yet, out of the spotlight, an extraordinary re-evangelization of Europe is underway.[29] The context is challenging, as this article illustrates, but God has ploughed these fields before. Our task, in fulfilment of the Great Commission, is to consider the soil, to sow liberally, and not to give up.

> *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* (Galatians 6:9, NIVUK)

Endnotes

1 See Heinz-Peter Hempelmann, 'Faktisch, postfaktisch, postmodern? Kommunikation von Wahrheitsansprüchen in pluralistischen Gesellschaften als Problem und Herausforderung (Factual, post-factual, postmodern? Communication of truth claims in pluralistic societies as a problem and challenge), In: Theologische Beiträge, 48 (Jahrgang: February 2017), 6–23.

2 Recent studies on the rise of mental disorders among teenagers are numerous, related to diverse issues like impact of COVID-19, correlation with use of social media, the phenomenon which in Scandinavia is called 'generation achievement', and in gender identity issues. One recent Danish study concludes that 'fears of not being able to comply with these demands were associated with anxiety, particularly among girls. Furthermore, these explanations were often framed in relation to being solely responsible for their own destiny, and the negative effects of these ideals often related to self-critique and critical introspection'; . Søren Christian Krogh and Ole Jacob Madsen (2024), "Dissecting the achievement generation: how different groups of early adolescents experience and navigate contemporary achievement demands", in Journal of Youth Studies, vol 27(5), p.718. . As for issues about gender identity, studies show an obvious correlation between rapid onset of gender dysphoria, increase in use of social media and internet, and levels of mental disorders; see for example Lisa Littman's open access study "Correction: Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria", in PLoS One 14(3) (March 19, 2019)

3 SeeOliver Rüegger,, 'Ich bin weg. Eine empirische Untersuchung, warum Jugendliche in der Schweiz ihre Freikirche verlassen', IGW (2017) , www.igw.edu/ch/ressourcen/downloads/abschlussarbeiten/Ich-bin-weg_Oliver-Ruegger_2017.php, accessed 16 February 2024.

4 See Tom Holland, Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind (London: Little, Brown, 2019).

5 See Justin Brierley, The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers Are Considering Christianity Again (Tyndale Elevate, 2023).

6 The idea of 'telling the better story' is taken from, Glynn Harrison, A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016).

7 'The EU Loneliness Survey, 2022' *https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/loneliness/loneliness-prevalence-eu_en,* Accessed 2 March 2024

8 Mental Health Foundation, 2020, *https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk,* Accessed 2 March 2024

9 Luke Greenwood, Global Youth Culture: The Spiritual Hunger of the Largest Unreached Culture Today (Steiger International, 2019).

10 Kat Napiorkowska, The Loneliness Epidemic (Short Film), December 2020, *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EadD-ybQ1ds,* Accessed 14 March 2024

11 *https://steiger.org/campaign-europe*

12 *https://feuer.network/*

13 *https://reviveeurope.org/*

14 *https://thesend.org/*

15 'Web 1.0, also called the Syntactic Web, is the first version of the internet and lasted from approximately 1990–2000. It was content and information-based with a prevalence of static websites. Web 2.0, also called the Social Web, is the second version of the internet and emerged around the year 2000. This version is still the paradigm that we operate under, and is about community, social media, and sharing. Examples of Web 2.0 websites are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Web 3.0, also called the Semantic Web, started emerging around 2010. Technologies included here are machine learning that enable tailored content for internet users, artificial intelligences such as Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa, as well as experiences such as VR.' J. Sewell, 'Church and Mission Within Virtual Reality: An Exploration' (2023), *https://www*.academia.edu/116146078/Church_and_Mission_Within_Virtual_Reality_An_Exploration accessed 10 April 2024.

16 T. Baynton, Data deep-dive: The impact of video gaming on the wellbeing of young people, Digital Youth Index (2023),: *https://digitalyouthindex*.uk/the-impact-of-video-gaming-on-young-people/ accessed 31 January 2024.

17 BEME News, 'Is Virtual Religion the New VR?' (2018), *https://www*.youtube.com/watch?v=N0IImB0gItI (Accessed: 14 November 2022); TRCOnlineChurch, The Robloxian Christians, Roblox (2024), *https://www.roblox.com/groups/477219/The-Robloxian-Christians,* accessed 10 April 2024.

18 Union Foundation, Metaverse: The Future of Ministry Training, Union Theology (2024), *https://uniontheology.org/metaverse-theological-education,* accessed 10 April 2024.

19 Evangelical Focus, 'Bulgarian Evangelicals Alarm About Religion Law 'Threatening Rights and Freedoms of Churches", Evangelical Focus (2018), *https://evangelicalfocus.com/europe/3983/bulgarian-evangelicals-alarm-about-religion-law-threatening-rights-and-freedoms-of-churches,* accessed 10 April 2024.

20 J. Kurlberg, 'Challenges Facing Digital Theology Today', Medium (2022),*https://medium.com/@jonas.kurlberg/challenges-facing-digital-theology-today-dd93d27e238,* accessed 10 April 2024.

21 'What Is Sustainable?', State of the Great Commission Report, 92–93.

22 LC, IX.

23 CTC, I-7a.

24 Colin Bell and Robert S White (eds), Creation Care and the Gospel. Reconsidering the Mission of the Church (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 48–50.

25 Eurostat, 'How many children were born in the Eu in 2022?' (2024), *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240307,* accessed 4 May 2024.

26 Eurostat, 'Population projected to decline in two-thirds of EU regions' (2021), *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210430-2,* accessed 4 May 2024.

27 United Nations , 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of World Population Ageing 1950-2050' (2002), *https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/files/documents/2021/Nov/undesa_pd_2002_wpa_1950-2050_web.pdf,* accessed 4 May 2024.

28 IOM , World Migration Report 2022 (2021), 24, *https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022.pdf,* accessed 4 May 2024.

29 Memory, Europe 2021: A Missiological Report (2021), *https://vistajournal.online/latest-articles/europe2021,* accessed 4 May 2024.

Authors

Julia Garschagen is Director of the Pontes Institute for Science, Culture and Faith. She is an evangelist and apologist in the university and business sectors, and among young people in German-speaking Europe and beyond. She was the co-founder an NGO that provides education for young people in Peru and is on the board of the International Justice Mission in Germany and of Christival, the biggest international youth festival in Germany.

Luke Greenwood is the European Director for Steiger, a mission dedicated to reaching the Global Youth Culture for Jesus, currently developing evangelistic movements in over 40 cities across Europe. Luke is author of *Global Youth Culture: The Spiritual Hunger of the Largest Unreached Culture Today* (2019)

Rolf Kjøde is Associate Professor of Missiology at NLA University College in Norway. He has been mission leader nationally and internationally for many years, including an active involvement with the Lausanne movement.

Jim Memory is Co-Regional Director for the Lausanne Movement in Europe and Director for International Partnerships of the European Christian Mission (ECM). He is one of the founding editors of Vista, a research-based journal on crucial issues for mission in Europe, and is the author of Europe 2021, a report on the context for mission in Europe today. From 1994-2008 Jim and his wife Christine were church planters in Córdoba, Spain.

Usha Reifsnider is a second generation migrant from India and a British Gujarati Christ follower from a Hindu background. She holds a PhD from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. She serves as regional co director of Lausanne Europe, as a director of the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World and continues in academic research and lecturing in the areas of mission and migration. She and her husband Matthew served in foreign mission since 1988 working with migrants, refugees and diaspora.

Janet Sewell currently serves on the Lausanne Europe Regional Team as well as on the operations team for the Lausanne Movement. She spent 14 years in Greece as a missionary. She holds an MA in Contemporary Missiology where she explored mission and ecclesiology within virtual reality and is a graduate of the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. She is married to Mehran and together they are church planting among Iranians in London.

FRANCOPHONE AFRICA



FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Cossi Augustin Ahoga, Fohle Lygunda, Rubin Pohor

Key Global Trends Shaping the Great Commission

The rise of Africa

If we observe the average annual rate of change (2.76), by 2050 Africa should have the highest percentage of Christians in the world and occupy a prominent place on the global Christian scene. The latest edition of the World Christian Encyclopaedia attests to the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa. According to this study, 26 percent of all Christians live in Africa, while Africa accounts for around 18 percent of the world's total population. Today, this figure may well be revised upwards. And the mission continues, no longer by foreign European or American agents, but essentially by African actors themselves, at a time when the world of former actors is becoming de-Christianized, and new religious recompositions and state religious policies (secularism, prohibition of proselytizing, etc.) seem to be undermining the missionary dimension of the church.

In the context of the Great Commission, we need to maintain the growth of Christianity in Africa and make the gains we have made profitable by emphasizing evangelization, youth discipleship at all stages, and cultivating an integrated theological vision that will consolidate the benefits of all missionary evangelization efforts.[1]

Regional youth populations

According to the United Nations, there are over 1.8 billion young people in the world today, or 16 percent of the global population, 90 percent of whom live in developing countries. The number of adolescents and young people is now at a record high, although it is expected to fall considerably, from 17.6 percent in 2010 to 13.5 percent in 2050 if global fertility continues to decline.[2]

Africa is the world's youngest continent in 2022, with 60 percent of its population aged 25 or under, compared with a global average of 25 percent and a median age of 19.7 years old. Furthermore, Africa is set to experience the strongest growth in youth, with 42 percent of its population aged between 15 and 24 by 2030. The youthfulness of Africa's population is perhaps its most strategic potential for the global Christian movement.[3]

One Hope's 'Global Youth Culture' report showed that Africa has the highest number of committed Christian teenagers at 28 percent, compared to 17 percent for all other continents combined. This means that anyone thinking about mission must not only ask how Africa is involved, but also that Africans themselves must be ready to be at the forefront of missionary strength, ready to offer the world the greatest missionary force.

> ***"The youthfulness of Africa's population is perhaps its most strategic potential for the global Christian movement."***

Like any other cross-cultural missionary, anyone interested in mission to young people in Africa must be ready to take part. Like any other cross-cultural missionary, anyone interested in youth mission needs to study youth culture and the influences it exerts on them. This is essential to understanding their worldview, in order to communicate the gospel to them and adopt them into the family of faith.

To win over young people, we must first go into their world to establish trust, attention, and relationships. Young people aren't interested in programs, but rather need meaningful relationships with caring adults. Second, they need an incarnational model, a preaching of the gospel accompanied by examples of authentic Christian living, the application of biblical principles in daily life, a model of adult living in faith, within the framework of authentic and meaningful relationships. Finally,

it's our engagement with the Scriptures that will help young people connect with God's Word, finding God's Word relevant to their situation. As parents and older adults, we need to set an example in the way we interact with God's Word and accompany our young people in reading, meditating on and applying these words of life.

Young people face multiple challenges in their life:

Challenges of social media: The Internet represents the dominant cultural metaphor for the world of the 21st century—decentralized, highly participatory, fluid, self-organizing, geographically dispersed.

Mental health challenges: Isolation and lack of human contact prove that community is the key to human flourishing. It's true, then, that the pursuit of relationships kills several birds with one stone (the all-the-time Internet connection is one of the major factors in the social isolation that worsens the mental health of young people);

General challenges: extreme poverty, global climate change, sexual abuse, unemployment and, political corruption. The church is called upon to address global challenges at the level of youth.

Visual & oral affect as validation of truth

Digital technologies are giving rise to what many call the 'new orality'. Bible applications enable people all over the world to hear, rather than read, the Bible in the language of their hearts. To this end, organizations, church leaders and partners involved in the Great Commission of our Lord should seize the new opportunities that oral Bible translation represents for African communities in their ministries of evangelism and appropriation of the Word of God in the communities. There is an urgent need to make the field of Oral Bible Translation (OTB) known to the churches, to show its importance for the Great Commission in French-speaking Africa and the need for the churches to be involved in the development of OTB projects in languages that do not yet have a Bible, and even in those where projects are underway.

Integrity and the fight against corruption

The promotion of integrity, accountability, and the fight against corruption is an important aspect of the implementation of the Great Commission in Africa. The church's mission is to support all those involved in preventing corruption by developing a culture of integrity. The focus is on the younger generation to act in a forward-looking way and break established patterns of corruption. Young people are a pillar of African society. They are the creators of the country's future, but also the ones most affected by the weaknesses of the governance system. In order to contribute to an effective culture of integrity in Africa, the following components will be required:

- Developing a culture of integrity among young Africans by setting up innovative dialogue groups, implementing awareness-raising and corruption-prevention measures with young people to reinforce integrity, creating spaces for reflection, and encouraging debate and innovation.
- Developing a life of integrity, or coherence, between our whole life and the teachings of Jesus: Non-Christians often justify their refusal to take the Christian faith seriously by pointing to the lack of coherence between our whole life and the teachings of Jesus in the church. The failure of believers to demonstrate integrity, or coherence, between their whole lives and Jesus' teachings makes the gospel less credible; it suggests that giving our lives to Christ doesn't have the transformative impact we claim.

Men and women in partnership

Worldwide, more women than men say that Christianity is 'very important' to them. This is especially true in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. In some cases, the gap varies from 15 to 20 percent.

One of the fronts of joint commitment expected for the success of the Grand Commission is the partnership between men and women. The presence of women should contribute to a different style of exercising responsibility and power. This means making the most of wom-

en's leadership style, which is more dynamic because it is more relational, transformational, and emotional; more interactive, encouraging participation and stimulating motivation; task and results-oriented by linking people and objectives; leadership that is sensitive to problem-solving and overcoming conflict; and an integrated approach among women to the different components of the person: body and mind, affectivity and intellect.

Challenges for the Great Commission

Digital communities and the ethical use of digital devices/media in pastoral ministry.

In Christian circles, pastoral leaders worry that things like ChatGPT could become a major platform for knowledge consumption. However, as Jason Watson rightly states, 'spiritual formation involves going beyond simply consuming content about the gospel to intentionally allowing the truth of the gospel to change the way we live.'[4] While many see AI advances as a threat to humanity, we perceive that trusting in God's providence in every Christian life will be more important than ever, because God's guidance cannot simply be replaced by information generation. In this respect, as followers of Christ, we have a responsibility, between now and 2050, to educate everyone in the ethical use of technology.

Immigration

More than in the past, Africa is on the move. This movement is physical (migrations chosen or imposed by various socio-political situations) or cultural, with phenomena of deculturation, cultural hybridization or displacement of values (moral and family values in this case). It is also religious, with religious and denominational recompositions and the referential conflicts they can generate, sometimes with ancestral religious structures, sometimes with those of Christianity and Islam. The Great Commission must necessarily position itself within this sometimes opportune, sometimes unbridled globalization. Missionary work should consider the effects of globalization on African Christianity (positioning of traditional churches, confessional recompositions, effects of the media and social networks, shifting values, accompaniment of people in migration, etc.).

In these conditions, it is urgent to redefine mission practice in this complex context, where people are constantly on the move and find themselves in new socio-religious situations with their own specific questions and challenges. We also need to consider the fact that traditionally non-Christian regions such as North Africa find themselves with Christian migrant populations, even though the countries in this region have Islam as their official religion.

Theological challenge, including the Kemite movement

This movement values pre-colonial African cultural and spiritual roots, and challenges Christianity in Africa at several points of ideological and historical divergence. It formulates several criticisms of Christianity on the African continent.

First, for this movement, Christianity is a colonial imposition in Africa. Christianity is presented as an instrument of European colonialism, used to subjugate African peoples and erase their indigenous cultures and spiritualities. According to the Kemites, the introduction of Christianity into Africa was often accompanied by the destruction of local religious and cultural traditions. As a result, Kemites believe that Christianity has contributed to the cultural alienation of Africans, by imposing foreign values and beliefs on them, to the detriment of ancestral African traditions.

Second, the Kemite movement calls for the valorization of ancestral African spiritualities. It encourages the rediscovery and reappropriation of ancestral African spiritualities, such as the beliefs and practices of ancient Egypt (Kemet), seen as authentically African, and the rejection of the presumed universality and superiority of Christianity, asserting that every culture has its own valid belief systems and that African spiritualities deserve equal recognition.

Third, the Kemite movement challenges Biblical and historical narratives, especially those that portray Africa and Africans in a negative light. They propose a rereading of Africa's religious and spiritual history, highlighting figures and events that have been marginalized or dis-

torted. They also reclaim the heritage of the ancient Egyptians, whom they consider to be black Africans, and criticize attempts to whitewash this history through Western narratives.

Fourth, the Kemite movement blames historical missionary practices, which often denigrated local beliefs and imposed a Western worldview, and questions the hierarchical structures of the Christian church, seen as undemocratic and externally imposed, in contrast to the more horizontal community structures of traditional African societies.

Fifth, the Kemites promote an Afrocentric consciousness by encouraging Africans to redefine their identity outside the frameworks imposed by the Abrahamic religions, including Christianity, and to regain cultural and spiritual autonomy and, to promote an education that highlights African history and contributions, and challenges dominant Eurocentric historical narratives.

Every intercultural missionary, every person interested in mission to Africans, needs to be sensitive to these cultural and theological critiques of the Kemite movement.

The transformation of its raw materials, which are the cause of conflict and non-development.

The church in Africa will have a real impact on African societies if it reflects on finding sustainable solutions to the over-reliance on African resources that has led to volatile economies, weak industrialization, governance problems, and an inability to adapt to global changes such as the energy transition. Furthermore, it is crucial to stress that future wealth lies more in the development of human, technological and institutional capacities than in the raw exploitation of natural resources. The Great Commission could work on these major points:

Volatility of commodity prices

- Market instability: The prices of raw materials such as oil, precious metals and minerals are extremely volatile. This instability makes long-term economic planning and stable wealth creation difficult.
- Dependence on an unstable world market: African economies heavily dependent on commodity exports are vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in world prices, which can rapidly reduce income.

Low value-added and limited industrialization

- Lack of local processing: A large proportion of Africa's raw materials are exported unprocessed, meaning that most of the added value is generated elsewhere. This limits opportunities for industrial development and job creation in the country.
- Low industrial development: The lack of infrastructure and technological capacity to process raw materials locally prevents a greater share of the value chain from being captured.

Resource rent and curse

- Economic rent and corruption: Wealth in natural resources has often led to rent-based forms of governance, where elites capture revenues without equitably redistributing the benefits, leading to corruption and inequality.
- Resource Curse: This phenomenon describes the tendency of resource-rich countries to have slower economic growth, internal conflict and weak political institutions, compared with less resource-rich countries.

Ecological transition and knowledge-based economies

- Global Energy Transition: As the world transitions to renewable energy sources, demand for certain fossil fuels and minerals could decline, affecting African oil and gas exporters.
- Growing importance of Knowledge Economies: In the 21st century, the most dynamic economies are increasingly focused on innovation, technology, and services. Raw materials alone are not enough to generate sustainable economic growth.

Environmental and social issues

- Environmental degradation: The extraction of raw materials often results in significant environmental damage, which can affect agriculture, public health, and biodiversity.

- Conflict and population displacement: The exploitation of natural resources is sometimes linked to violent conflict and forced population displacement, exacerbating social tensions and hampering sustainable development.

Poverty and unequal access to wealth

About 700 million people still live in extreme poverty (including one child in five). The major indicators of poverty, covering health, education and standard of living, reveal that a poor person in one part of the world is not deprived in the same way as a poor person in another region. This income inequality remains a challenge for missionary work, and many people continue to live in poverty.

To reduce poverty and inequality of access to wealth, we propose a number of solutions:

- Understand the complexity of poverty to find solutions. We can't solve a problem we can't see or understand. We need to invest our time and resources in better understanding the dynamics of poverty, both globally and in our own communities, and we need to equip our members with this understanding through micro and macro business education.
- Create measures of success based on analytical models.
- Analyze climate issues and respond to the expectations they raise, rather than politicizing them: One of Lausanne's contributions in this area is the provision of its Creation Care Issue Network, which brings together Christians from all over the world.
- Collaborating to reduce redundancies and conflicting objectives: With the rapid development of new technologies, the church can develop relevant and timely information to support decision-making. This enables us not only to understand the crisis, but also to assess the best approach and identify potential partners.

Great Commission and Contextual Theology

The future vigour of Christianity in Africa in general, and in francophone Africa in particular, will depend enormously on the type of theology in relation to the church's mission in the world. Faced with the challenges of traditional African religions, secularism, global geopolitics, and religious pluralism, an African theology that is neither missional nor contextual in essence cannot guarantee a bright future for African Christianity. The enduring question remains that of knowing the reaction of African theologians themselves, as well as the meaning and degree of their personal involvement in the process of developing related theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

The key idea is that our faith should impact the community or the society. The result of our faith should also lead to the transformation of our community. It shouldn't be only about 'me', but also about 'my community'. One cannot understand that a country with 60 or more percent of the population being Christians is a place for injustice, corruption, tribalism, violence, genocide, etc. become a reality. We should therefore stress more on the fact that:

- God of our faith should transform our community;
- Our Bible should transform our community;
- Our salvation should be an evidence of the transformation of our community;
- Our Christian life and responsibility should lead to the transformation of our community.

Therefore, the critical question is: What is the impact of the gospel on our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the rest of the creation? When you travel to many places in Africa, you will notice that in many cases, people are expecting the church to be the solution, but the reality is sometime a different scenario.

In many places, the gospel has the purpose of preparing people for heaven, for God's kingdom to come. The focus is more on prayer than on work. Therefore, theology, be it evangelical or non-evangelical, becomes an instrument of alienation instead of leading to the solution to the felt needs. If God cannot care about believers, it becomes easier to look for another one who would care.

The need for Christian faith in Africa is not only a theoretical one, but also a practical faith. In the statement of the Great Commission, Jesus talks about 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt 28:19).

There is a need for contextual evangelical theology rather than contextualized evangelical theology. But evangelicalism in Africa should avoid the trap of misleading theologies, coming from Western theologies and from African traditional religions. There is a need to get women and young people on board in theological engagement.

References

Agayi, Marc Kodjo. Engagement Politique des Chrétiens Dans les Pays Francophones d'Afrique de l'Ouest (1990–2005). Thesis. Université de Strasbourg, 2010.

Ahoga, Cossi Augustin, ed. Du Temple à la Cite, Quand l'Eglise Africaine Pense le Développement. Cotonou, Bénin: Presses Bibliques Africaines, 2019.

Audéoud, Martine. 'Perspectives Sur la Théologie du Travail en Afrique Francophone'. Intervention à la Conférence Internationale de Recherches Interdisciplinaires 1959–2019: 60 ans des études théologiques en Afrique francophone—Tendances actuelles et perspectives d'avenir, Kinshasa, 19-21 Novembre 2019.

Fallut, Mélanie Soiron. Les églises de réveil en Afrique centrale et leurs impacts sur l'équilibre du pouvoir et la stabilité des Etats : le cas du Cameroun, du Gabon et de la République du Congo. Libreville : Ministère de la Défense, Délégation aux Affaires stratégiques, 2012.

Gitau, Wanjiru, Seyram Amenyedzi & Fohle Lygunda. 'Essor de l'Afrique'. In https://lausanne.org/fr/report/quest-ce-que-le-christianisme-polycentrique/essor-de-lafrique. Accessed 29 July 2024.

Kenmogne, Michel et Pohor Rubin (sous dir.). Vivre l'Evangile en contexte. Abidjan : Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone et Initiative Francophone, 2021.

Lygunda li-M, Fohle. Contextualisation aujourd'hui : Questions approfondies en théologie contextuelle. Kinshasa: F Legacy Publishing, 2023.

Niyigena, Jean-Paul, 'Global Christianity in the Context of Africa. Historical Point of View and Challenges'. In Globale Christentüner. Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2022. p. 289-306. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657708390_015

Endnotes

1 Wanjiru Gitau, Seyram Amenyedzi, & Folhe Lygunda, 'Essor de l'Afrique', in https://lausanne.org/fr/report/quest-ce-que-le-christianisme-polycentrique/essor-de-lafrique , accessed 29 July 2024.

2 Ana Lucia Bedicks, Menchit Wong & Maggie Gathuku, « Populations Régionales De Jeunes », in https://lausanne.org/fr/report/quelles-sont-les-donnees-demographiques-emergentes/populations-regionales-de-jeunes, accessed 28 July 2024.

3 PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT CENTRE DE SERVICES RÉGIONAL POUR L'AFRIQUE (2023). Les Jeunes en Afrique : un Impératif Démographique pour la Paix et la Sécurité Corne de l'Afrique, Grands Lacs et région du Sahel, In https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/undp-africa-youth-in-africa-2023-FR_0.pdf, accessed 28 july 2024.

