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## THE CHANGING FACES OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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### Abstract

It is crystal clear that over the last few decades, Christianity's centre of gravity has relocated from the Global North to the Global South. While church buildings in Western Europe are being closed, or rather sold, new mega-churches are filled with believers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Charismatic and/or Pentecostal movements practice the Christian religion in dynamic and innovative ways, changing the narratives and challenging the established churches and society at large on all continents. The Global Southern, or non-Western, missionaries are rapidly taking over the Global Northern hemisphere for a reverse mission for the purpose of salvaging the perishing souls, particularly in the Global North, which seems to have departed from its glorious past. Thus, the main thrust of this work is to critically and scholarly examine the current trends in demographical changes in world Christianity, their implications for world Christianity, and possible solutions to the declining status of Christianity in the Global North to save it from going into extinction. This study makes some recommendations and suggests that they might help to engender fresh thinking and better planning in order to respond sensibly to the current challenges and to cash in on the opportunities provided by the Global South phenomenon. The paper concludes by calling for an organised reverse and rescue missions in the Global Northern hemisphere before it is too late.

**Keywords:** world christianity, global south and north, changing faces, trends

## Introduction

*Changing faces* is a kaleidoscopic observation describing World Christianity in general. This describes how Christianity fares in the religious market. No doubt, Christianity is gradually being threatened in the religious marketplace. It is rather appalling and poignant that the nations at the cutting edge of Christianity are now gradually losing their grip. Indeed, studies have shown that the West has lost its grip on classic Christianity. The spiritual power has changed hands; Christianity's centre of gravity has moved from the Global North [1] to the Global South [2]; and the Global North is increasingly becoming the epicentre of secularism and moral decadence. It is therefore urgently imperative for the Global South to embark on a reverse and rescue mission to salvage the Global North from the seemingly impending doom lurking at the door of her religious life. When the religious center of gravity changes, its spiritual power weakens. This is an exact description of the present scenario in the Global North. Thank God, Christianity is not static but dynamic and migratory. Hence, the centre of gravity can be shifted to a more receptive region that is ready to obey the divine mandate.

As observed, "Christianity is a migratory religion" (Adedibu, 2018, citing Jehu, 2003), and it is also "a teaching religion" (Ilesanmi, Dele Alaba, 2021). Christianity is seen as both a "migratory and teaching religion" because the initiator of the Christian faith, our Lord Jesus Christ, commanded us to "go and teach" or to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47–49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). The command "go", involves a change or move to another place; hence, Christianity is migratory. The command "teach", means to guide and impart lives or to restore the image and likeness of Christ in the soul of man. Thus, Christianity is not a static and ignorative religion. It is a religion that moves to the dark side of the world through the gospel of Christ to illuminate the dark abyss of ignorance, irrespective of the distance. Following the nature of Christianity and its core role of lightening up the dark world, it moves from its original epicenter in the Middle East, particularly in Israel, to Europe and North America, Africa, and other parts of the world primarily for the salvaging of perishing souls.

Unarguably, Christianity is now a predominantly non-Western religion, as opposed to the belief of some Africans that Christianity is a religion of the West. Lending credence to this, in his prescience over four decades ago, Barrett accurately observed that "Africa might well tip the balance and transform Christianity as a non-Western religion" (Adedibu, 2018). This is indeed a plausible observation. Adedibu writes that "The imprint of African Christianity has gradually emerged as a transnational phenomenon across North America, Europe, and the West in general." He went further to say that the resultant emergence of this paradigm shift is described as the Southernization of Christianity. No doubt, there is a dynamic shift in Christianity—a paradigm shift from the Global North to the global south. It is believed that it is not apt to use the term "Southernization of Christianity" because the hubs of Christianity is now situated outside the Southern Hemisphere, such as in Nigeria and South Korea, but the adoption of the term "non-Western Christianity" is preferable, referring to those countries outside of Western Europe and North America, as against the view of some scholars, like Jenkins, who prefer to use the term "Southernization of Christianity"<sup>1</sup>.

It is clearly evident that the dynamic shift in Christianity largely favours Africa. It is also obvious that the largest Christian communities are now found in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that other synonyms used to describe the Global South include "third world", "the two third worlds," or

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., Adedibu,2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

"the developing world". It is also to be noted that, though we thank God for using the West to bring the light to Africa, the West should similarly be grateful to God for using the non-Western world, particularly the Africans, for the reverse mission—the Africans are now showing the Western world the light of God. This is one of the major faces of world Christianity that has undergone a change.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this research is to critically and scholarly examine the current trends in demographical changes in world Christianity, their implications for world Christianity, and to proffer possible solutions to the declining status of Christianity in the Global North to salvage it from going into extinction by making some recommendations and suggestions that might help to engender fresh thinking and better planning in order to respond sensibly to the current challenges and to cash in on the opportunities provided by the Global Southern phenomenon.