4 Jason Watson, « ChatGPT pourrait-il faire des disciples ? Repenser le discipulat évangélique à la lumière de l'IA », in https://lausanne.org/fr/qui-nous-sommes/blog-fr/chatgpt-pourrait-il-faire-des-disciples, 9 February 2023, accessed 28 July 2024, p.14.

Authors

Dr Cossi Augustin Ahoga born in Logozohê (Benin), is a theologian, economist, and anthropologist. He studied at the National University of Benin, Vaux-Sur-Seine in France, Gloucestershire in England, and SATS in South Africa. He worked in the GBU for 32 years and directed Presses Bibliques Africaines (PBA) for 12 years. Today, he is a Scholar-researcher and President of the Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire des Réalités Endogène (LIRE-Afrique). He was the editor of the first reference book published by PBA, From the Temple to the City: When the African Church Thinks About Development, published in 2019.

Dr Fohle Lygunda is the founder of Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche et d'Innovation (CIRI) in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. He has a PhD in missiology from North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, and a DMin from Asbury Theological Seminary, USA. He is the author of Transforming Missiology: An Alternative Approach to Missiological Education . He currently serves as the Tearfund manager of the theological department in Africa.

Dr Rubin Pohor is a professor at the Alassane Ouattara University, Bouaké, Ivory Coast. He is also Vice-President in charge of teaching methods, research, and publications at the Abidjan Christian Alliance University (UACA) and head of its Human Sciences Department. He is the coordinator of the Council of Theological Institutions in French speaking Africa.

LATIN AMERICA



LATIN AMERICA

Daniel Biachi, Analia Saracco

As we approach our fiftieth anniversary, we are preparing for the Fourth Congress to be held in September 2024 in South Korea. Although we believe this gathering will be a new milestone, it is more than an event. It will culminate the years of work we have dedicated in country, and regions. At last we will be together, and we look forward with great expectation. At the same time, it will be the continuation of a process of enlarging collaboration for world evangelization with our horizon set in 2050. As for the Seoul-Incheon Congress, there will be celebration, analysis, gratitude, evaluation, and planning of what is to come.

In the case of Latin America, Lausanne held its first regional gathering on 19–22 September 2023, choosing Montevideo as the host city. We had 191 people registered (plus 50 virtual). It comprised 44 percent women and 56 percent men from 18 countries in the region and 14 people from other countries. All were involved in ministry, most of them serving as vocational ministers (*ie,* their livelihood comes from their jobs and professions and not from their ministries). There were 18 tables of people of different ages, countries, etc. The meeting was a time of biblical reflection on the book of Acts, fellowship and joy, and strategic collaborative initiatives to advance the gospel in the world.

The results of the roundtables are summarized below. It is worth mentioning that they are a summary of the interaction that took place around the tables. There was a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, perspectives, and emphases. Our meeting was one of listening and consultation. The questions will continue to resonate and produce reflection and, we hope, concrete actions that will have the shape, sound, and flavor of the different participants. The process remains open because God continues to work. More than a report, this summary is an *invitation* to reflect and work, in our most diverse contexts.

Gaps in the Great Commission

As an initial reflective task for the working groups, the proposed question pointed out some significant gaps in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Among the responses, the following needs were highlighted:

- Discipleship and the formation of healthy leadership.
- Unity and cooperation among churches and Christian institutions.
- The formation of new generations.
- An accurate contextualization of the gospel for the challenges of today's world,
- Expanding the role of the Lausanne Movement in achieving these objectives.

The conversation reminded us that it is God who is the protagonist of this Great Commission (not us) and that it is he who invites us to join in what he is already doing in the world. Therefore, we must be attentive and sensitive to listen to the voice of God's Spirit through his word. Likewise, the gaps raised are also opportunities to listen and work together. Among these opportunities were mentioned:

More Precise Definitions of the Terms Related to the Great Commission

There is still a lack of clarity in our regional languages about what the call to the Great Commission means. Providing more precise definitions, with the help of biblical-theological tools, of the meaning of the terms 'mission,' 'missionary,' etc., that clarify both the local and global role of mission is fundamental. It would allow for a greater awareness and mobilization of the church of Christ.

Christ-centered relational discipleship

Even today there is a lack of effective and deep relationships between Christians that lead to effective service to and from one another.

Therefore, for the Christian community to participate in the Great Commission, it is first necessary to foster in the churches a culture of serious, deep, and intentional discipleship that prepares people to follow the model of Jesus and find their identity and purpose in him.

Focus on the formation of healthy leadership

If we understand that the Great Commission happens through the church of Christ, it is fundamental to look more closely at leadership training and formation. The gaps identified in training were many: a decrease of Christians willing to be trained to be leaders in the face of new challenges; the professionalization of roles in the church; the polarization between theological and missionary study that generates a limited or erroneous understanding of the missionary task (*eg*, evangelism as only an event, missions as a task only for specialists and little missionary investment; the lack of academic programs in seminaries focused on missions). It is necessary that churches unite and cooperate to improve the process of leadership formation.

Unity and cooperation among churches and Christian institutions

The biblical standard for Christian unity remains a major challenge for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Lack of dialogue and cooperation can generate competition and lead to duplication of efforts. We need to cultivate a communal understanding of faith through love and dialogue. On the one hand, some timely actions were identified to work on unity and cooperation, such as creating materials on how to apply mutual aid in the Great Commission, strengthening networking in Latin America and fostering strategic alliances between local churches, mission agencies, and other Christian institutions. On the other hand, areas considered to be of greater tension for unity were highlighted:

Unity that begins in families: Family deconstruction also affects Christian families; therefore, it is necessary to inculcate love for God and his principles from the home. Thus, families become the basis for evangelization.

Mental health: Work in unity that aims at integral wellbeing, not only as a diagnosis of mental illnesses, but at all levels. Caring for the heart of the believer.

Economic resources: Through unity, we can secure economic resources for missionary support and transparent accountability. For example, the opportunity for greater unity among the Americas is on the table. North America has economic resources but, sometimes, few candidates, and South America with candidates but without sufficient economic resources to support them.

> ***"We need to cultivate a communal understanding of faith through love and dialogue."***

Working with the new generations

There is a generation gap that demands greater dialogue between generations. Therefore, it is essential to give more opportunities to younger people, accompanying them in their maturity so that they can assume their responsibilities in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. However, it is necessary to do so, always, considering the strengths and weaknesses of the generation. It is necessary to consider some generational characteristics. For example, the new generations are more linked to causes and not to organizations. Similarly, we must also focus on children and their specific needs.

Biblical contextualization adequate to the challenges of today's world

Contextualizing the gospel for each culture is a primary task for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Good contextualization produces adequate methods for evangelization. Some challenges for biblical contextualization in today's world were highlighted:

- The marks of sin in our society, such as individualism, selfishness, corruption, and materialism.
- The divorce between faith and reality, separating the sacred from the secular.

- The lack of courage among Christians to express countercultural opinions.
- Lack of understanding of the languages of social subgroups.
- The difficulty of building a balanced biblical worldview on faith and politics. There is a lack of creative ways to bring the gospel to places isolated by totalitarianism. Instead of proclaiming the gospel, we install a moralistic agenda.
- The theology of work: How do we integrate our faith with our profession? Does a professional have a mission? How does a professional or academic fulfill the Great Commission?
- The use of technological tools: There is a lack of creativity with all the tools and gifts that God has given us, as well as a lack of knowledge about the ethics for the use of technology and understanding of its effects on people's mental health.

Environmental justice/Creation care

It is fundamental to understand our role in caring for nature. We need to re-read Genesis with the perspective of creation care and reflect on how to apply it in our present time.

The challenge of Bible translation

There is still a lack of awareness of the need for Bible translation for those who do not have it. It is necessary to see the urgency of getting the gospel to these less accessible people. Today much technology is available for this task.

Observation of the reality of migrants

We must be prepared to observe the problem of migrant and refugee communities in our countries and understand how to enable the church to create organic initiatives of reception and evangelization.

Expand Lausanne's role among local churches

Local churches must be equipped with information so that they can understand what is happening in their communities and in the world and know how they can participate. Lausanne has great potential to dialogue with local churches and support them in fulfilling the Great Commission. To do this, we need to share more in local churches and seminaries about what is being worked on in spaces like Lausanne and connect with key leaders to raise awareness of the statements in the Lausanne documents.

Opportunities for the Great Commission

As a second reflection challenge for the working groups, the proposed question asked the groups to identify what promising developments or innovations they see that can accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Among the responses, the following categorical opportunities were highlighted:

- Use of technology and arts
- Increased collaboration and alliances and strengthened theological education institutions.
- Increased participation of younger generations
- Discipleship as axis of Great Commission

The use of technology in the Great Commission

At the core, it is essential that we assign specialists to the early exploration of new technologies and trends, and proactively anticipate the ways in which these technologies can be applied to the work of evangelism and Christian mission.

- The advancement of virtual education can help in the expansion of the training of pastors and missionaries.
- The use of technology in an appropriate way—not to demonize networks, but to be part of them with content that offers truth.
- Latin America would be great for the local mission field where different languages and dialects are spoken.
- The impact in the availability of the Bible in different technological platforms (oral, visual, etc.).
- Through technology, people from places without direct access to churches or Christians, or from persecuted church contexts,

could be an opportunity to be part of virtual communities.

- Digital ministries (different from technology as a catalyst for face-to- face ministries) where Christian streamers and influencers are doing Bible studies. They are using the infrastructure of new technologies for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The Arts as a Tool for the Great Commission

Use of creative arts (*eg*, visual, drama, etc.) for proclamation, reflection, and study of the word. The expressions of art such as cinema, theater, and music to connect with the diverse realities of today's society and to make the gospel known in each of these areas. The challenge is to redeem art, discerning its expressions of death and life.

Ministerial collaboration and alliances in the Great Commission

We call to intensify prayer due to our contemporary moment of global collaboration. A new era of partnership is needed between movements and agencies to reach unreached ethnic groups. This expands to include governmental organizations, foundations, etc. with common interests. Other aspects:

- National mobilization movements (*eg*, churches, resources, people, agencies) through alliances.
- Urbanization allows for strategic collaboration between local organizations and churches.
- The new perspective of networking, based on the unity between pastoral work and the various stakeholders.

Strengthening theological institutions to fulfill the Great Commission

A key requirement is to make missiology central to the curriculum of theological seminaries.

- The standardization of remote or virtual study platforms allows greater access to theological, missionary, and leadership education that impacts communities at a minimum cost, which will allow the proliferation of seminaries and Bible institutes that empower missionaries in their work centers.
- Development of applications (apps), with the use of AI for theological education, facilitating access to materials, bibliographies, biblical commentaries, and ministerial tools of easy access to those who today do not have direct access to such materials.

The participation of the new generations in the Great Commission

Consider that the new generation is more collaborative. Therefore, we should be very intentional in the development and specialization of teamwork—influencing new generations to use technological advances to advance the gospel.

- Mission-minded Christian student networks
- Christian start-ups to carry the gospel
- Be intentional in re-thinking the mission in the field of work of the younger generation

Discipleship as the axis of the Great Commission

Discipleship plans according to the socio-cultural context, placing trust in children, adolescents, and youth for the responsibilities of Christian ministry and fulfillment of the Great Commission.

- Disciple-making movement (self-responsibility, commitment to the mission, mutuality, cooperation/support).
- Work on the concept of contemporary organic discipleship using all the technological means we can use (children, parents, church, businesspeople, etc.).

Missionary listening to fulfill the Great Commission

To open spaces of sharing to listen to the needs of society and, in this way, to present/communicate the gospel. This requires an active listening process for the church, leadership, and new generations. Not to be afraid to innovate and to establish inter-institutional and inter-ecclesial connections and dialogues, considering the tension that exists between the polarizing theological positions—proclamation only and social action only.

Missionary Concerns

As part of the responses form the worktables, several Latin American missionary concerns were identified and discussed. The following is a summary of the responses of thre issues of missionary concern today.

Concern 1—The role of the church in God's mission

The church still does not understand the true role or essence of its life in the world. Below are several areas the worktables identified as areas where there remain questions about the church's role.

The relevance of the church: How the church connects with the reality of human beings today: the growing and serious climate crisis, wars, materialism, technological and cultural changes, post-pandemic reality (loneliness, suicide, etc.).

Narrow agenda of the local churches: Only concerned with 'soul winning' inwardly and not outwardly. An opposite and negative tendency are also noticeable: the push for a socio-political agenda without the centrality of Christ and the gospel. There is a need for an intentional focus on the work on developing mature character in the church, with scriptural foundations.

Polarization: We see society separated and aggressive. The church is in this context and does not dialogue, ignoring the current issues. Even within the church, there is a lost sense of unity.

The unity of the Church as a missionary force: The missionary movement from Latin America deserves to be highlighted. Despite the enormous political and economic challenges in the region, missionaries continue to be sent out. According to Comibam, there are some 33,000 field missionaries serving in 200 nations. This source says that the average sending rate has been maintained, and that attrition is disappointing. At the same time, there are many challenges ahead. We need more collaboration of the churches as a movement without falling into institutionalism and being naïve in the management of power and of personal or international interests.

Lack of biblical and missionary training: There is room for growth in the cultural and linguistic training of Christians and missionaries to impact the culture, placing the Bible as the authority in the church, creating disciples who know how to present responsible responses on the Scriptures.

Concern 2—Poverty and social injustice in the world

Like the first concern, this concern highlights the special role that the church has in engaging with poverty and social injustices within Latin America. While this is a multi-dimensional concern, below are several areas where there is need for further church engagement.

> ***"There is a need for an intentional focus on the work on developing mature character in the church, with scriptural foundations."***

The worktables identified several areas where there remain questions about the church's role, and the inordinately few missionaries who are engaged in these parts of the world. These areas include: poverty, urbanization, violence, drug trafficking, corruption, migration issues, social injustices, minority communities, businesses, and work.

Concern 3—Lack of focus and intentional work in the new generations

The worktables also highlighted a concern for the lack of intentional work in the new generations. There is an observed lack of communication with integration of, and evangelization to the new generations. These realities have, in part, created challenges with generational replacement of leadership. The new generations are not very concerned about taking on these challenges as they often value individualism and are distanced from the church. Thus, there is a need to renew recruitment strategies and increase intergenerational dialogue, taking special care with the language of messaging to the younger generations.

Concern 4—Lack of use of new technologies in the mission

Lastly, the worktables further highlighted the gap, need, and potential strategic use of new technologies in mission. There is an observable influence of media and digital communications on younger generations, and the populations at large, which the church and mission have yet to fully utilize. Further, the church appears to additionally be disengaged from the broader movement of technology, which has generated numerous challenges to society and simultaneously opened new frontiers of culture, including the development of artificial intelligence. The use of technology is a necessary part of mission today, and the church must work diligently to understand and use these tools in mission.

Latin American Message to the Global Church

In conclusion, we asked to reflect on the Latin American contribution that adds value to global mission, while maintaining our own color, our Latin American tone. We have selected some proposals that have been emphasized in several groups, trying to give shape to a coherent contribution.

First, we demonstrate to the global church that it is possible to do mission from suffering and difficulties.

This is a reality that crosses the continent. The mandate is to embrace the call of the Lord Jesus to serve from where we are, bringing to the mission this face that can be integrated into the world that needs to receive the gospel.

Second, we remind the global church the need to keep putting mission into its fullness in practice.

In Lausanne 1974 there was a prophetic call. That voice has been taking dimension throughout these decades. In this difficult time, we once again wish to make this voice to be heard. We must not forget to be coherent with the gospel of the kingdom of God and his justice. Integral mission was heard loud and clear then and has thus continued during these years. However, at this time is necessary to recognize that the term 'integral mission' has become a kind of buzz word and has been used for many things to the point of almost losing its meaning. This has been the case to the point that many times instead of uniting, we have seen that it divides. An increasing number of mission leaders are proposing that we address 'the integrality of the mission'. We understand that the mission of God is whole, integral—near-far, spiritual-physical, etc. There are no compartments, separations or divides.

Third, we remind the global church to be a resilient church.

The Latin American quality of resilience has marked the path of the communities of faith. Despite political totalitarianisms, natural disasters, deep economic crises, and the post-pandemic suffering of mental health, teenage suicide, etc., the church is still resilient and called to be a voice of hope for our peoples. We know that other regions of the 'global village' share this reality, and we affirm this call.

Fourth, we remind the global church that we are a global missionary force, and we want to keep growing.

To see that happen, we need to make alliances to serve, keep creativity, see contribution of professionals in different fields, etc. All this is critical. We need to break the paradigm of the last century so that the churches of the North can recognize us as co- partners in the global missionary task. We have strengths particular to our Latin-Caribbean culture. For instance we highlight the ability to initiate something creatively and with few resources. This quality can serve to plant the seed of the gospel in unreached regions.

Fifth, we advocate to the global church to see the value of unity in diversity.

We must build bridges of dialogue and cooperation among churches/mission agencies/NGOs. We must be bearers of the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, and compassion, inwardly and as a genuine expression of the gospel. To allow us to enjoy the multiform grace of God and to be enriched by the multicultural contributions. We must promote a mission that crosses borders from South to North and from West to East. The mission of

God motivates us to be agents of unity, to confront the ethnocentric views of the world, of closed borders, and to value each contribution.

Sixth, we commend the global church to serve as churches that are therapeutic communities in a hurting, helpless, and crisis-ridden world.

We should be therapeutic communities rooted in hope, as followers and servants of the God of all hope: to face suffering, to embrace the homeless, migrants and displaced who roam countries and cities, looking for a place to live, the grieving who have immersed themselves in substance abuse, pleasures, and anti-life models. We are the vanguard of the kingdom.

Seventh, we call the global church to relational discipleship; discipleship around the table.

This is a quality that crosses the continent from the Rio Bravo in Mexico to the southern tip of Ushuaia in Argentina. We are people who celebrate the table, the dialogue, the welcoming home, the breaking of bread to share with others, the after-dinner meal, etc. It is our cultural imprint. We recognize that this cultural imprint is shared in other regions of the world. Therefore, it is a call to rethink discipleship, a step beyond the intellectual and affecting lifestyle. We can take advantage of this quality of Latin America.

In summary, we recognize Latin America as a plurality of voices and perspectives, which have given us a cultural identity to we contribute to the global mission. The Seoul-Incheon Congress is an opportunity to unite our voice with the voices of the other continents, until the 'whole world hears the call of the gospel of the kingdom of God and his justice'.

Conclusion

As it stated earlier, this gathering and time of reflection of Latin American leaders, reminded us that it is God who is the protagonist of this Great Commission (not us) and that it is he who invites us to join in what he is already doing in the world. Therefore, we must be attentive to listen to the voice of God's Spirit through his word. We rejoice that his mission continues to unfold and extends despite obstructions, delays, setbacks, ignorance, and disobedience. We are on mission with God, there is nothing better.

Report Compiled by Lausanne Regional Directors

Daniel Biachi is the Lausanne regional director for Latin America. Daniel served with Operation Mobilization and on the ship *Doulos* in Spain, Germany, and Austria. He is an ordained pastor of the Baptist Convention of Argentina, later the founder and director of the mission agency of Argentina Baptists. He served as vice-president of Comibam and was member of the International Board of Directors of Wycliffe Bible Translators. He is founder and director of 'Conexion Oriental', an organization that focuses on connecting churches from Latin America with churches and leaders in the Middle East and Far East. Daniel received his DMin from the *Facultade Teological Sul Americana* from Londrina, Brazil.

Analia Saracco is the Lausanne co-regional director for Latin America. Analia is also the director of chaplaincy at *The Instituto Teologico FEIT* (International Faculty of Theological Education) based in Argentina. She is a member of *Juntas en el Camino* (Together on the Way), a ministry for abused women. She is Rector of the Institute of Higher Education (IFSFIET). Analia received her LIC in public relations from *Universidad Argentina de la Empresa*, and her MTh from South African Theological Seminary.

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Rafik Wagdy Barsoum, Salim J. Munayer, Jack Sara

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the seedbed of Christianity, where it all began, and from Palestine in particular the gospel spread to the whole MENA region, and onward to the entire earth.

The disciples and the early Christians followed the commission of Jesus in Acts 1:8, where he told them: 'You shall be my disciples in Judea, Samaria and to the end of the world.' The book of Acts reflects his reality of the spread of the gospel which reached the ends of the common world within the first century.

The makeup of Christian communities in the MENA region is diverse and rich in history, reflecting centuries of coexistence and interaction with various cultures and religions. While the specific demographics vary from country to country, here is a general overview of the Christian presence:

Armenian Christians: Concentrated in countries like Armenia, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, Armenian Christians have a rich cultural heritage and have faced historical challenges, including genocide and displacement.

Coptic Christians: Primarily concentrated in Egypt, Coptic Christians are one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, tracing their roots back to the early days of Christianity. They have a distinctive cultural and religious identity within Egypt.

Chaldean, Assyrian, and Syriac Christians: These communities are mainly found in Iraq and Syria, with smaller populations in other countries in the region. They have faced significant challenges due to conflicts and persecution in recent years.

Eastern Orthodox Christians: Beyond Greece and Cyprus, Eastern Orthodox Christians are also found in countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, where they have longstanding historical roots.

Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic: These communities have a presence in various countries across the MENA region, including Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon.

Maronite Christians: Predominantly found in Lebanon, Maronite Christians have a significant presence in Lebanese society and have historically played a key role in the country's politics and culture.

Protestant and Evangelical Christians: In recent decades, there has been a growth in Protestant and Evangelical Christian communities in various countries across the MENA region. Perhaps numbering over half a million in Egypt, influential communities exist also in Lebanon and Jordan. In some countries like Iraq, however, they might be only a few hundred in population.

"The makeup of Christian communities in the MENA region is diverse and rich in history, reflecting centuries of coexistence and interaction with various cultures and religions."

There is a number of Anglican Christians in the region. There are also expatriate Christian communities in many of the MENA countries, especially the Gulf states.

But the outlook for all Christian communities is negative. Paul Vallely's book, *The Vanishing: The Twilight of Christianity in the Middle East*, proves poignant evidence. Here are some indicative quotes:

- For the first time in nearly two millennia, Iraq may soon be bereft of Christians.
- The Christian faith and its followers were an integral part of the Middle East since the religion's earliest days. Now, they are facing extinction in many of their ancient homelands.

- The ancient churches of the Middle East face a mortal threat. In Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Palestine, the crucible of Christianity is being extinguished.
- The exodus of Christians from the region is unprecedented in modern times, leading to fears that Christianity in the very lands of its birth is becoming a vanishing religion.

In summary, Christians face violence, persecution, and discrimination that have driven millions of believers from their homes. Ancient communities have been dispersed, erasing the rich tapestry of religious diversity that once defined the region.

While many of the factors driving this phenomenon have been present for decades, amazing changes in social and economic demographics have occurred since the last Lausanne congress in 2010. And as we approach the midpoint of the 21st century, global transformations and internal tensions will continue to fundamentally reshape the MENA region, necessitating adaptive strategies.

Most crucial for the Christian communities in the MENA region are the complex and continually evolving factors of migration, socio-political changes, and religious dynamics. But despite the many challenges and hardships, believers in the region continue to contribute to the cultural, social, and religious fabric of their respective countries.

Between Now & 2050: Key Trends Shaping The Great Commission

Islam and Radical Politics

The rise of radical Islam, political Islamic movements, and the governing systems using Islam as their reference point have been notable and unprecedented in the last 20 years. Affecting so many countries in this region, it has been most pronounced in Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan, while the regime in Algeria has shuttered dozens of churches. While youth are being heard more and more and Millennials were the force behind the Arab spring, this is also the age recruited by the Islamic parties and jihadist movements to change the region at its core.

But a corresponding development has been the rise of atheism. Previously always under cover, when groups like the Muslim Brotherhood gained authority, many former Muslims began denying Islam publicly in pronouncing their atheism. Statistics have documented a surprising surge in Saudi Arabia,[1] while there may be up to 4 million atheists in Egypt alone.[2]

Youth empowerment

If current trends continue, by 2050 more than 300 million young people will enter MENA's already strained job market, leading to significant unemployment. Combined with challenges like climate change and water scarcity, this situation will likely drive the youthful population to seek greater political participation and opportunities for empowerment. These demands for political reforms and inclusivity, while potentially bringing positive developments, could also cause unrest and instability in the region.

People on the move

The global population is expected to hit 9.7 billion by 2050, with notable aging and urban demographics growth. About 65 percent of the global population will reside in urban areas, adding 2.5 billion people to cities, with MENA's population increasing from 500 million to 724 million. This surge will strain healthcare, social security, and urban planning.

Meanwhile, radical and political Islam has caused a huge wave of migration from the region into other places in the world, with refugees flooding into Europe where at mid-2023 they reached 2.5 million in Germany, according to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

But MENA has been impacted as a refugee haven as well. Egypt has seen its population balloon to 100 million inhabitants, including between 11 and 13 million refugees, while Lebanon maintains the highest per capita rate of refugees in the world due to the Syrian influx. This unprecedented development overloads the limited local resources, but also provides an opportunity for economic growth by importing fresh money into the country and increasing its labour force.

These demographic changes have contributed to the dramatic decline in the number of Christians in the region, but also their greater number in the Gulf through its increase in the foreign worker community. With migrant communities everywhere, MENA ministry becomes global in scale.

Poverty, freedom, and religious persecution

With all the political and social changes in the region, the economic situation changed drastically, where the middle class in many countries is almost extinct[3]. Because of corruption, the rich are getting much wealthier, while poverty increases and national GDP and personal the purchasing power,[4] have declined dramatically.

While MENA regimes have largely survived the tumult so far, as these challenges mount, non-state actors have filled governance voids, further destabilizing states.[5] But despite these challenges, many Christian communities in the MENA region continue to demonstrate resilience and perseverance, maintaining their faith and heritage in the face of adversity. International organizations and advocacy groups work to support these communities, promote religious freedom, and address the root causes of persecution and discrimination.

Creation care and mental health

One root cause is related to the rise in global temperatures[6], creating competition over limited resources. Projected temperature increases between 0.8° and 3.3°C and decreased precipitation in northern MENA[7] will exacerbate water scarcity and lead to frequent severe heatwaves.[8] Rising sea levels and increased pollution challenge the sustainability of both natural and archaeological heritage.[9]

But there has also been a ripple effect on regional mental health. Anxiety, depression, frustration, and suicide (noting that the Arab Spring began with a suicide in Tunisia[10]) have increased dramatically. Vulnerable populations, already reeling from political and economic instability, can ill afford this trend that threatens their core coping mechanisms.

Discipleship in a digital age

The MENA region's diversity in economic conditions is revealed in its access to new media sources. Some nations (*ie* Yemen) have miserable to very poor Internet connection,[11] and therefore rely on traditional media like television and radio. Others exist on parallel worlds, like the UAE, which boasts the global high in of social media accounts per person,[12] and in 2021[13] [14] boasted the highest Internet speeds in the world. The church must account for both realities, and strategize effectively to communicate the gospel message in both low and high tech environments.

Regional Considerations For The Great Commission

War and political conflict

The MENA region has been destroyed by war. Beginning with the Iraq invasion at the turn of the 21st century, through the initial hope sparked by the so-called Arab's spring, there has not been one area spared from internal or external conflict. Revolutions, civil wars, proxy wars, and coup d'états shattered the stability of nations like Tunisia in 2010, and continued to plague Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, and Somalia in subsequent years. Worrying for the international community, its effects have been felt over the whole globe.

External and regional rivalries

Many of these conflicts were influenced by foreign powers continuing to interfere in the MENA region. Often led, or perceived as led by the United States, as America pivots to Asia[15] and the world shifts toward multipolarity with rising powers like China and India, traditional US hegemony is diminishing.[16] Furthermore, a relatively equal power balance amongst regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Israel, suggests a future driven by competition rather than dominance.[17]

The Palestinian question

Nevertheless, despite new diplomatic relations and shifting alliances as enacted in the Abraham Accords, violent conflict in areas like Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza show that the Palestin-

ian question remains significant.[18] While Israel's war against Hamas has outraged the Arab peoples over the death of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, behind-the-scenes security and economic cooperation with the Jewish state characterizes several nations worried about Iranian regional power. At the time of writing it is unclear how this issue will resolve.

Economic dynamics

But as the global economic landscape shifts toward a multipolar world, the E7 (China, India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, and Mexico) economies are expected to outpace the G7 (US, Japan, Germany, France, UK, Italy, and Canada). MENA countries must diversify from traditional oil dependence to embrace renewables, technology, and infrastructure, capitalizing on new economic opportunities. And although oil will remain a primary energy source, the global shift towards renewables may destabilize the region's rentier states. These nations may face increased social unrest if unable to adapt their social contracts to the changing economic landscape.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Great Commission

The last decade has been the best of times and the worst of times for the MENA region. Instability has shaken the pillars of society, but also the religious foundation of many. People are upfront about their atheism, while some are entertaining the claims of Christianity like never before.

According to the Joshua Project[19], Unreached Unengaged People Groups (UUPG) among the region's 19 countries represents 68.2 percent of the population. To reach them, the church must deal with several challenging realities.

The growth of urban populations offers churches the opportunity to serve larger congregations while providing minorities with greater anonymity in practicing their faith. However, urbanization is also transforming traditional family structures and gender roles, which in turn affects church attendance and leadership participation. To remain relevant, churches must adapt their programs to accommodate the changing demographics, including single-parent families, working mothers, and youth who are delaying marriage and childbearing. Furthermore, churches must effectively address shifts in congregational beliefs and practices to stay pertinent in an increasingly secular society.

Contextualizing church for the emerging world

Some of these shifts are being driven by youth with their new ideas and energy, which can rejuvenate church communities and enhance outreach and social justice initiatives. The growing political activism among the youth offers churches the chance to revitalize their communities. However, the traditional dominance of older men in church leadership poses significant barriers to youth and women, potentially leading to a lack of qualified leadership as the next generation takes over. Promoting leadership mobility between generations and actively involving women in all areas of church life is critical. Churches must make spaces for young people to express their faith in ways that feel authentic to their generational identity, especially in more traditional congregations. This is crucial not only for addressing generational divides but also for ensuring the church's adaptability and responsiveness to contemporary challenges. These include, among others, contextualized theology about economic disparities, migration, and political unrest.

One issue that resonates with many, youth in particular, is climate change. As stewards of creation, churches have a unique opportunity to integrate environmental care into their teachings. The onset of harsher climates and the development of urban slums from displaced populations will demand that churches not only preach about stewardship but also actively participate in community resilience efforts. This could include setting up support systems for environmental migrants and engaging the youth in active dialogues about theological perspectives on humanity's relationship with nature, thus ensuring that environmental advocacy is woven into the fabric of church activities.

Unfortunately, the economic issues driven partially by climate change, but related to the

political malaise as a whole, are likely to deepen mental health issues among congregants. Churches must integrate mental health resources, train clergy in psychological first aid, and form partnerships with mental health organizations. While economic diversification will bring new employment opportunities, which churches can support through professional development programs, these transformations might not benefit all equally. This will result in widening disparities within communities and increasing demands for church-provided social services. Churches need to diversify their funding sources to address the potential increase in poverty levels affecting church revenues.

Orienting church for regional service

But in regions where state structures weaken, churches may find themselves inadvertently assuming roles typically filled by governments, such as mediating disputes and providing community services. These roles, while essential, must be balanced with vigilance against non-state actors who might impose restrictions on religious practices. Churches can serve as stable community centers, offering refuge and support during times of turmoil, but must also advocate for and uphold the freedom of religion and belief amidst changing political landscapes. Furthermore, the geopolitical instability in the region can exacerbate sectarian divides, heightening tensions within and between communities. In response, churches should actively engage in reconciliation programs. These programs are vital for addressing the underlying issues that fuel sectarian conflicts and for promoting peace and understanding.

The MENA church has a key role to play here as well through its partnership in the global body of Christ. Addressing the complexities of the ongoing Palestinian crisis, local believers must model a re-evaluation of theological interpretations that historically support Christian Zionism, as it often aligns with policies that overlook the rights and suffering of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. By promoting a theology of peace and justice, churches can advocate for the dignity and rights of all people in the region, fostering a more compassionate and balanced stance that supports reconciliation and coexistence.

Within the region, evangelicals face a difficult task to pursue such cooperation with the historic churches, accused of pro-Israel sentiment as their ties to American churches often result in being lumped in with US policy. But overall as the Christian presence in the region has been dwindling, minority status and common threats have pushed the various denominations to gather and pray like never before. In Egypt, for example, the Egyptian Council of Churches represents one encouraging initiative, uniting the ancient Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Catholic churches, the Greek Catholic churches, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Protestant and Anglican churches. Once existing only between limited officials, these churches now form common committees as an ecumenical sentiment—without theological compromise—spreads at the popular level.

Demonstrating Church As A Home For All Backgrounds

But it is still true that evangelicals are the 'new kid on the block,' which continues to perturb many historic Christians. In Egypt the Protestant community might number over half a million, while in Iraq they might be only a few hundreds. Their numbers are increasing, however, because of their progressive evangelistic nature, growing mainly out of the traditional Christian communities. Believers will have to balance between the strengthening of relations with all who ascribe to the Apostles' Creed, while continuing to preach the gospel with dynamism.

And with increasing urbanization and a younger, tech-savvy population,[20] much dynamism can come through how technology will fundamentally change how religion operates. Churches must engage with digital platforms and embrace the technological revolution to remain relevant and effectively serve their congregations amid economic distress caused by technological disruptions.

Already the new venture of digital church has been fruitful, serving in all five ecclesial functions of worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, and witness. A network has also been formed in the greater MENA region that is experiencing a great digital revival through meeting together, learning from each other,

serving one another, and partnering for the expansion of the gospel in the digital world. And beyond this example, so many churches now have virtual spaces and online platforms, extending the presence of the church in society even more.

This is especially true in highly persecuted countries such as Algeria, where 48 churches were closed by state officials and people were forced to disband formal fellowship[21]. Whether for scattered believers or vulnerable Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), digital ministry provides people a way to share freely without revealing their identity.

There is a small movement happening among the Muslim majority's believers in countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel.

The rise of the MBB movement stems from various factors. First, advancements in information and communication technologies have broadened individuals' exposure to diverse religious viewpoints, enabling them to explore alternative beliefs. Additionally, shifts in social and political dynamics, such as discontentment with authoritarian rule and dissatisfaction with societal norms, have prompted some to re-evaluate their religious affiliations and seek spiritual fulfillment elsewhere.

But a major factor has been the rise of radical Islam. While some turned to atheism or secular commitments toward society, many went right and left, searching for hope anywhere and everywhere, not knowing that their real hope is in Christ. Churches and their ministries of mercy have done wonderful work when ISIS dominated the Levant and displaced so many. Serving the refugees and disadvantaged of all religions, believers drew thousands into church for trauma healing and therapy, and along the way communicated that Christ is their healer, their only hope. And apart from the suffering, with foundations shaken and taboos questioned, many Christians grew bold in finding freedom to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even in Saudi Arabia the spiritual atmosphere is changing. Though there is still no physical church present, the country is opening toward its expatriate Christian presence, beginning to facilitate the quiet fellowship of believers.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenges that MBBs face in the MENA region. They often encounter significant social stigma, familial rejection, and persecution from authorities or extremist factions. Publicly embracing Christianity requires immense courage and resilience amidst such adversity.

Nevertheless, the growth of MBB movement underscores the dynamic nature of local faith. It disrupts prevailing notions of religious uniformity and showcases the diverse spiritual journeys within Muslim-majority societies. We need to pray that the Lord will continue to raise up followers for him form among them, so that despite the numerical existential threat to the Christians in the region, we can still have hope that Jesus will bring about revival. A new church, from among the majority people, will rise up from the ashes of the traditional structures so that God will have glory always.

"Whether for scattered believers or vulnerable Muslim Background Believers, digital ministry provides people a way to share freely without revealing their identity."

Conclusion

As the MENA region approaches 2050, it is poised on the brink of transformative changes that will reshape the societal, environmental, and political fabric of the area. Churches in the region stand as critical bastions of stability, community, and faith amidst these shifts.

To navigate these turbulent waters successfully, it is imperative that churches not only adapt but lead by example in fostering inclusivity, leveraging technology for engagement, and advocating for justice and stewardship. They must proactively train and empower a new generation of leaders who are as diverse as the communities they serve. By embedding reconciliation and public theology into their core missions, churches can bridge divides and build peace in an increasingly fragmented world.

The call to action is clear: churches must embrace their pivotal role in shaping the future of the MENA region, ensuring they remain vibrant and relevant in serving their congregations and communities in the face of impending global changes.

Endnotes

1 US Department of State, '2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Saudi Arabia', US Department of State, accessed 15 May 2024, *https://www*.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/saudi-arabia/.

2 US Embassy, '2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Egypt', US Embassy in Egypt, accessed 15 May 2024, *https://eg*.usembassy.gov/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-egypt/.

3 World Bank, 'Middle Class Dynamics and Arab Spring', World Bank Blogs, accessed 15 May 2024, *https://blogs*.worldbank.org/en/arabvoices/middle-class-dynamics-and-arab-spring.

4 World Bank, 'Making Data Count: How to Devise Better Policies to Fight Poverty in MENA', World Bank Blogs, accessed 15 May 2024, *https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/arabvoices/making-data-count-devise-better-policies-fight-poverty-mena.*

5 'European Policy Brief: Regional Dynamics In The MENA Region', 'The Middle East in 2050'

6 'European Policy Brief'.

7 Ajjur, Salah Basem, and Sami G. Al-Ghamdi, 'Evapotranspiration and Water Availability Response to Climate Change in the Middle East and North Africa - Climatic Change', Varela, R., et al. 'Persistent Heat Waves Projected for Middle East and North Africa by the End of the 21st Century.'

8 Piesse, Mervyn, 'Global Water Supply and Demand Trends Point Towards Rising Water Insecurity', Varela, R., et al.

9 Westley, Kieran, et al. 'Climate Change and Coastal Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa: Assessing Past Impacts and Future Threats'.

10 Elie Abouaoun, 'Tunisia Timeline: Since the Jasmine Revolution,' United States Institute of Peace, 12 July 2019, *https://www*.usip.org/tunisia-timeline-jasmine-revolution.

11 NordVPN, 'Countries with the Best and Worst Internet in the World', NordVPN Blog, Last modified 10 March 2024, *https://nordvpn*.com/blog/countries-with-the-best-and-worst-internet/.

12 GMI Blogger, 'UAE Social Media Statistics 2018 Infographics | GMI Blog', Official GMI Blog, 8 March 2023, *https://www*.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-social-media-statistics/.

13 World Population Review, 'Internet Speeds by Country 2020', worldpopulationreview.com, 2022, *https://worldpopulationreview*.com/country-rankings/internet-speeds-by-country.

14 'Internet Speeds by Country,' Data Pandas, accessed 25 April 2024, *https://www*.datapandas.org/ranking/internet-speeds-by-country#top.

15 Davidson, Janine, 'The US 'Pivot to Asia'', American Journal of Chinese Studies 21 (June 2014): 77–82.

16 Ignatieff, Michael, and Paul Friesen, 'The Threat to American Hegemony Is Real: By Michael Ignatieff', 'The Middle East in 2050.'

17 'The Middle East in 2050'.

18 'The Middle East in 2050'.

19 Joshua Proje, 'Africa, North and Middle East Country and People Group Listings', Joshua Project, accessed 31 May 2024, *https://joshuaproject*.net/regions/6.

20 World Bank Group, 'The Middle East and North Africa: From Transition to Transformation.'

21 Open Doors Canada, 'Algeria Church Closures', Open Doors Canada, accessed 15 May 2024, *https://www.opendoorscanada.org/algeria-church-closures/.*

Authors

Rev Dr Rafik Wagdy Barsoum is originally from Egypt. After graduating from the faculty of medicine, he founded Message to All Nations (M.A.N.) with his wife, Rana, in 2009. He earned a Master's in Organizational Leadership and Management, a degree in Apologetics and Theology from Oxford University, and a certificate of Global Health (Queen Mary University of London). He hosts Christian TV programs in Toronto where his family resides, and he pastors the digital Church of The Nations. He is the current Chairman of the MENA Digital Church Network. Rev. Barsoum is ordained by the conservative Anglican Province of Alexandria and has taught apologetics, evangelism and missions at the Anglican seminary for many years.



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Dr Salim J. Munayer is the founder and Senior Consultant of Musalaha Vision of Reconciliation, an organization dedicated to fostering reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians since 1990. He holds a BA in History and Geography from Tel Aviv University, an MA from Fuller Theological Seminary, has undertaken graduate studies in New Testament at Pepperdine University, and earned his Ph.D. from the Oxford Center of Mission Studies in the UK. Salim has authored several books on reconciliation, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the experiences of Christians in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Salim also serves as the Coordinator for the PRN NENA Region on behalf of the WEA.

Rev Dr Jack Sara is the President of Bethlehem Bible College and the general secretary for the World Evangelical Alliance for the Middle East & North Africa. Born and raised in Jerusalem, Palestine, Jack studied at Bethlehem Bible College after committing his life to Christ in 1991, earned earned a M.Div from Alliance Biblical Seminary in the Philippines, and holds a doctorate degree from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in Missions and Cross-Cultural Studies. He travels around the globe, teaching about Missions and Cross-Cultural work in the Middle East.

NORTH AMERICA



NORTH AMERICA

Andy Cook, Dee Crye, D.A. Horton, Todd Korpi, Joshua Laxton, Michael Lee, Andrew MacDonald, Ed Stetzer, Andrea Summers, Daniel Yang

Introduction

Since the close of The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 2010, North America has experienced tectonic shifts in culture and religion. The upcoming Global Congress marks a unique occasion not only to listen but to reflect on the current challenges and opportunities we face in the North American context.

While there are innumerable themes at play in both Canada and the United States, this report focuses broadly on the rapid and uneven secularization of society, the influence of both new and historic cultural idols, the possibilities offered by unprecedented innovations in digital ministry, and the transformation of the pastorate resulting from these societal and political changes. Within each theme, this report aims at identifying what these changes mean, the challenges they pose to churches and mission, and opportunities where leaders are working to advance the Great Commission. Looking to 2050, while the complexities and challenges facing churches in North America are daunting, we believe churches stand at the edge of enormous missional potential.

What is the Societal Influence of Christianity?

The Secularization of North America

At the forefront of the state of the Great Commission in North America is our transition away from a culturally dominant Christianity towards a post-Christian or secular society. In only the past two decades, the percentage of people who identified as Christians in Canada has declined by nearly a quarter to 53.3 percent in 2021. Although a less dramatic decline, Christian self-identification in the US has likewise fallen from 78 percent in 2007 to 63 percent in 2022. These national shifts have significant variations across demographics, regions, and religious traditions yet together reflect a broad trend away from societal identification with Christianity.[1] Beyond identification, secularization is most tangibly seen in the declining church attendance and membership. In 2021, US church membership fell below 50 percent of the population for the first time in the 80 years Gallup has tracked it.[2]

This trajectory of North American secularization signifies a movement already underway in many other Western nations towards privatized forms of faith and the retreat of Christian traditions and norms that previously underlay societal beliefs and practices.

The Rise of the 'Nones'

Central to the impact of secularization in North America has been the resulting shift away from traditional or institutional forms of religion towards individual and internalized spiritual identity. Sociologists and ministry leaders identify this growing group as the religious 'nones', those who identify as 'nothing in particular' in public opinion surveys. In the past few decades, the rise of religious 'nones' has been one of the most significant trends in the North American religious landscape. In the US, the percentage of nones increased from 16 percent in 2007 to 28 percent in 2023. As noted above, in Canada, nones more than doubled from 16.5 percent in 2001 to 34.6 percent in 2021. Moreover, Gen Z are nearly double as likely as baby boomers to identify as religiously unaffiliated, reinforcing the urgency of understanding the unique challenges and opportunities of reaching the nones.

While this category is often grouped with atheist or agnostic, nones are characterized by ambivalence about established forms of religion and spirituality. Nones typically believe in God or another higher power, reject the idea that science can explain everything, see spirituality as essential in their lives, say religion does some harm but also does some good, and rarely attend religious services. Nearly three-quarters of nones were raised in

religious homes, contributing to a broader societal trend of religious switching.

The Challenge of Biblical Illiteracy

A critical byproduct of North America's secularization confronting church leaders is the gradual erosion of a cultural literacy in biblical themes, language, and central narrative. For generations, church leaders in North America have benefited—and struggled with—a nominal or cultural Christianity that often presumed a common religious framework. These common definitions provided a religious language through which Christians could communicate the gospel, shaping North American missiological practices for generations.

The immediate challenge posed by growing cultural biblical illiteracy is our communication of the gospel. Without basic knowledge of the Bible, preachers, and leaders confront enduring misconceptions and assumptions of Christianity held by an emerging post-Christian society. Without firsthand knowledge of the Bible, individuals are susceptible to misinterpretations propagated by popular culture or biased sources. Biblical illiteracy can lead to distorted perceptions of Christian beliefs and values, hindering efforts to bridge cultural divides and foster mutual respect.

While a challenge, the rise of biblical illiteracy offers North American churches a unique opportunity for innovation and renewed missional strategy. As traditional models of evangelism prove less effective, leaders are forced to incorporate approaches to mission and evangelism that acknowledge diverse communities and perspectives.

Opportunity abounds for North Americans to revisit the story of Jesus afresh, rethinking how to proclaim the foundational truths of the Christian faith to an unfamiliar audience. Through returning to questions about God, sin, salvation, creation, and purpose, we not only discard assumptions about the biblical literacy of our hearers, choosing instead to recontextualize biblical truth to the new questions of meaning and purpose that animate North American society.

In addition, by embracing innovative strategies—such as online Bible studies, podcasts, and multimedia resources—organizations and leaders utilize new methods to broaden how we educate culture and the church on the biblical story. Through listening to marginalized communities—both at home and abroad—leaders are developing new pathways for teaching, proclaiming, and relating biblical truth in language that penetrates the defenses of ignorance and assumptions of a post-Christian society.

Looking to 2050, North American churches, while still influential, confront a society where their influence is rapidly declining. Christianity's previous dominance defined centuries of missiology in Canada and the United States, and its continued decline marks the need for a reorientation of our framework. Biblical illiteracy, the decline and inconsistency in church attendance, and the rise of the religious nones are elements of this tectonic shift that will continue to shape how we pursue the Great Commission.

" Through listening to marginalized communities—both at home and abroad—leaders are developing new pathways for teaching, proclaiming, and relating biblical truth..."

Where Does Society Place Its Hope?

The Hope of Politics for Protection and Victory

Societal hope in politics is neither unique to North America nor a recent temptation. Yet the recent radicalization of our political language and practices reflects a society increasingly looking to its political leaders and parties for salvation and—in many cases—victory. It is this promise of power over perceived enemies that appears prevalent across North American politics, weighing upon church leaders looking to remain faithful as prophetic witnesses amid brokenness.

A potent idol across society, this temptation to look to politics for hope has proven appealing to many Christians as a means of retain-

ing cultural power and influence in the face of escalating secularization. This has been exacerbated by politicians, parties, and media outlets who enthusiastically play to Christian concerns over public morality and institutional control. In such cases, the good news of Jesus is in danger of being co-opted by leaders and ideologies offering the security of Christian hegemony. The result is often a conflation of Christianity's historic cultural prominence with our calling to the Great Commission.

Inevitably this co-option poses two challenges in Great Commission work. The first is that the degradation of our public witness as those who identify as Christian can appear to society as power-hungry and pragmatic. Compounded by championing ungodly politicians and causes, this has traded short-term security for long-term loss: politicization of our churches. Conversely, fear of politics can lead to a form of quietism that abandons it as a critical tool and part of our calling to engage our world. As two vibrant democracies, both Canada and the United States offer significant opportunities for Christians to engage the political process and advocate for biblical truth in the public square in a way that transcends party affiliation.

The second is internal division, as deepening fragmentation, division, and disunity among North American churches is often driven by diverging political allegiances. Far from a prophetic witness, ideological sorting within church membership and ministry partnerships can at times reflect political party lines rather than doctrines and mission. More commonly, the ferocity of political division can prove a paralyzing force for churches and ministries. For these leaders and communities, the challenge lies in enduring in both truth and love while knowing that this will never pacify the tribal voices in our midst.

While this cultural hope is fraught with challenges, significant opportunities exist for churches and believing communities to model a prophetic presence. Critical to this prophetic model is the ability of North American leaders to endure as 'people shaped by the word of God, sharing the mission of God, and living under the kingdom of God'.[3] This will continue to require dialogue, grace, and forgiveness among church leaders as we strive to counter these pressures of division both culturally and within our pews and pulpits.

The Hope of Identity for Meaning and Significance

Personal identity in North American society has become a complex and central issue, intertwined with the continent's historic values of individualism and autonomy. As self-expression, self-creation, and self-actualization have become paramount in society, identity has ascended as a leading repository of false hope. At their core, these idols offer simplistic solutions to intricate questions surrounding meaning, purpose, and belonging.