### **Research Methodology**

The research is a descriptive study that relies mainly on secondary data collected from various journals, books, websites, and other publications. This data was then reviewed and analyzed to make recommendations and suggestions and arrive at inferences and conclusions.

### **Current Trends and Demographical Changes in World Christianity**

Recent scholarly work on the trend of world Christianity shows an ambivalent trajectory of changing faces of global Christianity. The available data is a mixture of trepidation and respite. Indeed, the current state of world Christianity gives it no much-needed fillip. However, let us start with the 2022 report. Aaron Earls (2022) released the 2022 statistics from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He mentioned some encouraging trends in the 2022 Status of Global Christianity report. Though it is a fact that Christianity is declining, people are leaving the church and the Christian faith, and it seems that secularism is growing at an alarming rate particularly, in the West, Earls claims that, globally, that is not the case at all. In his report, Earls has a holistic view of world Christianity. He reveals that the number of all religious people is growing at a 1.27% rate, but the growth rate of non-religionists is 0.52—less than half that number and well below the total population growth percentage—and the number of atheists is almost stagnant, only growing at 0.18% per year. The Gordon-Conwell report expects the number of atheists to continue to decline by 2050, as there are fewer atheists around the world today (147 million) than in 1970 (165 million). According to this report, Christianity is expected to grow. With a 1.17% growth rate, almost 2.56 billion people are estimated to be identified as Christians by the middle of that year, 2022. By 2050, that number is expected to increase to 3.33 billion (Earls, 2022). Catholics remain the largest Christian group in the world with almost 1.26 billion adherents, but the two fastest-growing Christian groups around the world are evangelicals (1.8% growth rate) and charismatics, or Pentecostals, with a growth rate of 1.88%. The dramatic global growth of Charismatic Christians is remarkable. For example, in 1900, less than 1 million people around the world identified as Pentecostal or Charismatic. By 2050, that number is expected to increase to 1 billion. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary also states that Africa with

2.77% growth and Asia with 1.50% growth are the places where Christianity is growing the fastest in the world. To support this claim, in 2000, 814 million Christians lived in Europe and North America, while 660 million Christians called Africa and Asia home. But in 2022, 838 million lived in the global North, while almost 1.1 billion Christians were living in Africa and Asia alone. In 1900, twice as many Christians lived in Europe than in the rest of the world combined. Today, more Christians live in Africa than any other continent. By 2050, it is believed that Africa will be home to almost 1.3 billion Christians, while Latin America will stand at 686 million and Asia, with 560 million, will both have more than Europe, with 497 million, and North America, with 276 million (Earls, 2022).

According to this report, Christianity will continue to grow in the Global South, but it will also become increasingly less concentrated in the major Christian nations. For example, "In 1900, 95% of all Christians lived in a majority Christian country. In 2022, that number will have fallen to 53.7%. By 2050, most Christians (50.4%) around the world will live in non-majority Christian nations." The report states further that with more Christians living outside of Christian nations, more non-Christians know a Christian. For instance, in 1900, only 5.4% of non-Christians could identify a Christian they knew. That percentage has risen to 18.3% today. And by 2050, 1 in 5 non-Christians (20%) will know a follower of Jesus and have the opportunity to hear the gospel from them. This is quite interesting and encouraging. The report goes on to state that, as a result of this trend, the percentage of unevangelized people around the world continues to fall. For example, in 1900, more than half of the world's population was unevangelized (54.3%), but that has now fallen to 28% today. It is noteworthy to mention here that up to 5 million copies of the Bible were printed in 1900 and 54 million in 2000. According to the report, it was expected that 93 million copies of God's word would be printed in 2022. "By 2025, 100 million Bibles will be printed each year." This report states further that "currently, almost 1.8 billion Bibles are in circulation around the world. That will climb to 2.3 billion by 2050."

CNN report 2023 reveals a trajectory of Christianity in United States of America. John Blake<sup>3</sup>, CNN senior writer, reports in April, 2023 that:

For years, church leaders and commentators have warned that Christianity is dying in America. They say the American church is poised to follow the path of churches in Western Europe: soaring Gothic cathedrals with empty pews, shuttered church buildings converted into skate parks and nightclubs, and a secularized society where one theologian said Christianity as a norm is "probably gone for good — or at least for the next 100 years."