Navigating these idols of self-creation can be a daunting task for church leaders. North American society not only celebrates but demands public validation of journeys of self-discovery, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. As criticism of these often elicits strong reactions due to their intensely personal nature, navigating identity boundaries can be fraught.

A significant concern in North America stemming from this identity challenge is the rapid growth of non-traditional sexual and gender identities. The rise of LGBTQ identities has not only revolutionized secular culture but also caused significant division in culture. This division is particularly conspicuous among Gen Z and younger individuals, for whom embracing diverse sexual and gender identities is part of a broader exploration for meaning and belonging. Recent studies indicate that LGBTQ identification is more prevalent among emerging adults than older generations, reflecting the evolving moral and religious landscape in which they mature.

Despite these challenges, there are missional responses that offer both a prophetic witness and pastoral care. Rooted in the imago Dei, a revival of Christian theology and missiology champions the inherent dignity and value of humanity, offering a counter-narrative to the prevailing cultural ethos. Additionally, reinvesting in the church as a place of belonging and mission can provide an alternative to the transient communities of secular society's myriad

identities. As a unified Body empowered by the Spirit and grounded in the Word, the believing community offers a communal identity that transcends individualistic pursuits, offering eternal hope in a fallen world. This community becomes a space where the gospel flourishes, and Christian witness thrives.

Faith flourishes when our identity flows from Christ and his mission, rather than from any other identity, including from sexual orientation or socio-political context. By reframing identity questions within the context of mission, opportunities exist for North American churches to provide true and full identity rooted in Christ, equipping individuals for eternal purpose. The church can offer an identity in Christ that brings wholeness and fulfillment.

The Hope of Technology for Connection and Efficiency

While new technology and digital platforms offer expansive opportunities for evangelism and mission, this potential can often obscure the ways North American society has increasingly invested its hope in technology as an idol. Promising efficiency, connectivity, societal cure-alls, and happiness, technology has become an alluring savior for many, fostering a complex and evolving idol that challenges and opens opportunities for the Great Commission.

First, idolization of technology has reshaped cultural values of authority and communication, reducing them to branding or platform that amplify celebrity and tribalism over substance. As digital tools center on platform, social media voices are incentivized to division, controversy, and absurdity where questions of character and expertise are secondary if not irrelevant. Within churches and ministries, this temptation can likewise elevate celebrity pastors and leaders with platform over leaders qualified through godliness and spiritual maturity.

Second, idolization of technology has fueled a cultural obsession with entertainment. Awash in content, technology has enmeshed media into our daily lives resulting in a society always plugged in and distracted. The result is a consumer mindset that centers our need to be entertained over serving one another. This idol is particularly felt in churches and ministries, where consumerism can produce congregations and communities oriented around personal preferences rather than mission.

Third, idolization of technology has accelerated our societal pursuit of productivity. In contrast with the biblical vision of Sabbath, technology has accelerated our societal priorities of efficiency and productivity by invading our rest with work and busyness on a scale unthinkable only a generation ago.

Despite these challenges, our cultural value of technology presents unique opportunities. From radio to television, North American Christians have historically recognized the power of redeeming technology as critical tools in gospel mission. Christian pioneers are already leveraging online media and platforms to tell the gospel story in fresh ways, reaching communities that might never engage traditional Christian institutions.

As technology continues to revolutionize society, the critical task for the next generation will be resisting the dangers of losing what is essential for human and community flourishing while seizing its great potential. This challenge and opportunity lie in leveraging new technology while modeling to North American society its inability to save but merely as a tool to proclaim the One who can.

What is Ministry in a Digital Age?

The Innovations and Adaptations of Online Church

Few innovations have challenged and stretched our assumptions and convictions around church more than the growth of online ministry. The pandemic accelerated what had already been a widespread and rapid adoption of online church across denominations, demographics, and regions of North America. As the pandemic subsided, many North American churches have continued to leverage digital tools to retain their online congregations while returning to traditional, in-person formats.

First, churches have begun to leverage digital spaces both to cultivate a sense of belonging among the congregation and to reach their surrounding community. Far from a peripheral concern, churches are recognizing the

central role that social media and online resources play in the lives of their people and as possible tools in discipleship. From hosting new believers groups on Zoom to encouragement videos posted to YouTube, local churches are increasingly embracing online platforms as core ministry practices. Today, the 'front door' of the church is quickly moving past websites towards its social media and other online resources.

Second, churches are experimenting—and at times struggling—with integrating online and in-person services to create a cohesive believing community. The expansion of online church during the pandemic unlocked the potential for local churches to reach and serve members in the community who normally could not or would not attend services. Yet as leaders grapple with the inherent deficiencies in online-only services, churches are beginning to experiment with hybrid communities that incorporate both in-person and online elements. Through utilizing online tools for small groups, outreach ministries, and bible studies, churches have begun to integrate online spaces as core to their discipleship and missional strategies.

As churches continue to experiment and innovate around integrating online and in-person spaces and resources, leaders face the critical challenge of developing a robust framework for both digital ecclesiology and digital missiology. Gaps clearly remain in both, limiting their use as practical tools for churches to effectively engage digital spaces and in thoughtful guidelines for healthy digital mission.

The Potential for Digital Mission and Evangelism

Digital platforms open doors to communities previously unreached or underreached by traditional ministries. Their decentralized nature provides new opportunities for innovation, from missions to evangelism to spiritual formation. The growing permeation of digital spaces creates opportunities to empower the laity to reach their communities. Digital platforms have made the gospel more accessible than at any point in church history and created a space to mobilize the entire church to reach the entire world. Further, many others preach their own 'gospel' through these platforms; it is essential for the (true) gospel to be proclaimed as well.

The most recent decade saw evangelistic ministries take witnessing online through websites and social media, creating live online events and online curricula for seekers and spiritual explorers. While the advent of streaming events was an iteration of broadcasting, the live interaction of viewers and the intentional follow-ups from the event coordinators endeavored to fill in the gaps between digital broadcasting and personal evangelism, opening the door for more Christians to participate in evangelism online.

" The growing permeation of digital spaces creates opportunities to empower the laity to reach their communities."

The explosion of online social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram offer potential for missional innovations outside of digital mission focused on evangelism. Evangelists on these platforms offer themes and topics that cover meaning, purpose, identity, mental health, and apologetics. The personality-driven, evangelist-influencer role is often seen as an everyday person journeying with the seeker in their spiritual journey.

As technology progresses, evangelistic ministries continue to manage the tension between digital broadcasting versus personal evangelism and content creation versus gospel proclamation. Many ministries are utilizing online meeting platforms as a middle ground, allowing them to convene conveniently online while maintaining the uniqueness of dynamic conversations and relationship building.

How Are the Pastorate and/or Church Changing?

The Power and Potential of an Emerging Gen Z

As the most ethnically and socially diverse generation, Gen Z has been shaped by seismic social changes and technological advancement. The result is a demographic that often rejects

the conventional norms that define traditional religious life and approaches.

Gen Z has a drive toward independence and self-reliance, evidenced by its abiding confidence in 'figuring it out' without direction from authorities. The first true digital natives, Gen Z desires to be active participants in the conversation more than consumers or followers of an established template. Their natural skepticism of the inherent hierarchies of institutions leads Gen Z to seek opportunities that challenge and reshape institutions.

The collision of creative desire and disruptive reform leads to Gen Z's animating potential to reshape North American Christianity. Ministries that have successfully reached and empowered Gen Z have prioritized authenticity and open communication by amplifying their voices and equipping them to participate as leaders in the conversation.

As Gen Z struggles to reconcile religious beliefs with their desire for authenticity and relevance within shifting societal norms, they may be seen as rebellious rather than on a genuine search for understanding. Gen Z will likely respond with disconnection or alienation when churches either shy away from controversial subjects or offer authoritative answers without engaging their doubts and complexities. As Gen Z continues to hunger for meaning and identity, the church can help them understand how embodying Jesus' teachings in genuine and transformative ways can meet these needs and reshape our world.

The New Reality of Racial/Ethnic Diversity

North American ethnic diversity is beginning to shape and reshape traditional religious institutions. Preparing for 2050, the continued emergence of leaders of color in these institutions will be critical in their renewal towards greater effectiveness in evangelism and mission.

Churches in the US and Canada are rapidly diversifying ethnically as immigration continues to impact the demographic composition of both nations. For instance, the Assemblies of God in the United States has grown in membership yearly for the last three decades, in contrast to other denominations that have steadily declined. For many denominations, institutions, and networks, numerical growth is often a direct result of increased non-white membership, evidenced in the growth (until recently) in the Assemblies of God, with 'ethnic minorities' now accounting for nearly half of its membership. As people of color continue to gain influence and positions of authority in these institutions, they will be better equipped to lead the reforms necessary to reach a diverse North American society.

Through immigration, the global church significantly impacts how evangelicalism and evangelism look as we face the future. Multi-ethnic church planting has become mainstream for most North American evangelical denominations and networks. Heterogeneous leadership among church planting teams is seen as a demonstration of the gospel and a testament to a non-believing world regarding how the hostility between different groups can be torn down in Christ.

Some of the ongoing cultural complexities and increasing challenges facing the church's witness in North America are the convergence of historic issues faced by indigenous peoples, the US/Mexico border crisis, and residual institutional tracks left by segregation and racist policies. Part of the church's evangelistic witness is offering a prophetic voice amid these issues while appropriately admitting its biases and complicity, especially in its history and systemic structures.

The Evolving Shape of the North American Pastorate

Just as North American society is evolving rapidly, these changes are echoed in a shifting pastorate. In surveying the broad trends in a reshaping pastorate, four critical evolutions are critical for leaders to understand and engage in relation to the advance of the Great Commission.

The first has been the notable increase of public and visible leadership of women in varying ministry contexts. Among evangelicals in North America, recent data suggests a wide majority are comfortable with women clergy even as the actual numbers lag considerably behind.[4] Even as evangelical denominations and networks disagree over the role of women in pastoral offices, this growth in public perception suggests that women lead-

ers across ministry and pastoral leadership will become a critical force in the reshaping of the North American religious landscape.

A second is the rise of nondenominational churches, where most church growth has occurred over the past three decades, with over 9,000 such churches added in a decade. 'The two biggest stories in American religion are the nones and the nons',[5] Ryan Burge observes. Nondenominational church membership would be the largest denomination if it were one. This trend impacts pastoral leadership from theological education to developing vibrant pastoral community.

In addition, a significant evolution among pastors is the rise of bi-vocational ministry. Particularly in communities without significant economic support—such as rural and urban contexts—the bi-vocational pastor is a necessity. These ministers and church leaders rely upon full- or part-time jobs that supplement their pastoral income yet often balance the demands of a full-time ministry position.

Parallel to the rise of bi-vocational ministry is the evolution in formal ministry training and education as church leaders shift away from traditional programs. The accelerated popularity of online education has and will continue to reshape ministry training as church leaders remain deeply divided on its short- and long-term impact. While concerns focus on the unintended consequences of moving away from traditional, in-person education, such as leaders being ill-equipped and under-resourced to endure in effective ministry, online education provides unique opportunities for ministry training including enabling church leaders to continue to serve local communities while pursuing higher education.

The Necessity of Future Sustainability Models

Across regions, ministry specialization, and cultures, few challenges registered as consistently and urgently as the toll of ministry burnout. The pandemic certainly accelerated both in terms of scope and severity as pastors and ministry leaders were often left to bear the weight of their communities and organizations. Yet while the pandemic exacerbated the crisis, the seeds of ministry burnout are generational, and the result is a clergy and ministry force near its breaking point.

As the Hartford Institute recently discovered, more than half of all clergy (53 percent) express burnout to the point of leaving their church and/or ministry entirely.[6] More than just the need for rest, the degree and urgency of this burnout speaks to the flaws in our system that is failing to equip, support, and sustain ministry leaders. As this gets worse with the impending 'Great Retirement' of Boomers beginning in 2030, North American churches and ministry leaders face a complex and urgent challenge.[7]

This crisis of burnout ushers in two new opportunities for the Great Commission as we look to the future. First, leaders can finally begin to rethink our vision of the sustainable pastorate, challenging long-held assumptions about what constitutes healthy ministries, organizations, and communities. Through investing in sustainable models for ministry in the short-term, opportunities exist for long-term effectiveness. Already churches are finding pathways for this practice through investing in pastor treatment centers to restore and equip pastors with counseling and rest.

Second, through both dismantling abusive systems and modeling healthy systems and communities, churches and ministries can offer a prophetic word to a North American culture predicated on burnout. Reshaping our cultural and church-based conversations of burnout around spiritual, mental, and physical health empowers the church to lead a critical conversation in North American society. By embracing our shortcomings, the church can better learn to empathize with hurting people, especially those dealing with trauma. As church leaders in North America put on a trauma-informed lens when it comes to leadership development, congregational care, and outreach, those suffering with ministry burnout can have hope.

These investments not only secure a pastoral and ministry force equipped to fulfill the Great Commission but testify the truth that it is only by God's power that we can build his kingdom.

Conclusion

North America remains a vibrant and complex mission field with considerable potential for kingdom work in the coming decades. While its pressing challenges require innovative and godly leadership, these should not obscure the countless churches and ministries at work proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel across the continent.

As leaders gather in Seoul, this report is designed as a tool for identifying key areas and gaps in our mission where we can collaborate, encourage, and resource one another for greater effectiveness. Far from exhaustive, this report focused on the rising peaks of our missional frontier: secularization, digital ministry, our changing pastorate, and the defining cultural idols of our day. What emerges is a region amid seismic transition yet still with significant potential for innovation, collaboration, and global impact in the work of the Great Commission.

Endnotes

1 'Religion Statistics In Canada', Made in CA, Toronto, ON (March 2024), madeinca.ca/religion-statistics-canada; 'Modeling the Future of Religion In America'. Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (13 September 2022), pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/how-u-s-religious-composition-has-changed-in-recent-decades/.

2 '8 in 10 Americans Say Religion Is Losing Influence in Public Life', Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (15 March 2024), pewresearch.org/religion/2024/03/15/8-in-10-americans-say-religion-is-losing-influence-in-public-life; 'Around 4 in 10 Americans have become more spiritual over time; fewer have become more religious', Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (17 January 2024), https://pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/01/17/around-4-in-10-americans-have-become-more-spiritual-over-time-fewer-have-become-more-religious; Jeffrey M. Jones, 'US Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time', Gallup, 19 March 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

3 Christopher Wright, 'Here are your Gods': Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times, Carol Stream, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 111.

4 Ryan Burge, 'Researcher: Most Evangelicals Support Women in Church Leadership', Christianity Today, 30 June 2020. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/research-evangelicals-women-leaders-complementarian-preach.html

5 Daniel Silliman, "Nondenominational' Is Now the Largest Segment of American Protestants, Christianity Today, 16 November 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/november/religion-census-nondenominational-church-growth-nons.html

6 "I'm Exhausted All the Time': Exploring the Factors Contributing to Growing Clergy Discontentment'. Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations, a research project conducted by Hartford Institute for Religion Research and funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. https://www.covidreligionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Clergy_Discontentment_Patterns_Report-compressed_2.pdf

7 Richard Fry, 'The pace of Boomer retirements has accelerated in the past year', Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/09/the-pace-of-boomer-retirements-has-accelerated-in-the-past-year/

Authors

Andy Cook serves as co-director of Lausanne North America with Dr Ed Stetzer. Since 2019, he has served as managing director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center, leading its eight institutes dedicated to convening leaders, helpful research, and publishing resources. He previously served as executive director of operations for the Global Leadership Network, a global gathering of more than 400,000 leaders. He has a BA in biblical literature and communications from Taylor University and an MBA from Dominican University.

Dee Crye is the Operations Manager of the Billy Graham Centers' Church Evangelism Institute (CEI), providing leadership and oversight to expand the quality, reach, and impact of the work of CEI and the Research Institute. Prior to joining the institute, she worked at the country's first community college facilitating employee-based diversity, equity, and inclusion training.

Dr D.A. Horton serves as an Assistant Professor and Program Director of the Intercultural Studies program at California Baptist University. He is also blessed to serve as an Associate Teaching Pastor at The Grove Community Church. He earned his B.S. in Biblical Studies from Calvary Bible College, his Masters Degree in Christian Studies from Calvary Theological Seminary and is working on his Ph.D. in Applied Theology with a North American Missions emphasis at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has published nine books including G.O.S.P.E.L., DNA, and Foudnations of the faith.

Dr Todd Korpi is a Pentecostal missiologist, researcher, and writer. In addition to work consulting with churches on organizational effectiveness and missional engagement, Dr. Korpi serves as lead researcher of the Digital Mission Consortia at the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center and as an adjunct instructor in mission and leadership at several institutions.

Dr Joshua Laxton is passionate about mobilizing the church to participate in God's grand redemptive mission. He has been faithfully serving his local church in vocational ministry for more than 20 years and received a PhD in North American Missiology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Joshua serve as the Lead Pastor at Northland Church in Longwood, FL, and served as the Co-Director of the Billy Graham Center and Co-Director of Lausanne North America at Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL.

Rev Dr Michael Lee is Associate Professor of Ministry & Leadership and Program Director of three M.A. programs (M.A. Evangelism & Leadership, M.A. Ministry Leadership, M.A. Missional Church Movements) at Wheaton College. As ordained minister, Michael served in bi-vocational pastoral ministries during and after completing his Th.M. in Systematic Theology and Intercultural Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. He earned a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has taught at several schools prior to coming to Wheaton College. As a missiologist focused on salient contemporary challenges to Christian discipleship and gospel witness, he has presented and published papers on a wide range of issues including religious pluralism, race and ethnicity, social impact of technology, Christian ecumenism, and deconversion.

Dr Andrew MacDonald serves as the associate director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center, overseeing the Center's initiatives and as a key leader in its annual Amplify Conference. An expert in American religious history, Dr. MacDonald received his Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School after an M.A. in Philosophy of Religion from Talbot School of Theology. His research is focused on the ways in which Protestant adapted their theologies and practices of mission, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, including a focus on the rise of the Megachurch, the Jesus People Movement, and Digital Missiology.



NORTH AMERICA

Dr Ed Stetzer is the Dean and Professor of Leadership and Christian Ministry at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. He also serves as Distinguish Visiting Scholar at Wycliffe Hall at Oxford University, where he teaches twice a year. Stetzer has planted, revitalized, and pastored churches; trained pastors and church planters on six continents; earned two master's degrees and two doctorates; and he has written hundreds of articles and a dozen books. He is Regional Director for Lausanne North America, is the Editor-in-Chief of Outreach Magazine, and regularly writes for news outlets such as USA Today and CNN. His national radio show, Ed Stetzer Live, airs Saturdays on Moody Radio and affiliates. Stetzer serves his local church, Mariners Church, as Scholar in Residence & Teaching Pastor.

Rev Dr Andrea Summers serves as the Dean of Spiritual Formation and Campus Pastor at Indiana Weslyan University. Dr. Summers is an ordained minister in The Wesleyan Church and has served as a pastor, a denominational leader, and a professor. She has a huge heart for college students and is passionate about creating space for them to be shaped into the image of Christ for the sake of others.

Daniel Yang is the director of the Church Multiplication Institute at the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center, a think tank for evangelism and church planting. He has pastored and helped plant churches in Detroit, Dallas-Fort Worth, Toronto, and Chicago. He earned an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a BS in computer science from the University of Michigan, and is currently a PhD student in intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

OCEANIA



OCEANIA

Chris Edwards, Ainsley Freeman, Elliot Keane, Tammy White

Region Overview

The Oceania region covers a geographical area spanning the Eastern and Western hemispheres and includes over 10,000 Pacific islands. There are fifteen independent states (Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu), and thirteen associated or non-sovereign territories (American Samoa, Christmas Island, Cocos Keeling Islands, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Niue, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, and Wallis and Futuna). There are four sub-regions in Oceania: Australasia, Melanesia and Micronesia, and Polynesia. The four most populous nations are Australia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and Fiji. Due to the region's distance from the rest of the world, it has unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to the state of the great commission.

The State of the Church in Oceania

Recent statistics of the region as a whole indicate that Oceania is predominantly Christian. The gospel was brought by missionaries from Europe and the United States to the Pacific islands, creating a variety of 'historic' or 'mainline' churches that are still dominant in the various islands of the region. The success of this missionary activity across the 20th century is unprecedented. In the span of 75 years, the vast majority of the Pacific Islands became dominated by Christian Faith[1].

However, the picture of Christianity in Australia and New Zealand is quite different. These countries have half the number of people identifying with Christianity, and church attendance is declining. Results from the most recent census and church surveys can classify Australian (Protestant) churches using the terms 'growing', 'reproducing', and 'multiplying' as follows:

Growing: About 20 percent of churches grew by at least 10 percent in weekly attendance from 2017 to 2021.

Reproducing: Less than 1 percent of churches 'reproduced' by planting a church in Australia, in 2019 (the year before the pandemic occurred) but didn't plant in other years.

Multiplying: About only 0.25 percent of churches, which is one-quarter of the planting churches, planted in Australia in 2019, and are planting repeatedly.

Church Growth and Decline

In Australia, About 20 percent of Protestant churches are estimated to have grown by 10 percent or more from 2016 to 2021, while almost 70 percent are estimated to be declining by 10 percent or more. This does not compare well against the years 2011 to 2016 where over 30 percent of churches were estimated to be growing, while 50 percent were estimated to be declining.

Growth/Decline Period	Percentage of Churches		
	Growing	Stable	Declining
2016-2021	18%	13%	69%
2011-2016	31%	19%	50%

Figure 1: Growth and Decline of Local Protestant Churches: 2011-2021

There is little distinction to observe between different locality types in regard to church growth and decline from 2016 to 2021, except for smaller rural towns (towns with less than 2,000 people). Churches in the smaller towns have lower levels of declining churches. Growth is also higher in smaller towns and may reflect the 'sea-change' or 'tree-change' many urban dwellers sought during and post-pandemic.

Broadly across Oceania, there is clear evidence that the establishment and growth of new churches is taking place at the expense

of the historic mainline churches. There has been an emergence of increasingly complex networks of transnational Pentecostal, charismatic, and evangelical groups and churches. These networks have formed together as a movement where flows of people, money, and ideas spread with growing speed and intensity. There is no doubt this form of church resonates with the people, particularly in the island States.

If the current trend of change in religious affiliation continues, by 2050 the majority of Christians will not belong to the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that at one point represented a staggering 90 percent of the population.

The historical mainline churches in the Pacific Islands still cooperate at a regional level through the Pacific Conference of Churches, and internationally via the World Council of Churches. However, committing and contributing to the ecumenical movement is dramatically decreasing. There is a growing tendency to nationalism at the expense of ecumenical cooperation putting the member churches of ecumenical bodies in a vulnerable position with regard to future developments.

Church Planting

While the differences in growth or decline between denominational groups are fairly small, there are marked differences when it comes to church planting. Mainstream churches record the lowest level of church planting, with 2.8 percent planting a church in the past 5 years (Table below). This means the annual planting rate for mainstream denomination churches is now less than 1 percent.

Other non-Pentecostal church denominations recorded a slightly higher figure, with 3.8 percent of their churches planting another church and about 1.2 percent of churches from these denominations planting a church each year.

Pentecostal denominations recorded a far higher figure, with 14.5 percent of churches indicating they had planted a church in the past 5 years, or about 4.6 percent of Pentecostal churches planting another church annually.

The rate of Australian church planting appears to have been in very slight decline over the past decade or so. A large proportion (perhaps over 40 percent) of church plants by Pentecostal churches were overseas.

Denominational Mainstream	Percentage of Churches planting in any country over the 2017-2021 period	Estimated annual rate of planting for 2019
Mainstream Protestant[1]	2.8%	0.9%
Pentecostal[2]	14.5%	4.6%
Other Protestant[3]	3.8%	1.2%
All Protestant combined	5.0%	1.5%

Figure 2: General Church Planting from 2017 to 2021 by Denominational Group

Source: NCLS Research 2021 Church Census database (2021 n=2,832, weighted)
1 Includes Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting churches
2 Includes Acts 2 Alliance, Acts Global Churches, Australian Christian Churches (ACC), C3 Church, CityLife Church, CRC Churches International, and International Network of Churches (INC)
3 Includes Baptist, Churches of Christ, Christian Reformed, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), Salvation Army, and Vineyard Churches Australia

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on church life, with a large majority of churches experiencing decline, and a significant interruption to church planting efforts. However, before the pandemic occurred there were already significant challenges to the church in Australia.

Between Now and 2050: Key Trends Shaping the Great Commission

What are the Emerging Demographics?

The demographics of Oceania are showcasing a more multicultural and urbanized region, with an aging population. In recent years, the region has seen an increase in immigration, resulting in far greater diversity in an increasingly multicultural society.

One of the significant shifts is the increasing number of immigrants from Asian countries. Asian immigration, particularly from China and India, has been steadily rising, driven by economic opportunities and educational prospects. As a result, cities like Sydney, Melbourne, and Auckland have become vibrant multicultural hubs. This trend has not only brought diversity to the region but also influenced various aspects of society, including food, fashion, language, and religion.

Moreover, Oceania is experiencing a gradual increase in life expectancy and a significant decline in fertility rates. This combination has resulted in an aging population. The impact of an aging population can already be seen in the changing workforce dynamics and the strain it places on healthcare systems. Governments in the region are increasingly looking for strategies to support the aging population and faith-based health and aged care will continue to provide many opportunities for gospel proclamation.

What is the Foundation of Trust?

Perhaps inevitably or perhaps due to the speed of adoption, technology and digital life is eroding trust. Technology, the rise in AI, global data breaches, influencers, click bait, chat bots and fake news have contaminated some of the region's fundamental trust indicators.

In Australia, misinformation is considered the biggest issue for society, with 94 percent of Australians naming it as the number one issue - over cost of living, mental health, international affairs and climate change[2].

The rapid rise in AI technology which has absorbed much of Oceania's interest and attention over the last 12–18 months[3] can be destabilizing. We can no longer use voice, images, conversation, or video as a reliable source of truth, because Artificial Intelligence is able to closely mimic humanness.

Those in Oceania are also skeptical of celebrities and influencers - not trusting their opinions, data or thoughts and they also don't have much trust of religious leaders either, with 74 percent of Australians indicating that they don't trust them[4].

What is Fair and Just?

Men and women in partnership

Across Oceania, Christian congregations are majority female but are largely led by men[5]. In contexts across Oceania gender norms are often influenced by certain readings of Scripture. The countries with the greatest gender equality include Papua New Guinea in Melanesia[6]. Across the Pacific Islands the relational framework creates an environment for abuse and exploitation[7]. Silent suffering, spiritual and physical abuse often happen in these contexts[8]. In Australia and New Zealand society in general, gender equality is a social endeavor, but amongst Indigenous, Māori, and Pacifica cultures (as well as the rapidly growing migrant communities across Australia, including those who migrate from Pacific Islands), gender equality can be experienced as an imported western ideology and incompatible or even undesired within local social structures[9]. Across Indigenous, Māori, and Pacifica cultures, gender is understood and expressed differently from Western frameworks and is often defined by community and social relations and local cultural practices[10] While a cultural intelligence that appreciates the diversity of family systems and structures across the region must be further developed[11], there is significant need across Oceania to address and end gender-based violence[12], improve access for women and girls to education and livelihoods, and develop the opportunities for women in leadership in their communities, professions, and churches.

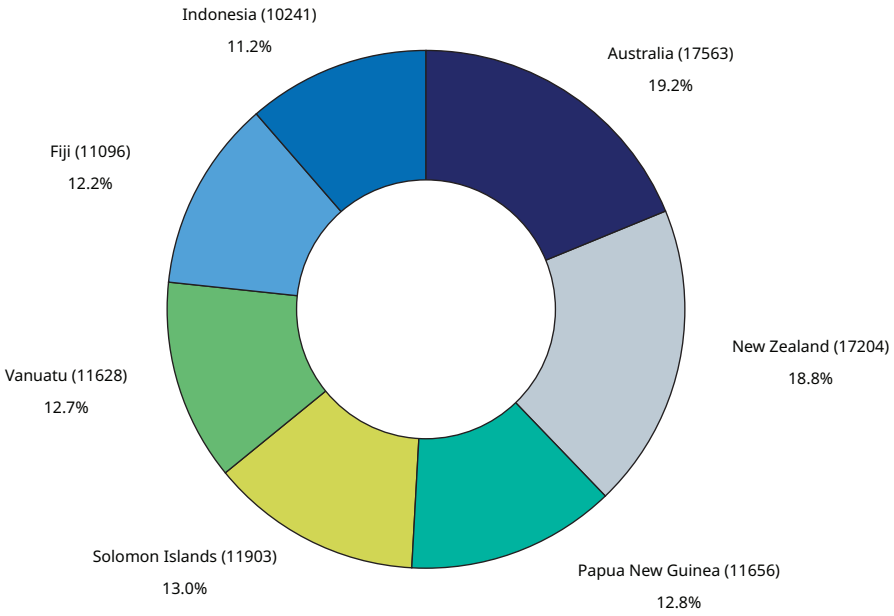
What is Sustainable?

Mental health

Mental health conditions are increasingly impacting countries throughout Oceania, with the hypothesized causes of this increase to be wide and varied[13]. In some regions of Oceania, the significant increase in mental health conditions has not yet been researched or understood. Given this gap, accurate statistics of the prevalence of mental health conditions in the region cannot be accurately established. Of the statistics available, Australia and New Zealand have some of the highest prevalence rates of mental health conditions globally[14].

Across the board in Oceania, children, youth and adults are experiencing depression and anxiety. A significant increase of mental health conditions in youth (depression, anxiety, substance use and suicide) are having key sociological outworkings, such as the prevalence of youth crime, and the devastating impact of suicide. Psychiatric conditions are also more prevalent, and substance use disorders more

Figure 3: Prevalence of Mental Health Conditions Oceania (per 100000)



Source: INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH METRICS AND EVALUATION, 2019

significantly affecting indigenous populations across Oceania[15].

Factors driving the increasing prevalence of mental health conditions are complex and varied. Across Oceania, COVID-19, conflict, lower socioeconomic status, increasing cost of living, domestic and family violence, childhood trauma, and loneliness have been identified. The impact of climate change has been another significant driver especially across Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia[16].

Increasingly those affected and the most vulnerable with limited access to equitable services include women, and the indigenous population[17] Given the increased demand, mental health services across public, private and NGO sectors are struggling to meet the mental health needs across the region. A World Mental Health Report on mental health states that 'across the globe, mental health conditions are widespread, undertreated and under-resourced'. It is estimated in Oceania that more than 90 percent of people with a mental health condition don't have access to psychological treatment[18].

With this increasing need in mental health, there is an opportunity for the Christian church. While mental health is prevalent in the church community, there is limited understanding or training amongst church leaders and community. WHO noted that 'mental health is everyone's business', and identified the need for promoting connection for mental well-being and recovery. With loneliness considered a pandemic, and its impacts on mental health and recovery, the church can educate and equip to reduce the stigma around mental health, and create a space for prevention, connection and healing.[19]

There is a burning need to adequately train mental health clinicians to provide culturally competent as well as integrated psychological treatment with faith; and to collaborate with the church community[20].

Creation care

The year 2023 was officially the warmest on record. Several climate centres include January 2024 in their datasets to show that we have now exceeded the limit of 1.5° C warming above pre-industrial levels[21]. Atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations also continue to rise, with atmospheric carbon dioxide levels at 422.80 parts per million in January 2024, up from 418.13 parts per million in January 2022. A 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report[22] projected that the 1.5° C

threshold would likely be crossed between 2030 and 2050. The early crossing of this threshold has serious consequences for the health, well-being, and way of life of people in Oceania. While this threshold allows for greater opportunities for adapting than a 2° C threshold, there are still wide reaching impacts such as increased precipitation due to tropical cyclones and sea level rise, greatly impacting low lying coastal areas and deltas[23].

In addition to land-based temperature impacts, the early passing of the 1.5° C threshold has impacts on the oceans. Warming seas, together with increased acidity and reduced oxygen levels will impact marine biodiversity, fisheries, and ecosystems (IPCC, 2018). This in turn impacts ecosystem services and tourism in the region.

Migration will become an increasingly used strategy[24] but increased migration risks impacting cultures and values, producing a reticence to leave[25]. While theology remains a barrier to acceptance of climate change science and a readiness to adapt, the church will continue to play a key role in the region. New theological framings such as the Exodus will be required to counteract narratives around Noah's Flood or inadequate eschatological schemes[26].

What is Ministry in a Digital Age?

Another issue for this region is the impact of geographical distance and therefore the great effect of digital acceleration.

Globally, COVID-19 disrupted and accelerated social changes that may have taken decades or even generations to come about[27]. The transition to digital and the adoption of technology in faith and spiritual life is one significant example.

Nicky Gumbel referred to this as 'the greatest evangelistic opportunity of our lifetime'[28].

For Oceania, the adoption and acceptance of digital technology when it comes to church forms, discipleship and proclamation has meant:

- More people can explore faith in a format that is non-confrontational. Alpha Australia found that exploring the topic of faith online is actually preferable to people[29].
- Resources are able to be shared and scaled in a way never possible before. This means we can have a greater reach and greater impact with less strain on finite resources.[30]
- On-demand content is bigger than ever, and people are used to consuming content in their own time. Digital Church opens the opportunity for people to explore faith, be discipled and worship in a way that is accessible. This is significant for groups such as: shift workers, parents with young children, those traveling, those unwell or immunocompromised, or those unable to be at a church gathering due to accessibility issues or mental health.[31]

Regional Considerations for the Great Commission

First Nations Voice

In Australia and New Zealand, a significant wound exists in the story of First Nations people and the church. Of course, much good has come with the missionaries of previous generations in gospel sharing and discipleship, health, education, social support, and more. But the story also carries pain and generational consequences including loss of cultural lore and identity, forced family separations, language, and land.[32] In the Pacific Islands, the majority Christian cultures have found a way to live culture and faith.

Evangelism attitudes among younger generations

The state of the great commission will be greatly impacted in Oceania if attitudes toward evangelism remain in the emerging adult generations: Gen Y and Gen Z. Not only do these generations affiliate less with Christianity than other regions of the world,[33] but they are dropping out of church at a faster rate than the global average.[34]

Adding to this, Barna's research based out of the United States demonstrates that Millennials are more opposed to the idea of evangelism with 47 percent believing it to be 'wrong'[35] and

the majority of Australian parents don't believe it's important to pass on faith to their children.[36]

On a positive note, 36 percent of Australians are open to changing their views on faith and their trust and positive associations toward Christian people remains steady. If invited personally to church, 68 percent of Australians said they would be likely to attend.[37]

The emerging generations of those living in Oceania are more open to discussing spirituality and are turning to media (social media and mainstream media) to participate in dialogues about faith and belief. Sixty-four percent of Australians believe the media is the most appropriate space for religious and spiritual discussions.

Oceania's geopolitical climate

Oceania is and will be impacted by the interest and ambitions of China for the foreseeable future. China's growing population and expanding industries require a stable and sustainable supply of natural resources, which Oceania is able to support. Additionally, China views this region as an untapped market for its goods and services, given the region's increasing disposable income and growing consumer market. By investing in infrastructure projects and fostering trade relationships with Oceania countries, China aims to deepen its economic presence and perhaps benefit from the region's tactical potential in a military sense.

This area is considered a key element in the 'first island chain' strategy pursued by China, which seeks to establish a defensive perimeter along its maritime borders. By strengthening its ties with Oceania countries, China aims to ensure their support in regional disputes and potentially gain strategic access to military facilities in the Pacific.

It should be expected that over the next three decades, Chinese immigration throughout the region will remain at significant levels and this will have an equally significant impact on evangelistic and pastoral ministries.

Opportunities And Challenges For The Great Commission

As growing mental health challenges, climate change, issues in leadership, generational shifts and rapid digital adoption impact Oceania, there is a challenge for the church to reflect its relevance and be able to authentically participate in the Great Commission. Christians will need to address these challenges and embrace the opportunities so we can see more disciples made and retained toward 2050.

Challenges

Eroded Trust: This will be a great challenge to the validity of the gospel and the momentum of the great commission. We will need to work out what makes the message trust-worthy, reliable and relevant to a community that is growing in distrust.

Mediated Message: If evangelism and faith conversations are primarily migrating to a digital and mediated environment, proclamation will take a different form and so too will the opportunity for response. The distance between the new convert and the front door of a church building will likely grow, with more Christians potentially existing outside of traditional church settings.

Opportunities

Relevance: The church needs to show relevance by being authentic and transparent, to learn how to engage and connect Christians across difference; and specifically, how to relate to and empower the emerging generation. There is a growing call for the church to step into spaces of social concern to lead, model change and champion advocacy in crucial issues impacting Oceania such as mental health, climate, gender violence, Indigenous reconciliation and transparency.

Indigenous Leadership: The future of the Great Commission requires a generative imagination of following the lead and voice of Indigenous, Māori and Pacifica Christian leaders. With patience, a generational horizon, and a generous posture of sharing the significant resources that exist, particularly in Australia

and New Zealand, we can see a future church shaped by the voices and presence of diverse indigenous peoples across Oceania.

The future of the Great Commission in Oceania requires further developing of cultural intelligence and a shift within dominant western frameworks to learn from and make room for Indigenous, Māori, and Pacifica cultural systems and ideas. This includes a theology that interconnects God, worship, all of life, ecology, economy, community, and land. Australia and New Zealand have strong theological education institutions that are well funded and critical for equipping the next generation of leaders. This development must include the voices of women and Indigenous, Māori and Pacifica Christian leaders to shape a future that embraces and even grounds the Oceanic church in a way of discipleship and life that is significantly shaped by Oceanic culture and practices.

Gender Equality: This is one of the ongoing themes in the Pacific and the future of the Great Commission requires churches across Oceania to engage with gender in light of biblical teaching. This will include empowering women regardless of our particular theological leaning; addressing social constructs, harmful practices, and unjust social norms and ending gender-based discrimination and violence. For churches across Oceania, and with culturally appropriate adjustments, this means intentionally shifting the culture of our churches and institutions to continue the long work of making room for women, and addressing second generation gender bias that still exists, even in women friendly spaces. The church has an opportunity to equip, train and empower men and women in the church and community context to break down the existing sociological and implicit structures that drive gender-based discrimination in Oceania. There is an opportunity for the church to confront the theological and social beliefs that disempower women and lead true inclusion and empowerment. Across Oceania, a movement of women worshiping in and leading safe and empowering churches and the marketplace are an integral part of any future movement of the Spirit.

Sustainability: With mental health conditions on the rise, churches have a crucial role in supporting those with mental health conditions, to reduce the stigma around mental health and create inclusive spaces for authentic connection and inclusion. To do so, there is an opportunity for churches from an Organizational to congregational level to create safety; be equipped in mental health; and to meaningfully create community. With the prevalence of mental health across Oceania, the future of the Great Commission is to embrace those with a mental health condition, so that the church is a place of inclusion, healing, and social connection.

Emerging Generations: If younger Christians can revive their passion for the gospel and the Great Commission, and if they can leverage the gift of technology and media—there may yet be more evangelization to come. Younger people want to discuss faith and they want to do it in a mediated format. This exponentially expands the opportunity to preach the gospel 'to the ends of the earth'.

Endnotes

1 C.W. Forman, The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022), 227. *https://books.google.com.au/books?id=zyKcEAAAQBAJ.*

2 "Australia Talks," ABC, n.d, accessed 1 December, 2023, *https://australiatalks.abc.net.au/.*

3 "Google Trends," Google, accessed 1 December 2023, *https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=AU&q=AI,Jesus&hl=en.*

4 "Australia Talks data shows we don't trust Instagram influencers, but advertisers rely on them increasingly," ABC, 2021, accessed 16 January 2024, *https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-27/australians-say-they-do-not-trust-influencers-but-do-they-really/100164654.*

5 Gina A. Zurlo, "Christianity in Oceania," in Women in World Christianity (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2023), 141.

6 Zurlo, "Christianity and Gender-based Violence," 269.

7 Randall A. Prior, "Vanuatu," in Christianity in Oceania (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 100-07.

8 Zurlo, "Christianity and Gender-based Violence," 265-83.

9 Zurlo, "Christianity in Oceania," 138.

10 Victoria Kavafolau, "Gender," in Christianity in Oceania, ed. Katalina Tahaafe-Williams Kenneth R. Ross, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinbugh University Press, 2021), 275-91.

11 Loïs Bastide and Denis Regnier, ed., Family, Violence, and social change in the Pacific Islands (New York: Routledge, 2023), 1-7, 179.

12 Claudia Garcia-Moreno and LynnMarie Sadinha, Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018 (World Health Organisation, 2021), 13.

13 Fiona J Charlson and Holly E Erskine, "Burden of mental and substance use disorders in Indigenous Australians and Oceania," Australasian Psychiatry 23, no. 6_suppl (2015), https://doi.org/10.1177/1039856215608295, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26634661/.

14 "Mental Health," Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2019, accessed 22 May 2024, https://www.healthdata.org/research-analysis/health-risks-issues/mental-health.

15 Mental Disorders - Level 2 Cause, (Global Health Metrics, 17 October 2020), https://www.thelancet.com/pb-assets/Lancet/gbd/summaries/diseases/mental-disorders.pdf.; "Mental Health Atlas 2020 Country profile: Micronesia (Federated States Of)," World Health Organization (WHO), 2020, accessed 24 May 2024, https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/mental-health-atlas-fsm-2020-country-profile. ; Charlson and Erskine, "Burden of mental and substance use disorders in Indigenous Australians and Oceania."; "Australia's mental health system - Mental health - AIHW," Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024, accessed 24 May 2024, https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/australias-mental-health-services. ; World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All, (Geneva: World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022).

16 Charlson and Erskine, "Burden of mental and substance use disorders in Indigenous Australians and Oceania." ; "Federated States of Micronesia 2020 Mental Health National Outcome Measures (NOMS).", SAMHSA, 2020, accessed 22 May 2024, http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt35290/FederatedStatesofMicronesia.pdf. ; World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All. ; "Summary - Mental health - AIHW," Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024, accessed 22 May 2024, https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/summary. ; "The loneliness epidemic," University of Sydney, 2023, accessed 22 May 2024, https://www.sydney.edu.au/engage/events-sponsorships/sydney-ideas/2023/loneliness-epidemic.html.

17 World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All.

18 World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All. ; Charlson and Erskine, "Burden of mental and substance use disorders in Indigenous Australians and Oceania."

19 Tamara White, Flourishing Spaces, 2023. ; World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All.

20 Mark McCrindle and Shannon Wherret, The Future of the Church in Australia (Norwest: McCrindle Research, 2020), https://mccrindle.com.au/app/uploads/reports/Future-of-the-Church-in-Australia-Report-2020.pdf. ; White, Flourishing Spaces.

21 "Press Release: 2023 Was Warmest Year Since 1850," news release, 12 January 2024, https://berkeleyearth.org/press-release-2023-was-the-warmest-year-on-recordpress-release/. ; "Copernicus: In 2024, the world experienced the warmest January on record," news release, 8 February 2024, https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2024-world-experienced-warmest-january-record.

22 Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al., eds., Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty (IPCC, 2018).

23 "Summary for Policy Makers," in Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty, ed. Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al. (IPCC, 2018).

24 Robyn Battles, Evading High Tides: Analyzing the Challenges of Climate-Induced Migration in Oceania (Pearl Harbor: Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance: Texas A&M University, 2021).

25 Stephanie Long and Janice Wormworth, "Tuvalu," in Climate Change: Voices from Communities Affected by Climate Change (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Friends of the Earth, 2007), 34.

26 T.A.J White, "Christianity and Climate Change Adaption: Sea-level Rise and Ritualising Village Relocation in Fiji," Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies 16, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-id431.

27 McCrindle and Wherret, The Future of the Church in Australia.

28 "Evangelism Finds a Way," Alpha Australia, n.d., accessed 1 December 2023, 2023, https://www.alpha.org.au/post/evangelisation-finds-a-way.

29 McCrindle and Wherret, The Future of the Church in Australia, 10.; Alpha Australia, "Evangelism Finds a Way."

30 McCrindle and Wherret, The Future of the Church in Australia, 28.

31 McCrindle and Wherret, The Future of the Church in Australia, 27.

32 'Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2023', (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2023), 25.

33 'The Connected Generation: Australia/New Zealand Report' Barna Group (Barna: 2019), 19.

34 'The Connected Generation', 22.

35 "Reviving Evangelism," Barna, 2019, accessed 15 April 2023, https://barna.gloo.us/reports/reviving-evangelism.

36 'The Impact of Faith on Australian Society', Mccrindle Research (Olive Tree Media, n.d.), 34.

37 Mark McCrindle, Sophie Renton, and Jason Authers, The Changing Faith Landscape of Australia (Norwest: McCrindle Research, 2022), 19, 30, 45.

Authors

Rt Rev Chris Edwards is the Bishop of North Sydney and has been in ministry since 1994. He has served in churches in Sydney and Adelaide, and also worked in various Christian Not-for- Profits both in Australia and Europe.

Mrs. Ainsley Freeman is a Ministry Associate with Olive Tree Media and has been in various leadership roles in churches for over 15 years. She is a writer, speaker and communications professional - working to grow the reach and impact of organisations.

Rev Elliot Keane is the Leadership Development Facilitator at Baptist Churches of South Australia and Northern Territory and works with Indigenous Australians in urban contexts for Baptist Mission Australia. He has been a lead pastor and community mobiliser and now equips others in areas of pioneering leadership, mission, community engagement and church revitalisation.

Dr Tammy White is a Clinical Psychologist. Tammy has worked across a vast range of community and organisational settings to empower psychological wellbeing. Tammy is an organisational consultant providing leadership training, coaching and consulting; a Board Approved Supervisor; a sessional lecturer, and researcher.

Contributor:

Dr Mick Pope has a PhD in meteorology from Monash University and he is Professor of Environmental Mission at Missional University. His work sits at the intersection of theology, mission and the environment, and he co-authored a book, *A Climate of Hope: Church and Mission in a Warming World.*

SOUTH ASIA



SOUTH ASIA

Shivraj K. Mahendra, ed., Stephen King, Rubab Raza, Ruth Surenthiraraj, Richard Howell, Raju Gurung, Joel Christian, Bony Baroi, Adeel Samuel

Introduction

South Asia is the home to a vast array of cultures, economies, geographies, nation-states, and world religions. The Lausanne South Asia region comprises the nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Socio-religious crosswinds involving Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, along with Communism and Radical Fundamentalism have left lasting impacts upon the region's societies today. Christianity faces immense struggles, including navigating ingrained social stratification, culturally-accepted discrimination, as well as state-sponsored persecution.

Despite the challenges, the gospel of kingdom moves forward through a resilient minority, an opportunistic diaspora, and the rise of indigenous theologies that provide a fresh witness of Christ in revolutionary ways. The future of Christianity in the region is expected to yield new insights into the global impact of the message of Christ.[1]

This brief report, voicing the conditions, concerns, and hopes of the region, attempts to present the following four reflections impacting the life and mission of the Christian church: (1) global topics (2) regional issues (3) impacts of these issues, and (4) opportunities and challenges for Great Commission efforts. We shall begin with key global topics.

Key Global Topics that Will Shape the Region Between Now and 2050

Persecution

In the regions of Afghanistan (including adjacent parts of Iran), India, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Pakistan the key global topic is persecution of Christians. According to the World Watch List 2024 these 4 South Asian counties are ranked within the first fifteen most persecuted nations for their faith in Christianity: Pakistan is 7th, Iran is 9th, Afghanistan is 10th, and India is 11th. In all these nations they face state-sponsored persecution. Christians are detained and often punished with torture and long prison sentences.[2]

Bangladesh, though established as a secular country, has rejected its roots and attacks on Christians have increased.[3] On to the World Watch List, Bangladesh is ranked 26th.[4] In April 2023, eight tribal Christians in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were killed. Another recent trend is the oppression of Christians in the Rohingya refugee camps. Rohingyas are a Muslim sect who have been forced to leave their homeland in Myanmar and the Christians amongst them have been subject to violence and persecution.[5]

> ***"Christians are detained and often punished with torture and long prison sentences."***

Pakistan even though has moved down two spots from five in 2019, does not imply a significant reduction in the levels of persecution. Christians face discrimination at educational institutions and also in the workplace. They face deplorable conditions at work with 80 percent of sanitation workers in the country being Christian[6] and poverty-stricken believers being trapped as indentured labour in the brick kilns[7]. Some Christians are subject to forced conversion to Islam especially those who are modern-day slaves. Pakistani authorities are empowered to punish individuals deemed guilty of offending another person's religious sentiments. There are many such cases where Christians are subjected to murder, death or lifetime imprisonment.[8]

In India, attacks on Christians and their places of worship have steadily skyrocketed, not only in rural areas, but also in large cities. The United Christian Forum stated that between January to June 400 incidents of vio-

lence against Christians across 23 States in India were recorded.[9]

In Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks have opposed the activities of the church and have also incited violence against Christians. All citizens of Maldives are required by law to be Muslims and the opposition to conversion remains high.

Poverty and economic inequality

The 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index Report finds over a third of all poor people in the world live in South Asia—which is around 389 million people. The World Bank defines poverty using the International Poverty Line, which designates extreme poverty at USD 2.15 per person per day.

Over several decades of civil unrest in Afghanistan, the economy has floundered. Malnutrition has soared, and hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost. 875,000 children are acutely malnourished while 840,000 women suffer from moderately severe malnourishment. 82 percent of all households have accumulated debts.[10] A similar situation is observed in Iran. In 2023 the Iranian Central Bank indicated that government debts have doubled. The official statistics have shown that daily calorie intake per capita has decreased by 22 percent. Inflation for essential items in 2023 was between 60 and 100 percent. The Iranian media reported that unemployment rates had declined but labour force participation rates have also gone down.

In Sri Lanka, with shrinking purchasing power and rising taxation, the new middle class are now facing basic struggles of survival despite their income levels. The frustrations of being unable to afford a middle-class lifestyle have also led to what might be termed a mass exodus of skilled labour in search of better futures overseas. Although the Sri Lankan government seems to be meeting its targets in terms of IMF conditions for extended fund facility, the reforms set in motion seem to be systematically dismantling social security nets such as welfare benefits that support the poorest. With increasing indirect and direct taxation hitting the middle-income households, a large proportion of Sri Lankans will struggle to survive.

The condition is somewhat similar for India. Although a growing global economy where some of the richest individuals of the world live, India is facing the issue of poverty like never before. According to Forbes India, poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue in India influenced by a combination of historical, socio-economic, and political factors.[11]

Global economic inequality remains a significant issue, affecting access to resources, education, and opportunities. The church has a role in addressing these disparities through social justice initiatives, charitable programs, and advocacy. By working to alleviate poverty and support economic empowerment, the church can demonstrate the practical implications of the gospel and its commitment to loving one's neighbor.[12]

Globalization and migration

Globalization continues to shape the world, influencing economic systems, cultural exchanges, and communication networks.[13] The church must adapt to this interconnectedness by fostering a global perspective in its mission. This includes supporting international missions, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and leveraging technology to connect with believers worldwide. Globalization offers unprecedented opportunities for the church to share the gospel across borders but also requires careful navigation of cultural sensitivities and global issues.[14]

Global migration is on the rise due to conflicts, economic opportunities, and environmental changes. This migration can be within the country and between countries as well. The Kerala State Planning Board of 2024 says that about 3.4 million[15] workers have migrated from outside to this southern Indian state. These workers include those from the eastern region of the country as well as from Bangladesh and Nepal. This trend brings diverse populations into closer contact, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the church. Migrants often face significant hardships, and the church has a unique opportunity to offer support and share the gospel with them. However, integrating diverse cultural backgrounds within congregations can also

be challenging, requiring sensitivity and inclusiveness in ministry practices.[16]

LGBTQI+

The growing acceptance and advocacy for LGBTQI+ rights globally challenge traditional Christian teachings on sexuality and marriage. This movement will push the church to re-examine its doctrines and pastoral approaches. Churches will need to find a balance between upholding biblical teachings and extending love and compassion to individuals in the LGBTQI+ community. This topic will require the church to engage in thoughtful, respectful dialogue while staying true to its convictions.[17]

Digital ministry and the impact of AI

With the introduction of social media and social platforms, outreach has been greatly simplified. The digital revolution has also made dissemination of information through church websites or communication across the church less difficult, thus strengthening fellowship. In addition, digital tools have made collaborative activities much easier.

Evangelism has benefitted tremendously through the advent of digital technologies like online Bibles, mobile applications, and various social platforms. The prudent use of social media has amplified the reach of God's word and the availability of the Bible in several native languages has made literacy less of a factor in evangelism.

The drawback of digital ministry is that fellowship can also become more of a virtual phenomenon than a physical one.[18] AI technology is advancing rapidly, bringing both opportunities and ethical dilemmas. AI can enhance church operations, such as improving administrative tasks, creating engaging digital content, and facilitating global communication. However, it also raises significant ethical questions, such as the potential for job displacement, privacy concerns, and the moral implications of AI decision-making. The church must provide clear, biblically grounded guidance on how to navigate these issues responsibly.[19]

Some thematic biblical reflections for digital ministry include, but not limited to, the following:

Proclamation evangelism in a digital age

The Great Commission calls Christians to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe Christ's commands (*cf*, Matt 28:19–20). Theologically, digital evangelism should be rooted in authenticity, relational engagement, and cultural sensitivity.[20]

Scripture engagement in a digital age

The Bible is the living Word of God, central to Christian faith and practice (*cf*, 2 Tim 3:16–17). Engaging with Scripture involves reading, meditating, and applying its truths. Digital tools offer new avenues for engaging with Scripture in the South Asian context. Digital platforms can also facilitate communal study, connecting believers across distances and fostering a shared journey of faith.[21]

Discipleship in a digital age

In South Asia, digital discipleship can provide flexible and scalable ways to mentor and nurture believers. By integrating technology with face-to-face interactions, the church can create a holistic discipleship experience that equips believers to live out their faith authentically and effectively.[22]

Unique Regional Topics that Will Shape the Region

Asylum seekers and refugees

In the case of Afghanistan, it is the asylum seekers and refugees that will make the unique regional topic which will impact the task of mission and evangelization. An estimated 8.2 million Afghans have fled their homeland since 2021 and 3.2 million people have been displaced to other areas of Afghanistan. Two-thirds of the population require some form of humanitarian assistance.

More than 1 million Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar and religious persecution since the 1990s. Currently more than 960,000 refugees are based in Bangladesh's Cox Bazaar region which are some of the most densely populated camps in the world. Approximately 92,000 refugees have sought refuge in Thailand while 21,000 moved to India.[23]

The number of Tibetan refugees has fallen from 150,000 in the 1990s to about 100,000. While precise estimates of the number of refugees in each country is not available, it is thought that about 10,000 are in Nepal, just over 1000 in Bhutan while the vast majority who fled their homeland are based in India[24].

Ethnicism

Divisions along ethnic lines will most probably continue to plague Sri Lanka which has had a gory history of interethnic violence and intolerance. The state's inability to offer lasting solutions has resulted in the conclusion of an ethnicity-based war with a fragile sense of peace. Interethnic tensions—also often falling along linguistic and religious boundaries—continue to threaten upheaval. Subtle and overt ethno-nationalist ideologies result in what seems to be a very narrow definition of permissible survival for minority communities.[25]

As a minority community that crosses both linguistic and ethnic boundaries, Christians will continue to have opportunities to model true ethnic harmony and integration. Paul's vision of an all-inclusive church will prove to be increasingly important in the Sri Lankan church's witness to a gospel that unites across boundaries. Close to 70,000[26] people largely from the Kuki community have been displaced from the Northeastern state of Manipur in India. The origin of the conflict has been traced to differences between two ethnic communities in the state. A superficial message of unity will be inadequate for a future of increasing polarization: the church will first need to understand its own failure in light of the gospel's wholistic unity if it is to live out true togetherness amidst an ethnically divided society.[27]

Ethnicism and communal tensions in South Asia often lead to violence and discrimination, yet theologically, the church is called to be a countercultural community that transcends ethnic divisions, embodying reconciliation and unity in Christ.[28]

Drugs and addiction

A report by the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has reported that 39 percent of opiate users in the world are in South Asia. It also speaks about India as being one of the primary markets for opiates and the cultivation of narcotics. The largest seizure made in India ever, was of nearly 3000 kg of heroin in September 2021 and another consignment of 75 kg of heroin was seized in July 2022.[29]

Southwestern Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular is a source for heroin.[30] In the case of Bhutan, in the first three months in 2023, the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) arrested 628 persons and 533 have been sent for deaddiction and 92 individuals have been detained on charges of illegal drug trafficking.[31] Given the size of Bhutan, this poses a major problem.

Religious pluralism and Hindu nationalism

In regions like India, religious pluralism and the rise of Hindu nationalism significantly impact the Christian community. The church faces increasing pressure and potential persecution as it navigates a landscape where Christianity is often viewed with suspicion or hostility. Hindu nationalism promotes a singular cultural and religious identity, which can lead to challenges for religious minorities, including Christians.[32] This environment requires the church to strengthen its internal unity and find innovative ways to witness to the gospel in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner.[33]

Economic development and urbanization

Rapid economic growth and urbanization in countries like India are transforming societies. As more people move to cities, the church has the opportunity to reach diverse urban populations but also faces the challenge of addressing urban poverty, inequality, and social fragmentation. The urban context demands that the church develop ministries that are relevant to the needs and lifestyles of city dwellers, including those in slums and high-rise apartments alike.[34]

Youth demographics

Many regions, particularly in South Asia, have a significant youth population. This demographic trend presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the church. Engaging young people requires relevant and dynam-

ic approaches to ministry, including the use of technology and social media. The church must address issues that concern the youth, such as education, employment, and mental health, while fostering a strong foundation of biblical discipleship.[35]

Cultural and linguistic diversity

Regions like South Asia are characterized by immense cultural and linguistic diversity. The church must navigate this complexity by developing multilingual and multicultural ministries. This includes training indigenous leaders who can effectively minister in diverse contexts and creating resources that are accessible to people of different languages and cultures. Embracing this diversity can enrich the church's witness but requires intentional efforts to foster inclusivity and unity.[36]

Creation and environmental issues

Around 750 million people in South Asia have been impacted by climate related disasters in the last two decades. The changing conditions can greatly diminish the living conditions of some of the most vulnerable people (about 800 million) in the world.[37] Also South Asia is home to nine of the ten most polluted (air) cities in the world. This accounts for about 2 million premature deaths across the region every year.[38] The church has a vital role in disaster response and environmental stewardship. By addressing these issues, the church can demonstrate God's love and care for creation, providing practical support and spiritual hope to affected communities.[39]

Creation care, a fundamental biblical mandate (Gen 2:15; Ps 24:1), necessitates advocating for environmental stewardship and sustainable development, mobilizing faith communities to take action on climate change, and emphasizing the moral responsibility to protect God's creation for future generations.[40]

Impacts on the Church and the Great Commission

Strengthening resilience and unity

The challenges posed by regional issues can lead to a stronger, more resilient church. An inclusive church that elevates women, children, youth and the marginalized will foster a deeper unity that will help church face adversity and depend on God. This resilience can enhance the church's witness, as a faith that endures hardship is compelling to onlookers. A rejuvenation of fresh ecumenical spirit with evangelistic passion is needed in our times.

Enhancing social impact

By addressing regional issues such as poverty, environmental crises, gender and caste discrimination, the church can enhance its social impact. This holistic approach to ministry aligns with the biblical mandate to love one's neighbor. Social impact initiatives can build bridges with non-Christian communities while respecting their culture and way of life.

Polycentric mission mindset

This includes, but not limited to, the following key points:

Decentralization of missionary authority.

In South Asia, this decentralization[41] requires a rethinking of missionary strategies and authority, recognizing and empowering local Christian leaders and communities. This shift acknowledges the significant contributions of indigenous missionaries who understand the cultural and social nuances of their regions better than outsiders. The rise of non-Western missionaries has emphasized the importance of cultural contextualization and indigenization of the gospel, allowing Christianity to take root and grow within different South Asian contexts.[42]

Mutual enrichment and learning.

Missionary movements from South Asia, are revitalizing the church worldwide, bringing fresh perspectives and vitality.[43] For instance, South Asian Christians bring unique insights into suffering, community living, and interfaith dialogue, enriching the broader Christian community.

Navigating theological diversity.

As different cultural interpretations of Christianity emerge, it is crucial to maintain unity

while respecting diversity; where theological perspectives can vary significantly even within the region, this challenge presents an opportunity for richer theological dialogue and mutual learning.

Power dynamics and collaboration.

This means fostering collaboration between Western and non-Western missionaries, ensuring that local voices are heard and respected. Collaborative efforts can lead to more effective and holistic mission strategies, addressing the complex social, economic, and spiritual needs of South Asian communities.

Polycentric resource mobilization.

This concept is crucial for fostering a more equitable, just, and sustainable approach to mission work.[44]

Equitable resource mobilization.

As a minority community that crosses both linguistic and ethnic boundaries, they will continue to have opportunities to model true ethnic harmony and integration. The early church's modelling of the collective meeting of needs must drive the South Asian church's response.

Yet other impacts would include disability, men and women relationships, gender and political issues.

Opportunities and Challenges for The Great Commission

Opportunities

Holistic ministry

Addressing social, economic, healthcare and environmental issues presents opportunities for holistic ministry that meets both physical and spiritual needs. This can lead to more integrated and impactful mission efforts.[45] The church has the opportunity to advocate for systemic change, provide direct support, and challenge unjust structures, engaging in community development, education, and advocacy to fulfill the biblical mandate to uplift the poor and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.'[46]

Youth engagement

Engaging the large youth population can invigorate the church with new energy and perspectives. Youth ministries that are dynamic and relevant can foster a new generation of committed disciples.

Cultural richness

Embracing cultural and linguistic diversity can enrich the church's understanding and expression of the gospel. This diversity can also enhance global mission efforts by providing a wider range of cultural insights and approaches.

Urban ministry

Urbanization offers the opportunity to reach large and diverse populations concentrated in cities. Urban ministry can serve in areas such as employment generation, healthcare and education.

Contextual Christian literature

While the language of ministry has been regional, such as Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, etc., the language of ministerial training has predominantly been English. This situation needs to change especially in the context of persecution and growth of Christianity in rural areas. Dependency on translation also needs to be reduced and original writings in the language of the mission field must be promoted.[47]

Challenges

Persecution and religious tension

Navigating persecution and religious tension requires wisdom, courage, unity, and resilience.

Resource allocation

Addressing diverse needs in various regions requires careful allocation of resources. The church must prioritize effectively and ensure that its efforts are sustainable.

Maintaining doctrinal integrity

In the face of diverse cultural contexts and societal pressures, maintaining doctrinal integrity is essential. The church must uphold biblical truths while being culturally sensitive and relevant.

Leadership development

Developing leaders who can navigate complex regional issues and lead effectively in diverse contexts is a significant challenge. This requires robust training programs and ongoing support for leaders.

Other key topics include interdenominational Christian unity, ministerial utilization of digital media and resources with ethical sensitivity, etc.

Conclusion

Christianity in South Asia is as old as Christianity itself. From the arrival of Apostle Thomas in the first century AD in India, to the development of indigenous Christianity throughout the region in our own times, South Asia has a rich Christian history.[48] In South Asia's Christian story, one finds striking similarities with global Christian issues as well as unique themes that call for special attention in the region. This report has attempted to present a glimpse of some of those themes and issues. It is our prayer that the Lord will enable His church and missions in this strategic region to be His effective witness in the midst of challenges and opportunities for His glory.

Endnotes

1 Kenneth R. Ross, Daniel Jeyaraj, and Todd M. Johson, eds., Christianity in South and Central Asia (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2021).

2 Stephen King, 'State of Great Commission Report on Afghanistan', unpublished report, July 2024.

3 Bony Baroi, 'State of Great Commission Report on Bangladesh', unpublished report, July 2024.

4 Open Doors, 'Persecution Index', Open Doors, accessed 2 July 2024, https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/.

5 Open Doors, 'Bangladesh,' Open Doors, accessed 2 July 2024, https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/bangladesh/

6 WaterAid Australia, 'Sanitation Workers in Pakistan', accessed 3 July 2024, https://www.wateraid.org/au/articles/sanitation-workers-in-pakistan.

7 Global Christian Relief, 'Faith, Hope, and Slavery: A Christian Family's Struggle in Pakistan's Brick Kilns', accessed 3 July 2024, https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/faith-hope-and-slavery-a-christian-familys-struggle-in-pakistans-brick-kilns/.

8 Adeel Samuel and Rubab Raza, 'State of Great Commission Report on Pakistan', unpublished report, July 2024.

9 https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/united-christian-forum-slams-government-denial-of-rising-attacks-on-christians-and-calls-for-independent-probe/article67070728.ece

10 UN Refugee Agency, 'Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained', accessed 3 July 2024, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/

11 Poverty Rate in India: https://www.forbesindia.com/article/explainers/poverty-rate-in-india/90117/1 Accessed 15 July 2024.

12 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action: How the Great Commandment Fuels the Great Commission', unpublished paper, July 2024.

13 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

14 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

15 'Learning from Kerala and Bengal on Migrant Workers', The New Indian Express. 30 January 2024. https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2024/Jan/30/learning-from-kerala-and-bengal-on-migrant-workers

16 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action: How the Great Commandment Fuels the Great Commission', unpublished paper, July 2024.

17 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

18 Raju Gurung, 'State of the Great Commission Report on Bhutan', unpublished paper, June 2024.

19 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action', unpublished paper, July 2024.

20 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland: A Global Shift and Its Implications for South Asia', unpublished paper, July 2024.

21 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland'.

22 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland'.

23 'Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained', UN Refugee Agency, accessed 17 July 2024. https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/.

24 'Tibetan Refugees in India', Migration Policy Institute, Accessed 17 July 2024. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tibetan-refugees-india#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Tibetan%20refugees,Nepal%20and%201%2C300%20in%20Bhutan.

25 Ruth Surenthiraraj, 'State of the Great Commission Report on Sri Lanka', unpublished paper, June 2024.

26 'Manipur violence accounted for 97% of displacements in South Asia in 2023: report', The Hindu, accessed 17 July 2024, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manipur/manipur-violence-accounted-for-97-of-displacements-in-south-asia-in-2023-report/article68177995.ece.

27 Ruth Surenthiraraj, 'State of the Great Commission Report on Sri Lanka', unpublished paper, June 2024.

28 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland: A Global Shift and Its Implications For South Asia', unpublished paper, July 2024.

29 https://thewire.in/government/hero-in-seuzure-adani-mundra-worry-indian-authorities

30 'New Report Flags Terror-Internet Links in Drug Trade in South Asia', United Nations in India, accessed 17 July 2024, https://india.un.org/en/266251-new-report-flags-terror-internet-links-drug-trade-south-asia#:~:text=The%20illegal%20drug%20trade%20is,users%20reside%20in%20South%20Asia.

31 'RBP Arrest 628 Individuals in Drug Cases from January to Mid-March 2024', The Bhutanese, accessed 2 July 2024, https://thebhutanese.bt/rbp-arrest-628-individuals-in-drug-cases-from-january-to-mid-march-2024/#:~:text=From%20January%20to%20mid%2DMarch%202024%2C%20the%20Royal%20Bhutan%20Police,custody%2C%20charged%20for%20illegal%20trafficking.

32 See, Shivraj K. Mahendra, 'The Persecution of Christians in the World: Exploring a Major Trend in World Christianity' New Life Theological Journal (July-Dec 2016): 33-45.

33 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

34 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

35 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

36 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action'.

37 'Integrating Climate and Development in South Asia Region', World Bank, accessed 17 July 2024, https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/integrating-climate-and-development-in-south-asia/integrating-climate-and-development-in-south-asia-region.

38 World Bank, 'Air Pollution in South Asia', accessed 17 July 2024, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/59caa0ae9263d449e65281b635541828-0310012022/original/AirPollution-Highlights.pdf.

39 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action: How the Great Commandment Fuels the Great Commission', unpublished paper, July 2024.

40 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland: A Global Shift and Its Implications for South Asia', unpublished paper, July 2024.

41 Andrew Walls, The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith (Orbis Books, 2002), 21.

42 Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture (Orbis Books, 1989), 67.

43 Dana Robert, Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion. (Wiley-Blackwell,2009), 209.

44 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland: A Global Shift and Its Implications For South Asia', unpublished paper, July 2024.

45 Joel Christian, 'Love in Action: How the Great Commandment Fuels the Great Commission,' unpublished paper, July 2024.

46 Richard Howell, 'Christianity's New Heartland: A Global Shift and Its Implications for South Asia', unpublished paper, July 2024.

47 See, Shivraj K. Mahendra, 'Translation as Mission: A Brief History of My Pilgrimage in Hindi Theological Translation', Indian Church History Review, vol. 56, no. 1, January 2022.

48 For a recent history of Christianity in Asia, see Amos Yong, Mark A Lamport, and Timothy TN Lim, eds., Uncovering the Pearl: The Hidden Story of Christianity in Asia (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023).

Author

Shivraj K. Mahendra (PhD, Asbury Theological Seminary) is the Dean of Online Studies and Associate Professor of World Christianity at Luther W. New Jr. New Theological College, India; General Secretary of Church History Association of India, and the author of the award-winning *Lived Missiology* (2021) and other books.

Contributors

Adeel Samuel (MDiv, International Graduate School of Leadership, Philippines) is the Project Manager for Youth Development Network, Asia Partners, INC.

Bony Baroi is the Chairman and Senior Pastor of Bangladesh Evangelical Revival Church (BERC). He also serves as an honorary director for faith based Christian NGO, Bangladesh Social Service (BSS).

Joel Christian oversees Dauntless Pulpit YouTube Channel. He has served as an evangelist for two years in CNI, and his research interest includes New Testament use of the Old Testament. His recent publication includes 'Love Beyond Borders: Christian Ministry, Missiology and Biblical Wisdom on Sexuality' (2024).

Raju Gurung (MTh, BBA) is a Lay Leader and Youth leader at New Song Church and the Coordinator of Bhutan Prayer Network, Indo-Bhutan Border.

Richard Howell is the Founder President of Caleb Institute of Theology in Haryana, India. He was General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India from 1997–2014 and of Asia Evangelical alliance from 2008-2019. He is also a founding member of the Global Christian Forum since 2000.

Ruth Surenthiraraj is a probationary lecturer at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. She also serves on the boards of the Fellowship of Christian University Students (FOCUS) and the Colombo Theological Seminary (CTS).

Rubab Raza (PhD, Quaid-i-azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan), is a researcher at University of Wisconsin, USA. She is serving with Asia Partners, INC. as Administrative Assistant.

Stephen King serves with the Indian Evangelical Mission. He concentrates on Farsi Speaking people. He has a few decades of experience in transformation ministry both in India and neighboring countries. He lives in Delhi.

SOUTHEAST ASIA



SOUTH EAST ASIA

Philip Chang, I'Ching Chan-Thomas, Manik Corea, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Sakunee Kriangchaipon, Ishak Sukamto

Southeast Asia ('SEA') is perhaps the most diverse region in the world.[1] Stretching all the way from Myanmar in the west to Papua in the east, it is a vast and complex region. Over the centuries, Southeast Asians have developed for themselves a staggering variety of social, political, economic, and cultural niches, where hundreds of ethnic groups and languages exist.

Approximately 692 million inhabitants live in SEA, representing around 8.5 percent of the world's population.[2] The average annual rate of natural population increase is slightly higher than the annual world rate, largely due to improving healthcare and increasing life expectancy.

Even prior to the penetration of European colonialists, SEA was a critical part of the world trading system. A wide range of commodities originated in the region and given its strategic geographical location, coupled with rapid industrialization since the 1960s, SEA's economy is projected to grow by over 5 percent per year to become the fourth largest economy in the world by 2030. This region is also the world's fastest-growing internet market with a digital economy projected to exceed USD 300 billion by 2025.[3]

Unfortunately, there is great disparity in development rates among the nations within the region. Rural-to-urban migration continues to be a major feature in nearly all SEA nations. As a result of geopolitical conflicts and persecution, refugee movements have also become conspicuous in the region, particularly since the mid-1970s.

While Islam and Buddhism are the major religions in this region, Hinduism, Christianity, folk religions, and animism are also widely practiced. Overall, Sunni Islam represents the majority religion with estimates of just over 40 percent of the population.[4]

Thanks to the efforts of Western missionaries, Christianity has seen significant growth in the 20th century but still remains a minority in terms of numbers, with the exception of the Philippines. Meanwhile, Islamization and Buddhist fundamentalism have been on the increase. Six countries in SEA are among the 2024 World Watch List of 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution.[5]

The church in SEA is alive and well, growing rapidly and yet, not without its challenges. Consumerism, prosperity teaching, erosion of family values, mental health problems, moral failures, and religious persecution, for example, are all on the rise. Many such 'gaps' and their causes have continued to pose challenges to the Great Commission efforts.

Therefore, these gaps need to be plugged—starting from within the family, within the church, beyond her walls into society, the nations and all peoples.

"Christianity has seen significant growth in the 20th century but still remains a minority in terms of numbers, with the exception of the Philippines."

Key Issues And Gaps—Within Family

The economic and cultural diversity of SEA makes it difficult to generalize family patterns and trends. The region has experienced significant demographic shifts in the last few decades, including steep declines in fertility, an increase in both regional and international migration, and in a notable rise in life expectancy.[6] Although the family remains a central institution, many aspects of family life are changing. For example, the falling fertility rate has shrunk the nuclear family size as well as increased the burden of elderly care disproportionately. Additionally, cultural norms regarding extended families and filial piety often result in most elderly parents and/or family members continuing to live with the younger generation.[7]

From the State of the Great Commission ('SoGC') report, these are following list of gaps or priorities that have direct implications on the family:

Discipleship of the next generation begins at home

A 2024 study by Focus on the Family Singapore found that over half of the respondents cited that their fathers were least involved in their spiritual development.[8] While similar studies may not have been done in other countries in the region, it is suspected that the picture would be similar. Typically, some parents think the primary parties responsible for their children's discipleship is the church or the youth or children's pastor. The socio-economic growth of the region has also resulted in the pressure of longer workplace hours for many working parents. This leaves many parents to focus on providing financially for their families while thinking they can outsource their children's spiritual life and care to the church.

However, Scripture is very clear about parents' role in teaching their children to fear and love the Lord. It is imperative that parents recognize their crucial and direct role in their discipleship. Unfortunately, many Christian parents in SEA are first generation followers of Jesus and have never had a model at home to emulate. Hence, one of the key areas the church can help bridge this gap is by supporting and mentoring parents on how to disciple their children. A study done in Indonesia post-Covid revealed that churches that placed strong emphasis on family discipleship before the pandemic grew stronger during the pandemic. However, churches which did not intentionally equip families for discipleship at home have grown weaker.[9]

This rallying cry for intentional discipleship at home is not only for the parents but also for elder brothers and sisters, and other older members of the family who play a role in the spiritual development of the younger generation at home.[10] While the Southeast Asian church is familiar with the experience of having the whole village to raise a child, the shift from extended family to nuclear family has eroded the role of the wider family and others in the community in the discipleship of children and youths. As such, the church will have to restore this sense of communal commitment to journeying together intentionally in the faith. Towards this end, the church and Christian educators in the region will also need to urgently develop discipleship and parenting resources that are relevant and contextualized to the cultures of SEA instead of relying on those that are produced in the West.

Role and leadership of women

The region's rapid economic growth has been accompanied by a sharp rise in female educational enrollment rates.[11] This increase has led to more women entering the professional workforce and taking on leadership roles and responsibilities both at work, at church and in missions. However, women, especially leaders, continue to experience gender prejudice at work, at home, and in church. Entrenched beliefs and gender norms shaped by cultural patriarchal values and denominational positions continue to restrict many women's ministry and calling as leaders in their participation in the Great Commission.

Since there are more female than male professing Christians (for example, in Singapore, in 2016, there were 98.1 thousand males of Christian faith recorded compared to 122.8 thousand females[12]), this gap must be addressed if we are to see greater female involvement in the church. And conversations about closing gender gaps is not enough—detrimental gender stereotypes and biases must be addressed with concrete steps—not as a women's issue but a Body of Christ problem—to be dealt with together as a family of God.

Rapid digitalization

The SEA region is experiencing unprecedented advancements in digital technology. Especially in the urban centres of the region, smartphones have become an extension of the self. The implications for discipleship especially with the younger generations have already been felt, but its effects will continue to intensify in the coming years. The church will need to equip families on how to navigate relationships at home in this new digital reality, as well as help parents to know how to mitigate

technological strangleholds and actively engage with their children's discipleship journey.

Mental health

Many recent reports by the World Health Organization as well as Lausanne have identified mental health as a major healthcare challenge presently as well as for years to come.[13] Discussions of mental health is still very much a taboo at home in SEA due to a lack of understanding as well as the sense of shame associated with mental health issues.[14] It does not help that the church is reluctant to engage effectively with this issue. If we are certain of the transformational power and hope of the gospel, then we must begin to take the mental health gap seriously. It will need to be addressed beginning at home.

Key Issues and Gaps – Within the Church

To fulfil the Great Commission effectively in SEA, it is imperative to address the many key weaknesses or gaps within the church itself. Clearly, right at the very heart of the Great Commission is a call to discipleship. Every Christian, no matter how old or young, mature or immature, is called to be a disciple. And every disciple should become a disciple-maker. Therefore, discipleship must form a core part of the church's strategy and focused efforts to develop healthy members and churches. Failure to do so, in the long run, will likely result in back-sliding and eventually attrition. This is the area where many gaps within churches in our region are found.

Love, the very key foundation

Central to fulfilling the Great Commission and becoming an effective disciple-maker is the motivation of the Greatest Commandment—both love for God and love for one's neighbours.[15] The latter is still very challenging for many Christians to put into practice. Many still have to overcome their racial and/or religious prejudices in order to love those who have hurt or discriminated against them, or even persecuted them.

Contextualized Christian education for every generation's needs

Amidst the distractions and pressures of today's societies, families and individuals are increasingly finding themselves in dire need of constant support from the church. For example, research emphatically underscores the urgency for strategic family discipleship, urging the church to forge deliberate partnerships aimed at fortifying Christian households.[16]

> ***"If we are certain of the transformational power and hope of the gospel, then we must begin to take the mental health gap seriously."***

The church needs to ensure that every member receives the appropriate Christian theological education. It needs in particular to be contextualized to the specific needs of every generation from Sunday school right up to Bible college-level teaching. This will further strengthen and encourage the church to be multi-generational, thus becoming more reflective of the local communities in character.

Willingness to accept and adapt to change

When the Covid pandemic hit SEA, it opened our eyes to some hitherto hidden areas of weakness in our churches. One of these was the declining church attendance especially among younger generations. However, the rapid rise of the online church that was 'forced upon' by the pandemic clearly demonstrated how that negative trend could be reversed if churches were willing to adapt to changes that appealed especially to the younger generation.

Churches that heartily employed digital and multimedia technology were able to reap the fruits and some even expanded their church attendance numbers from overseas audiences[17] – which went to show that the existing ways of 'doing church' and discipleship need to be reviewed regularly and adapted in the light of new digital technologies and changing needs of the communities.

Equipping of lay-workers

Another glaring reality was the lack of properly-trained workers in the church who are equipped, for example, to provide pastoral counselling and mental health care to meet the needs of the community. The relatively young Asia Christian Counsellors Association have achieved commendable work in equipping the Church in SEA and promoting lay-counselling as a ministry within the region.[18] But much work still needs to be done.

Sacred-secular divide

There is also a noticeable gap in the integration of faith with everyday challenges. A parallel comparison is between internal church integration versus external societal/cultural integration. The understanding and practice of a Workplace Theology is still clearly lacking among many Christians including among church and lay pastors, as well as mission workers in the region.[19] Although courses on Workplace Theology have been provided by some seminaries, churches, and marketplace ministries, many Christians including their clergy are functional operating with and living by a sacred-secular framework.

Teaching them to obey God's commands

The provision of suitable contextualized theological education and equipping at every level of the church is critical to help maintain the spiritual health of all believers and reduce attrition from the church. These efforts should also include the teaching and equipping of leaders as part of discipleship and leadership development, particularly in the area of governance and integrity. This is to counter the 'three-fold temptations of money, sex, and power' that sum up neatly the pressures experienced by all Christians.[20]

Moral failures of Christian leaders, and the issue of corruption and leadership integrity in the church in SEA is often a taboo subject, due to the prevalent shame/honour culture. Unfortunately, this gap needs to be addressed. Today, scandals continue to rock the church everywhere. One of the major causes of church and leadership downfalls is corruption – which reflects on the poor spiritual health of the churches and their leaders, who bring much dishonour to our Lord.

While the church is a sacred institution, it is also an imperfect one. As a body of Christ, the stewardship of her people and resources should be at least on par, if not better, than secular organizations. In fact, one could even argue that a church or a Christian organization's governance and practices 'should be better than what the law requires'—especially if biblical ethics and practices are to be applied consciously and diligently by the key leaders. Such behaviour will then set the right example for the rest of the staff, leaders and members in the church or organization to follow. Otherwise, as the famous proverb says, 'the fish rots from the head down.'[21]

Key Issues and Gaps—Within Society and the Nations

If we are to effectively plug the gaps in the wider communities and societies, just as with family and church, missional discipleship has to set the tone. We need to allow for the deliberate and prayerful spread and outward push of the Jesus' commission for us to be disciple-makers of all people—salt and light to the whole world—so that the church has gospel impact and initiatives into wider society, that is the cities, towns, villages, and whole nations of SEA. In our diverse and dense region, some of the regional and national issues or gaps that the church needs to bridge with kingdom love, truth, and grace include the following:

Urbanization and the importance of the marketplace

The SoGC report rightly points out that Asia as a whole with SEA is rapidly urbanizing.[22] Indeed, already more than half of Southeast Asia's population live in urban centers, and an additional 70 million people will live in our cities by 2025. In addition, 80 percent of the region's GDP stems from its cities.[23]

Cities are places of great diversity, specialization and competition over shared, often contested spaces. It affects and changes the way people behave and interact with each other. Urban churches must of necessity function and relate to their communities differently from rural and small-town churches.

This is a challenge for the churches operating within the prevailing traditions and cultures of our region, where harmony and deference to entrenched beliefs are not only the norm, but enforced. Not only that, but Christians are having to battle the forces of consumerism and secularism that blunt our true missional call and identity. 'In Southeast Asian cities, religious belief is still active, but it seems to lack the magnetic pull of consumerism.... Spiritual awe and transcendence is being replaced by a spirituality of self-interest (driven in part by consumer-style worship and prosperity teaching). Individual spirituality is elevated with little regard for what is true.'[24]

Typically, reaching people in the cities – particularly through marketplace ministries and enterprise or efforts to help the urban poor and those who live in slums, have been left to specialized ministries and para-church organizations. This is coupled often with the isolationist tendencies of some of our churches, which have tended to be focused on their own programs that are attractional in nature. We exclusively serve and tend to our own people within our buildings but end up creating 'Christian ghettoes', failing to help our people engage with their homes, workplaces and social networks.

Consequently therefore, there is a need to build vision for the complexities and opportunities of whole-city engagements with multifarious initiatives reaching all levels of society. There needs to be a greater integration between churches and market-place ministers to engage and participate in urban-centric ministry and focus. Already, the Lausanne-linked 'Movement Day' is seeking to bring a sea-change to disjunct between churches and city-centred mission and ministry.[25]

Economic and political concerns and resultant poverty

This is a region that has seen tremendous economic growth in the past years. Collectively, the region of SEA is the fifth-largest economy in the world, with annual growths of 4-5 percent, close to that of both India and China.[26]

However, the economic prosperity is not distributed equally. Average annual incomes in 2022 ranged from USD 2,310 in Laos to USD 67,200 in Singapore.

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies' 'The State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey Report' found that fear about global and regional economic realities and their effect on daily life, ranked top of concerns of people in the region.[27]

Linked to this is an increasing economic disparity between rich and poor in many of our nations. Indonesia ranked sixth in wealth inequality worldwide, according to the Global Equality Index of 2022.[28]

Poverty is still endemic to many of the major cities of SEA, as evidenced by the slums of Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila.[29] Myanmar remains mired in an internecine conflict between a brutal military and rebel forces that has pushed many into poverty. Corruption and favouritism of the powerful is accepted practice in many SEA nations.

What has the Church in SEA got to prophetically say about the selfish and all-consuming pursuit of a materialistic utopianism that drives many in our nations? Can we provide a biblical response to unjust rule and practice? How do we balance the need for making a decent living in unstable, often inflationary economies, with a transcendent gospel that calls us to act and live sacrificially and missionally as citizens of a higher and greater kingdom of God? How can we 'seek the welfare of our cities' and 'do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God' in such times as ours?[30]

Human trafficking

Closely related is the issue of human trafficking that, aided and abetted by organized crime groups and cyber-scam centres, have grown at exponential rates during and after the pandemic into a global network that makes up to USD 3 trillion a year. According to Interpol, drug trafficking businesses still contributed 40 to 70 percent of criminal groups' income.[31]

The church in SEA that is called to bring God's shalom into this world cannot be blind to issues like these but must speak and engage with those in power and responsibility to address this growing blight on our peoples.[32]

Identity issues, women's rights, and mental health

The Western world is increasingly reordering sexual beliefs and practice from historically biblical standards in the name of an 'ongoing normalization of gender ideology and the transgender movement.'[33] But such clamour for rights and recognition of homosexual and transgender people is slowly gaining a foothold in part of the region, notably in Singapore and the Philippines.[34] In 2024, Thailand became the first Southeast Asian nation in to legalize same-sex marriage.[35]

At the same time, women's rights and gender equality has continued to grow and be recognized as an important issue in the region. Mental health is another societal issue that has come to the fore of late. The stigma of mental health is still an issue in many countries in the region. According to a World Health Organization, about one in seven people in the region have mental health issues, and many of them do not receive timely treatment.[36]

Christians need to be attentive to issues like mental health and the equality of women, particularly within our families and churches—these are discipleship issues. In terms of homosexuality and its divergent forms, Christians and churches in the region while needing to continue to stand for, defend and advocate for biblical-sanctioned morality, must learn at the same time to look with compassion and offer pastoral support to those among us who struggle with same-sex attraction and attendant issues.

Diaspora and refugees

SEA is a region of diasporic peoples. In 2020, an estimated 23.6 million Southeast Asian migrants live outside their countries of origin. With more than six million emigrants, the Philippines is the country with the highest number of emigrants in the sub-region, as well as the ninth highest globally.[37] Almost half of these—11.7 million—are women (though much higher in Thailand—61 percent, and Malaysia—55 percent).[38] Many of these were or are vulnerable to exploitation by those in authority, employers and gangs, etc. Of the 27,000 globally-reported victims of exploitation and human trafficking, 81 percent of these were from Asia, of which three-quarters were from SEA.[39]

In countries like Malaysia, many churches and para-church organizations have realized the great opportunities for evangelism at their doorstep and have started programmes specially tailored to reach out to migrant workers and refugees.[40] But much still remains to be done in the rest of the region.

Climate change

Countries in SEA are particularly vulnerable to climate change and environmental disasters, including those from earthquakes and volcanic activity (Indonesia is particularly vulnerable sitting on the Pacific's 'Ring of Fire'), cyclones and tropical storms, flooding and heatwaves. The impacts of climate change such as sea-level rise–which is projected to inundate 40 percent of the Mekong Delta—and drought will hamper the livelihoods of millions of people.[41] In 2019 alone, natural disasters led to 4.1 million new displacements in the Philippines, 463,000 in Indonesia and 270,000 in Myanmar.[42]

Conclusion

The response of the church and God's people to all these gaps and challenges is dependent on us having a theology and practice that embraces the all-encompassing notion of the coming of God's rule in his kingdom, effected through the salvation won by Jesus Christ in his cross and resurrection. Jesus alone provides a multi-dimensional gospel that has the power not only to deal with sin between people and God, but also to deal with the sinfulness, brokenness, challenges and opportunities in the wider world of people to people, from family to society. We must respond with a passion for justice, truth, compassion and love. With action, not just words.

The whole family of the church discipled, empowered and equipped by God's Word and Spirit, is called to a missionary task. A church that is ultimately not engaged in reaching its community and beyond, is a church that is both disobedient and dying.

Endnotes

1 "Southeast Asia." Encyclopædia Britannica, May 30th, 2024. *https://www.britannica.com/place/Southeast-Asia.*

2 "South-Eastern Asia Population (Live)." Worldometer. Accessed May 30, 2024. *https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/south-eastern-asia-population/#google_vignette.*

3 "Why Asean Matters." Why ASEAN Matters | US ABC. Accessed May 30, 2024. *https://www.usasean.org/why-asean-matters.*

4 "South East Asia." Lausanne Movement, April 4, 2024. *https://lausanne.org/network/south-east-asia.*

5 "World Watch List 2024." · Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide. Accessed May 30, 2024. *https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/.*

6 Dommaraju, Premchand. "Transformation of the Family Structure in Southeast Asia: Trends and Implications." Populations and Precarity during the COVID-19 Pandemic, June 22, 2023, 12–27. *https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814951500-004.*

7 Yeung, Wei-Jun Jean, Sonalde Desai, and Gavin W. Jones. "Families in Southeast and South Asia." Annual Review of Sociology 44, no. 1 (July 30, 2018): 469–95. *https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041124.*

8 "The Emerging Family Report - Focus on the Family Singapore." Focus on the Family Singapore - Helping Families Thrive, May 13, 2024. *https://family.org.sg/research/the-emerging-family-report/.*

9 "Aea September 2021 Newsletter." ASIAEA, November 15, 2023. *https://asiaevangelicals.org/2021/09/20/news-letters-september-2021/.*

10 Crizaldo, Rei Lemuel, 2023. "Synthesis of the first day of the Lausanne South East Asia Virtual Gathering." Presentation from Malaysia, August 23rd 2023. The first day focused on the theme of gaps within the home in fulfilling the Great Commission.

11 Yeung, Sonalde and Jones, "Families in Southeast and South Asia," 477.

12 Hirschmann, R. "Singapore: Count of Christians by Gender 2016." Statista, May 29, 2024. *https://www.statista.com/statistics/1007459/singapore-count-of-christians-by-gender/.*

13 "Technology and the Future of Mental Health - Black Dog Institute: Better Mental Health." Black Dog Institute | Better Mental Health, July 19, 2021. *https://tinyurl.com/2msjfh73.*

14 Azam, Yaksan. "Mental Health Literacy as a Ministry Skill." Lausanne Movement, August 3, 2023. *https://lausanne.org/about/blog/mental-health-literacy-as-a-ministry-skill.*

15 The Cape Town Commitment 2010 is an excellent document on this subject matter.

16 "Update on The Decade of Disciple Making 2020–2030." DODM new. Accessed May 28, 2024. *https://disciplemaking.worldea.org/update/.*

17 A good example is the CCF Church in Manila, Philippines, that saw its weekly church service attendance grew significantly through the use of digital technology.

18 For more information about Asia Christian Counselling Association and its member associations, visit their website: *https://www.asiancca.org*

19 JayHartwell. "Lausanne Regional Consultation on the Teaching of Theology of Work." Lausanne Movement, February 15, 2019. *https://lausanne.org/gathering/lausanne-regional-consultation-on-the-teaching-of-theology-of-work.*

20 Hwa, Yung, and Soo-Inn Tan. Bribery and corruption: Biblical reflections and case studies for the marketplace in Asia. Singapore: Graceworks Private Limited, 2018.

21 These are recommended books and articles for further reading:

Lin, Peter Lin. 2011. Focused Boards - Sharpening Your Church's Leadership Edge. Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2011.

Kam Weng, Ng. 2004. Doing the Right Thing: A Practical Guide on Legal Matters for Churches in Malaysia. Petaling Jaya: Kairos Research Centre Sdn Bhd, 2004. (*https://krisispraxis.com/Doing%20RightThing%20Online.pdf*)

Datuk Low, Paul. "Church Governance." NECF Malaysia. (*http://www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=2&action=view&retrieveid=794.*)

22 Fenggang, Yang, Anand Mahadevan, Edmund Ng, Karan Thomas, David Ro, Sara Kyoungah White, Jamie Kim, Ben Torrey, Rob Morton, and Justin V. Hastings. "Rise of Asia." Lausanne Movement, May 24, 2024. *https://lausanne.org/report/polycentric-christianity/rise-of-asia.*

23 "APFSD Side Event: The Rise of New and Emerging Cities in Asia: Leveraging Vlrs for a Sustainable Urban Future." ESCAP. Accessed May 24, 2024. *https://www.unescap.org/events/2024/apfsd-side-event-rise-new-and-emerging-cities-asia-leveraging-vlrs-sustainable-urban.*

24 Crane, Michael D. "The Complex Idolatries of Southeast Asia." Redeemer City to City, May 17, 2024. *https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/the-complex-idolatries-of-southeast-asia.*

25 *https://www*.movement.org/ See *https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/movement-day-and-lausanne* for historical context.

26 Denson, Hannah, Jenny Hayward-Jones, Francis E. Hutchinson, and Susan Hutchinson. "The Parts within the Whole: Understanding Southeast Asia's Economies." Lowy Institute, November 28, 2016. *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/parts-within-whole-understanding-south-east-asia-s-economies.*

27 "The State of Southeast Asia: 2024 Survey Report." ISEASYusof Ishak Institute. Accessed May 24, 2024. *https://www.iseas.edu.sg/centres/asean-studies-centre/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/the-state-of-southeast-asia-2024-survey-report/.*

28 The four richest men in Indonesia have more wealth than the combined total of the poorest 100 million people. The Jakarta Post. "Addressing Economic Inequality - Editorial." The Jakarta Post. Accessed May 24, 2024. *https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2024/02/12/addressing-economic-inequality.html.*

29 *https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/asia-growth-rural-communities-inequality-un-sdg-slum-climate-change-3563526*

30 Jeremiah 29:7; Micah 6:8.

31 Southeast Asia Human Trafficking now a global crisis, Interpol says | Reuters. Accessed May 24, 2024. *https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/southeast-asia-human-trafficking-now-global-crisis-interpol-says-2024-03-27/.*

32 See *https://lausanne*.org/global-analysis/human-trafficking-and-the-response-of-the-global-church for a good treatment on steps we can take.

33 Edsinger, Olof. "Sexuality and Gender." Lausanne Movement, May 24, 2024. *https://lausanne*.org/report/human/sexuality-and-gender.

34 The Philippines hosted the biggest Pride event in Southeast Asia in 2023 with 110,000 attending. In November 2022, the Singapore Parliament passed legislation that repealed the criminalising of homosexual relations, although despite a growing movement appealing for greater acceptance among the LGBTQ+ community, the government has also stated that it would continue to protect and entrench the traditional definition of marriage as only being between a man and a woman.

35 "Thailand Passes Bill to Legalise Same-Sex Marriage." South China Morning Post, March 28, 2024. *https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3256915/thailand-passes-bill-legalise-same-sex-marriage.*

36 Yang, Calvin, and Telegra. "1 in 7 in Southeast Asia Live with a Mental Health Condition, Treatment Gap in Some Countries Is 'Huge': Who Official." CNA. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/world-health-organization-southeast-asia-andrea-bruni-mental-health-day-wellness-disorders-suicide-treatment-3834676.*

37 "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia." Migration data portal. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia.*

38 "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia." Migration data portal. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia.*

39 "Victims from Asia." Victims from Asia | CTDC. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/story/victims-asia.*

40 Datuk Low, Paul. "Church Governance." NECF Malaysia. (*http://www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=2&action=view&retrieveid=794.*)

41 Internal-displacement. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/220919_IDMC_Disaster-Displacement-in-Asia-and-the-Pacific.pdf.*

42 "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia." Migration data portal. Accessed May 26, 2024. *https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia.*

Authors

Philip Chang serves as the Regional Director for South East Asia in the Lausanne Movement. He is a corporate consultant, drawing from nearly 40 years' experience in key management positions in the stockbroking and investment banking sectors. He is also a third culture kid and well-versed with cross-cultural ministries, having studied and worked abroad in the marketplace at different stages of his life. Currently he sits on the boards of several private and public companies as well as non-profit organisations. He is also the chairman of Interserve Malaysia and an associate of the WEA Mission Commission.

I'Ching Chan-Thomas has been a communications consultant, a missionary in West Asia with Operation Mobilisation (OM), and an apologist for an international apologetics ministry. Presently she is on OM International's Global Leadership Team as an Associate International Director overseeing Global Resourcing. I'Ching also speaks at churches and conferences regularly and has written Jesus: The Path to Human Flourishing which explores the commonalities between the gospel and Confucius' ideal of human flourishing.

Rev Manik Corea is a Singaporean of Sri Lankan/Indian descent. He is the National Director of the Singapore Centre for Global Missions (SCGM) and Associate Pastor of Crossroads International Church in Singapore. Previous to this, Manik served for 22 years as a missionary with the New Anglican Missionary Society (NAMS) in the USA, UK, Thailand, and Singapore. He is ordained in the Anglican Church of North America and serves his diocese as a Global Consultant in Missions. Manik has a Masters in Intercultural Studies (Church-Planting) from Asbury Theological Seminary and is currently on their Doctor of Ministry programme.

Rei Lemuel Crizaldo is part of the Younger Leader Generation (YLG2016) of the Lausanne Movement. He is a thinker and a communicator whose writing and active online engagement bring together people reflecting on contextual theology, holistic ministry, and the impact of digitality. He also teaches these subjects in several seminaries in the Philippines. His work of connecting people and forming collaborative actions includes coordinating the theology network of Tearfund in East and Southeast Asia and coordinating the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Dr Sakunee Kriangchaipon has been on the faculty at McGilvary College of Divinity in Chiang Mai, Thailand for 8 years. Prior to her time at McGilvary, she served as an author of Biblical studies materials at Biblica. Sakunee has written and published several Christian articles for journals and magazines, as well as conducting research for Thai churches. She has translated several theological books for Christians in Thailand. She holds a Ph.D. from Biola University, and an MA in Christian Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ishak Sukamto has served for 13 years as the Executive Director at SAAT Ministry Center (a part of South East Asia Bible Seminary) with a focus on developing spirituality for church leaders and Christian Organizations Leaders in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia.This focus became his primary concern when, in 2000, he founded the Athalia Kilang Education Foundation, which now serves 1,700 students in Christian schools and 200 in non-Christian schools. He has also undertaken similar roles as the Secretary of the Board at Domus Dei - House of Prayer since 2019, and at CPF - Christian Professional Forum since 2016.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I STATE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY (Pg 10) (Graphs 1, 3 and 4) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed May 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY (Pg 10) Graph 2) - Hackett, Conrad. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 2, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (Pg 11) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20.

PROTESTANTS AND INDEPENDENTS (Pg 12) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 25-26.

EVANGELICALS AND PENTECOSTALS (Pg 13) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 25-26.

MISSION WORKERS (Pg 14) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

EVANGELIZED (Pg 15) (Graph 1) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed April 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

EVANGELIZED (Pg 15) (Graph 2) - Joshua Project. "People Groups." Accessed March 2023. joshuaproject.net.

UNREACHED PEOPLE (Pg 16) (All Graphs) - Joshua Project. "People Groups." Accessed March 2023. joshuaproject.net.

UNREACHED PEOPLE (Pg 17) (All Graphs) - Joshua Project. "People Groups." Accessed March 2023. joshuaproject.net.

DISCIPLE MAKING MOVEMENTS (Pg 18) (All Graphs) - Long, Justin. "Global Movement Dashboard." Accessed December 2022. https://www.justinlong.org/charts.

DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT (Pg 19) (Graph 1) - YouVersion. "2022 Stats Spreadsheet." https://www.youversion.com/press/youversion-reports-verse-of-the-year-and-ukrainian-movement/.

DIGITAL BIBLE ENGAGEMENT (Pg 19) (Graph 2, 3) - Margette, Richard. "Single Language Bible App Installs." SIL International provided by Faith Comes by Hearing. 2023.

LANGUAGE (Pg 20) (Graph 1) – Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. Ethnologue: Languages of the World. 26th edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2023. http://www.ethnologue.com.

LANGUAGE (Pg 20) (Graphs 2, 3) – Weiss, Danny. Provided Data and Commentary. Unfolding Word, June 2023.

BIBLE TRANSLATION (Pg 21) (Graph 1) - SIL International. Progress Bible. 2023. https://progress.bible/.

BIBLE TRANSLATION (Pg 21) (Graph 2) – Missio Nexus. "Global Bible Translation: Status of Bible Translation 2022." Accessed March 2023. https://missionexus.org/global-bible-translation/.

BIBLE TRANSLATION (Pg 22) (Graph 1) - Missio Nexus. "Global Bible Translation: Status of Bible Translation 2022." Accessed March 2023. https://missionexus.org/global-bible-translation/.

BIBLE TRANSLATION (Pg 22) (Graph 2) - SIL International. Progress Bible. 2023. https://progress.bible/.

FINANCIAL GIVING (Pg 23) (Graph 1) - Roser, Max, Pablo Arriagada, Joe Hasell, Hannah Ritchie and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina. "Economic Growth." Our World in Data. 2023. https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth.

FINANCIAL GIVING (Pg 23) (Graph 2) - Johnson, Todd M. and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. "Status of Global Christianity, 2023, in the Context of 1900-2050." World Christian Database. Accessed January 2023. www.worldchristiandatabase.org.

FINANCIAL GIVING (Pg 23) (Graph 3) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 941.

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP (Pg 24) (All Graphs) - Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP (Pg 25) (All Graphs) - Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP (Pg 26) (All Graphs) - Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

II FROM TODAY TO 2050

WHAT IS POLYCENTRIC CHRISTIANITY?

CHRISTIAN GROWTH (Pg 29) (Graph 1) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH (Pg 29) (Graphs 2, 3) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed May 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS (Pg 30) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 20-26.

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS (Pg 31) (Graph 1) - Johnson, Todd M. and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. "Status of Global Christianity, 2023, in the Context of 1900-2050." World Christian Database. Accessed January 2023. www.worldchristiandatabase.org.

CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS (Pg 31) (Graphs 2, 3, 4) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed July 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

STRUCTURES OF FORMATION (Pg 32) (Graphs 1, 2) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed May, 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

Esterline, David, Dietrich Werner and Todd Johnson. "Global Survey on Theological Education 2011-2013." World Council of Churches. Accessed August 2023. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/global-survey-on-theological-education.

STRUCTURES OF FORMATION (Pg 32) (Graph 3) - Esterline, David, Dietrich Werner and Todd Johnson. "Global Survey on Theological Education 2011-2013." World Council of Churches. Accessed August 2023. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/global-survey-on-theological-education.

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF HOPE?

GLOBAL INTERESTS (Pg 76) (Graph 1, 3) - Google Trends. Accessed June 2023. https://www.google.com/trends.

GLOBAL INTERESTS (Pg 76) (Graph 2) - Google NGram. English Publications. Accessed June 2023. http://books.google.com/ngrams.

GLOBAL VALUES (Pg 77) (All Graphs) - Google NGram. English Publications. Accessed June 2023. http://books.google.com/ngrams.

WORLD RELIGIONS (Pg 78) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 28.

WORLD RELIGIONS (Pg 79) (Graph 1, 3) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Encyclopedia. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16.

WORLD RELIGIONS (Pg 79) (Graph 2) – Hackett, Conrad. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 2, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY (Pg 80) (Graph 1, 3) – Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY (Pg 80) (Graph 2) – Hackett, Conrad. "The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010." Pew Research Center. Last modified December 18, 2012. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SECULARISM (Pg 81) (Graph 1, 2, 4) – Hackett, Conrad. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 2, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

SECULARISM (Pg 81) (Graph 3) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

ISLAM (Pg 82) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

HINDUISM (Pg 83) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

BUDDHISM (Pg 84) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

JUDAISM (Pg 85) (All Graphs) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF TRUST?

TRUST (Pg 108) (Graph 1) - Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban and Max Roser. "Trust." Our World in Data. 2016. https://ourworldindata.org/trust.

TRUST (Pg 108) (Graph 2) – Ipsos. "Global Trends 2023: A New World Disorder? Navigating a Polycrisis." Accessed February 2023. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/global-trends.

TRUST (Pg 108) (Graph 3, 4) - Ries, Tonia E. "2022 Edelman Trust Barometer: The Cycle of Distrust." Edelman. Last modified January 24, 2022. https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer.

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (Pg 109) (Graph 1) - Ipsos. "Global Trends 2023: A New World Disorder? Navigating a Polycrisis." Accessed February 2023. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/global-trends.

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (Pg 109) (Graph 2, 3, 4, 5) - Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban and Max Roser. "Trust." Our World in Data. 2016. https://ourworldindata.org/trust.

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (Pg 110) (All Graphs) - Ries, Tonia E. "2022 Edelman Trust Barometer: The Cycle of Distrust." Edelman. Last modified January 24, 2022. https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (Pg 111) (Graph 1) - Hoogeveen, S., JM. Haaf, JA. Bulbulia, S. Altay, T. Bendixen, R. Berinunas, C. Kavangh, N. Levy, and H. Turpin. "The Einstein Effect: Global Evidence for Scientific Source Credibility Effects and the Influence of Religiosity." Nature of Human Behavior 6 (2022): 523-35. https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:0f9a4f66-d80d-4699-8bad-3f904a923160.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (Pg 111) (Graph 2) –

ABC. "Australia Talks National Survey." July 20 to 29, 2019. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-10/australia-talks-data-explorer-2019/12946988#/.

Ward, Paul R., Emma Miller, Alex R. Pearce, and Samantha B. Meyer. "Predictors and Extent of Institutional Trust in Government, Banks, the Media and Religious Organisations: Evidence from Cross-Sectional Surveys in Six Asia-Pacific Countries." PubMed Central (PMC). Last modified October 4, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0164096.

Jones, Jeff and Lydia Saad. "Gallup News Service: Final Topline." June 3-16, 2019. https://news.gallup.com/poll/259964/confidence-organized-religion-remains-low.aspx.

Katenda, Luyando Mutale. "For religious leaders in Africa, popular trust may present opportunity, challenge in times of crisis." Afrobarometer, Last modified September 5, 2022. https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/ab-update-august-2022/.

Latinobarómetro. "Latinobarómetro 2023." https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp.

Manchin, Robert. "Trust in Religious Institutions Varies Across EU Map." August 24, 2004. Accessed May 30, 2023. https://news.gallup.com/poll/12796/trust-religious-institutions-varies-across-map.aspx.

YOUTH SOURCES OF TRUST (Pg 112) (Graph 1) – Global Shapers Survey Team. "Global Shapers Survey: Annual Survey 2017." https://www.es.amnesty.org/fileadmin/noticias/ShapersSurvey2017_Full_Report_24Aug__002__01.pdf

BIBLIOGRAPHY

YOUTH SOURCES OF TRUST (Pg 112) (Graph 2) - One Hope. "Global Youth Culture: Insights from a Digital Generation." 2020. https://www.globalyouthculture.net/reports/.

YOUTH SOURCES OF TRUST (Pg 113) (Graph 3) - Global Shapers Survey Team. "Global Shapers Survey: Annual Survey 2017." https://www.es.amnesty.org/fileadmin/noticias/ShapersSurvey2017_Full_Report_24Aug__002__01.pdf.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE (Pg 113-114) (All Graphs) Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING DEMOGRAPHICS?

GLOBAL POPULATIONS (Pg 145) (Graph 1) - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. "World Population Prospects 2022." https://population.un.org/wpp/.

GLOBAL POPULATIONS (Pg 145) (Graph 2, 3) - Johnson, Todd and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill. Accessed March 2023. https://worldchristiandatabase.org/.

GLOBAL AGING (Pg 146) (Graph 1, 3, 4) – United NationsDepartment of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. "World Ppulation Prospects 2022." https://population.un.org/wpp/.

GLOBAL AGING (Pg 146) (Graph 2, 5) - Desjardins, Jeff. Signals: The 27 Trends Defining the Future of the Global Economy. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2022. 5-6; United Nations (UN). "World Population Ageing 2019: Highlights." Accessed Summer 2023. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2019-Highlights.pdf.

NEW MIDDLE CLASS (Pg 147) (Graph 1) - Kharas, Homi. "The Unprecedented Expansion of the Global Middle Class." The Brookings Institution. Last modified February 28, 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-unprecedented-expansion-of-the-global-middle-class-2/.

NEW MIDDLE CLASS (Pg 147) (Graphs 2, 3, 4) - Desjardins, Jeff. Signals: The 27 Trends Defining the Future of the Global Economy. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2022. 22-23; The Brookings Institution. "2017 Annual Report." Accessed Summer 2023. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-annual-report.pdf.

YOUTH (Pg 148) (Graphs 1, 2) - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. "World Population Prospects 2022." https://population.un.org/wpp/.

YOUTH (Pg 148) (Graph 3) - Population Reference Bureau. "World Population Data Sheet: 2022." https://2022-wpds.prb.org/.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

MIGRATION (Pg. 173) (Graph 1) - IOM UN Migration. "World Migration Report 2022." https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/.

MIGRATION (Pg. 173) (Graph 2) - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "World Population Prospects 2019." https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/news/world-population-prospects-2019-0.

MIGRATION (Pg 173) (Graph 3) - Natarajan, Anusha, Mohamad Moslimani and Mark Hugo Lopez. "Key Facts About Recent Trends in Global Migration." Pew Research Center. Last modified December 16, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/16/key-facts-about-recent-trends-in-global-migration/.

RELIGIOUS MIGRATION (Pg 174) (All Graphs) - Hackett, Conrad. "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 2, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

REFUGEES (Pg 175) (Graph 1) - Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Fiona Spooner and Marcel Gerber. "Migration." Our World in Data. 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/migration.

REFUGEES (Pg 175) (Graph 2) - Natarajan, Anusha, Mohamad Moslimani and Mark Hugo Lopez. "Key Facts About Recent Trends in Global Migration." Pew Research Center. Last modified December 16, 2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/16/key-facts-about-recent-trends-in-global-migration/.

REFUGEES (Pg 175) (Graph 3, 4, 5) - UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency. "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-trends-report-2021.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (Pg 176) (All Graphs) - UNESCO Institute for Statistics. "Data for the Sustainable Development Goals." Accessed February 2023. https://uis.unesco.org/en/home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CITIES (Pg 177) (All graphs) – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "World Urbanization Prospects 2018." https://population.un.org/wup/.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS (Pg 178) (Graphs 1, 2) - Samper, Jota. "The Atlas of Informality: Mapping the Expansion of Informal Settlements around the World." UN DESA (2013) and United Nation's Millennium Development Goals database in The Atlas of Informality. 2020. https://www.atlasofinformality.com/.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS (Pg 178) (Graph 3) - Knudsen, Christine, Eduardo Moreno, Ben Arimah, Raymond Otieno, and Ololade Ogunsanya. "World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization." UN Habitat in United Nations. 318. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

WHAT IS FAIR AND JUST?

GLOBAL POVERTY (Pg 203) (Graph 1) Hasell, Joe, Max Roser, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Pablo Arriagada. "Poverty." Our World in Data. 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/poverty.

GLOBAL POVERTY (Pg 203) (Graph 2) Fontana, Gilbert. "Charted: The World's Working Poor, by Country (1991-2021)." The Visual Capitalist. Last modified January 24, 2023. https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cp/where-are-the-working-poor-living/.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION (Pg 204) (Graph 1, 2, 4) Pew Research Center. "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World." Last modified July 15, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION (Pg 204) (Graph 3) Open Doors International. "World Watch List 2023- Countries Where Christians Face Persecution & Danger." Accessed Summer 2023. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN (Pg 205) (Graph 1) - Zurlo, Gina A., Women in World Christianity: Building and Sustaining a Global Movement. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2023. 30.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN (Pg 205) (Graph 2, 3, 4) Hackett, Conrad. "The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World." Pew Research Center. Last modified March 22, 2016. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

MARGINALIZED (Pg 206) (Graph 1) World Health Organization. "Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities." Last modified December 2, 2022. https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789240063600.

MARGINALIZED (Pg 206) (Graph 2, 4) World Health Organization. "World Report on Disability." Last modified December 14, 2011. https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability.

MARGINALIZED (Pg 206) (Graph 3) Ritchie, Hannah. "Neurodevelopmental Disorders." Our World in Data. 2019. https://ourworldindata.org/neurodevelopmental-disorders#prevalence-of-adhd.

HUMAN RIGHTS (Pg 207) (All Graphs) Herre, Bastian, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser. "Democracy." Our World in Data. 2013. https://ourworldindata.org/democracy.

SLAVERY (Pg 208) (All Graphs) International Labour Organization. "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage." Last modified September 19, 2017. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang--en/index.htm.

CORRUPTION (Pg 209) (All Graphs) Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2022." Accessed Summer 2023. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE?

CREATION CARE (Pg 244) (Graph 1) - Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy. "Environmental Performance Index 2022." Accessed June 8, 2023. https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/epi.

CREATION CARE (Pg 244) (Graph 2) – Steffen et al. "The Nine Planetary Boundaries." Stockholm Resilience Centre. Accessed June 29, 2023. https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html

CREATION CARE (Pg 245) (Graph 1) – Flynn, Cassie and Eri Yamasumi. "The People's Climate Vote: Results." UNDP and University of Oxford. Last modified January 2021. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-Oxford-Peoples-Climate-Vote-Results.pdf.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CREATION CARE (Pg 245) (Graph 2, 3) - Leiserowitz, A., Carman, J., Buttermore, N., Neyens, L., Rosenthal, S., Marlon, J., Schneider, J., and Mulcahy, K. "International Public Opinion on Climate Change, 2022." Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and Data for Good at Meta, 2022. Accessed June 8, 2023. https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/international-public-opinion-on-climate-change-2022b.pdf.

CREATION CARE (Pg 245) (Graph 4) - Google NGram. English Publications. Accessed June 2023. http://books.google.com/ngrams.

GLOBAL DEBT RATIOS (Pg 246) (Graph 1, 2) - Rabouin, Dion. "Global Debt and GDP." Reproduced from The Institute of International Finance: Axios Visuals. Last modified February 18, 2021. https://www.axios.com/2021/02/18/global-debt-gdp.

GLOBAL DEBT RATIOS (Pg 246) (Graph 3) - International Monetary Fund. "World Economic Outlook: Recovery during a Pandemic—Health Concerns, Supply Disruptions, Price Pressures." Last modified October 2021. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/10/12/world-economic-outlook-october-2021.

GLOBAL DEBT RATIOS (Pg 246) (Graph 4) - Desjardins, Jeff. "69 Trillion of World Debt in One Infographic." Visual Capitalist. Last modified November 14, 2019. https://www.visualcapitalist.com/69-trillion-of-world-debt-in-one-infographic/.

GLOBAL HEALTH (Pg 247) (Graph 1, 2) – Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban, and Max Roser. "Healthcare Spending." Our World in Data. 2017. https://ourworldindata.org/financing-healthcare.

GLOBAL HEALTH (Pg 247) (Graph 3) - International Monetary Fund. "World Economic Outlook: Recovery during a Pandemic—Health Concerns, Supply Disruptions, Price Pressures." Last modified October 2021. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/10/12/world-economic-outlook-october-2021.

MENTAL HEALTH (Pg 248) (Graphs 1, 2, 3, 4) – World Health Organization. "World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All." Last modified June 16 2022. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338.

MENTAL HEALTH (Pg 248) (Graph 5) - Google NGram. English Publications. Accessed June 2023. http://books.google.com/ngrams.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Pg 284) (Graph 1) – Roser, Max. "The brief history of artificial intelligence: The world has changed fast – what might be next?." Our World in Data. Last modified December 6, 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/brief-history-of-ai#:~:text=But%2C%20as%20the%20chart%20shows,performing%20much%20worse%20than%20humans.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Pg 284) (Graph 2, 3) - Charlie Giattino, Edouard Mathieu, Veronika Samborska, Julia Broden and Max Roser. "Artificial Intelligence." Our World in Data. 2022. https://ourworldindata.org/artificial-intelligence.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Pg 285) (Graph 1, 2) - Ipsos. "Global Opinions and Expectations about AI, 2022." Last modified January 5, 2022. https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-opinions-about-ai-january-2022.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Pg 285) (Graph 3) - Google Trends. Accessed June 2023. https://www.google.com/trends.

BIO-TECHNOLOGY (Pg 286) (Graph 1) - StartUs Insights. "Top 10 Biotech Industry Trends & Innovations in 2023." Accessed May 30, 2023. https://www.startus-insights.com/innovators-guide/top-10-biotech-industry-trends-innovations-in-2021/.

BIO-TECHNOLOGY (Pg 286) (Graph 2) - Wetterstrand, Katrina A. "DNA Sequencing Costs: Data from the NHGRI Genome Sequencing Program (GSP)." National Human Genome Research Institute. Last modified May 16, 2023. https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/fact-sheets/DNA-Sequencing-Costs-Data.

BIO-TECHNOLOGY (Pg 286) (Graph 3) - Desjardins, Jeff. Signals: The 27 Trends Defining the Future of the Global Economy. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2022. 23, 124.

BIO-TECHNOLOGY (Pg 287) (All graphs) – Funk, Cary, Alec Tyson, Brian Kennedy, and Courtney Johnson. "Biotechnology Research Viewed With Caution Globally, but Most Support Gene Editing for Babies To Treat Disease." Pew Research Center. Last modified December 10, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/12/10/biotechnology-research-viewed-with-caution-globally-but-most-support-gene-editing-for-babies-to-treat-disease/.

SEXUALITY (Pg 288) (Graph 1) - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. "Criminalisation of Consensual Same-Sex Sexual Acts." Last modified January 2023. https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SEXUALITY (Pg 288) (Graph 2, 3) - Ipsos. "LGBT+ Pride 2021 Global Survey Report." April 23 - May 7, 2021. https://www.ipsos.com/en/lgbt-pride-2021-global-survey-points-generation-gap-around-gender-identity-and-sexual-attraction.

SEXUALITY (Pg 289) (Graphs 1, 3) – Poushter Jacob and Nicholas Kent. "The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists." Pew Research Center. Last modified June 25, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/category/publications/.

SEXUALITY (Pg 289) (Graph 2) - Google NGram. English Publications. Accessed June 2023. http://books.google.com/ngrams.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL LIFE?

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY (Pg 313) (Graph 1) - The World Bank. "Internet Users (% of Population) - World Bank Indicator." Accessed June 14, 2023. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?view=map.

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY (Pg 313) (Graph 2, 3) – Ritchie, Hannah, Edouard Mathieu, Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina. "Internet." Our World in Data. 2023. https://ourworldindata.org/internet.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD (Pg 314) (Graph 1) - Desjardins, Jeff. Signals: The 27 Trends Defining the Future of the Global Economy. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2022. 72; Seagate. "The Digitization of the World: From Edge to Core." Accessed Summer 2023. https://www.seagate.com/files/www-content/our-story/trends/files/idc-seagate-dataage-whitepaper.pdf.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD (Pg 314) (Graph 2) - Ipsos. "A New World Disorder? Navigating a Polycrisis." Last modified February 2023. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/global-trends.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD (Pg 314) (Graph 3) - Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report." DataReportal. Last modified January 26, 2023. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report.

WEB 3 (Pg 315) (Graphs 1) - Yu, Irene. "What is Web3? Breaking Down Web2 vs. Web3." Skiplevel. Last modified May 3, 2022. https://www.skiplevel.co/blog/What-is-Web3-Breaking-down-Web2-vs-Web3.

WEB 3 (Pg 315) (Graphs 2, 3) – Gad, Ahmed G., Diana T. Mosa, Laith Abualigah, and Amr A. Abohany. "Emerging Trends in Blockchain Technology and Applications: A Review and Outlook." Journal of King Saud University – Computer and Information Sciences 34, no. 9 (October 2022): 6727-6730. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1319157822000891.

WEB 3 (Pg 315) (Graph 4) — Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report." DataReportal. Last modified January 26, 2023. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report.

GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA (Pg 316) (Graphs 1, 2) - Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report." DataReportal. Last modified January 26, 2023. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report.

SOCIAL MEDIA (Pg 317) (All graphs) - Kemp, Simon. "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report." DataReportal. Last modified January 26, 2023. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report.

WHAT IS MINISTRY IN A DIGITAL AGE?

DISCIPLESHIP (Pg 342) (Graph 1) Lausanne Movement. "The Evangelical Church Interacting Between the Global and the Local: Analysis of Lausanne 4 Listening Calls." https://lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Evangelical-Church-Interacting-between-the-Global-and-the-Local-Global-Listening-Team-Report-21.11.03.pdf.

DISCIPLESHIP (Pg 342) (Graph 2) - Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

DISCIPLESHIP REPORT (Pg 343) (All graphs) - Lausanne Movement. "Global Leaders Survey." State of the Great Commission Report, 2023.

WORSHIP ENGAGEMENT (Pg 344) (All Graphs) Hackett, Conrad. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." Pew Research Center. Last modified June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

PRAYER ENGAGEMENT (Pg 345) (All Graphs) - Hackett, Conrad. "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." Pew Research Center Last modified June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

YOUTH AFFILIATION (Pg 346) (All Graphs) - Hackett, Conrad. “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World.” Pew Research Center. Last modified June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

YOUTH WORSHIP ATTENDANCE (Pg 347) (All Graphs) - Hackett, Conrad. “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World.” Pew Research Center. Last modified June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13 the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

YOUTH DAILY PRAYER (Pg 348) (All Graphs) - Hackett, Conrad. “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World.” Pew Research Center. Last modified June 13, 2018. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/.

YOUTH SPIRITUALITY (Pg 349) (All Graphs) - Barna. The Open Generation. 2022. https://www.barna.com/the-open-generation/.