However, when CNN asked some of the nation's top religion scholars and historians lately about the future of Christianity in the United States of America, they had a different message. They said the American church is poised to find new life for one major reason: "Waves of Christians are migrating to the US."(Blake, 2023). What does this mean? It is evidently clear that American Christianity is on the brink of death. It only takes

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<sup>3</sup> Blake, John is a Senior Writer at CNN and the author of "More Than I Imagined: What a Black Man Discovered About the White Mother He Never Knew."

Christian immigrants to salvage it. This submission by American scholars and historians indicates that the United States of America has lost or is about to lose its place in the comity of Christian nations. What a pity! Though a fulfillment of the Scripture that says "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matt.19:30; cf. Matt. 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30).

Defending further the spiritual failure of the US, they said that the biggest challenge to Christianity's future in the USA is not declining numbers but the church's ability to adapt to this migration (Blake, 2023). Blake also reports that Joseph P. Slaughter, a historian and assistant professor of religion at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, says people have been predicting the extinction of Christianity in the USA for over two centuries, and nothing has happened yet. The question now is: Should the Americans wait until Christianity goes into extinction in their God-given land? God forbid! This will be the wrong decision to make in a Christian country like the USA. Speaking further, Slaughter made reference to a prediction made by Thomas Jefferson, one of the nation's founding fathers, who had already predicted in the 1820s that Christianity would be replaced in the US by a more enlightened form of religion that rejected Jesus' divinity and belief in miracles. " Instead, Jefferson's prophecy was followed by a series of revivals, which included the Second Great Awakening, which swept across America and reasserted Christianity as a dominant force in American life." Slaughter declares "I'd never bet against American Christianity, particularly evangelicalism, and its ability to adapt and remain a significant shaper of American society". What's happening in Europe now, Blake exclaims, "is the church's nightmare scenario. If one only looks at the numbers, Slaughter's optimism seems misguided." Blake goes on to say that nearly every recent poll about Christianity in America has been ruthless in its followers. He buttresses his view by saying that about 64% of Americans claim to be Christians today. That might sound like a good percentage, whereas 50 years ago, the number of American Christians was 90%, meaning that the number of non-Christians was just 10% (Blake, 2023, cites a 2020 Pew Research Center study). That same survey revealed that the Christian majority in the USA may vanish by 2070. This should not be taken lightly because every indicator points to a sharp decline in the American Christian population. Thank God for the rescue mission from the Global South. American and European Christianity would have gone into extinction.

Similarly, previous scholarship has observed different demographical changes, such as the Pew Research Report on Global Christianity and Distribution published in 2011, which indicated that in 1910, 66% of all Christians lived in Europe. But, by 2010, 100 years after, only 25.6% lived in this same Europe. Comparatively, less than 2% of Christians lived in Africa in 1910, but after 100 years, in 2010, it increased to 22% (see Adedibu and Igboin (eds.), 2018, p. 12). Adedibu explains further that the Global North contained 80% of the Christian population in 1910 but fell to 40%. Perhaps, he says, the change in global Christian demographics is in the diversities of the expression of the Christian faith in the Global South. If we are to go by Jenkins' prediction, by 2025, 75% of the Roman Catholic Church will live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Adedibu, 2018, citing Philip and Jenkins, 2007, p. 16). Quoting the World Christian Trends and Pew Research Centre, Enzo Pace states that "at least one of the two billion Christians around the world belongs to a Pentecostal church or a Charismatic movement" (Adedibu cites Enzo, Pace, 2017, p. 85).

There are certain factors that we could consider to be the cumulative effect that culminated in the decline of Christianity in the Global North. Apart from moral and religious liberalization, Blake continues his report and analysis on world Christianity when he writes:

A cascade of headlines in recent years have stained the church's reputation, including sex abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention; the spread of White Christian nationalism; and the perception

that the church oppresses marginalized groups such as LGBTQ people. Church leaders in the US also have fretted about the rise of “nones.” These are people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular” when asked their religious identity.

In his view, as reported by Blake, Tina Wray, a professor of religious and theological studies at Salve Regina University in Rhode Island, believes that the ascent of nones will transform the USA’s religious and political landscape. In this report, about 30% of Americans now call themselves nones. Intriguing and more worrisome still,

in 2010, a local atheists' group called "Coalition of Reason" paid for an advertisement on a billboard in Oklahoma City with the following inscription on it: **"Don't believe in God? Join club.** This is an apparent ominous scenario lurking in the rickety structure of American and European Christianity. Unfortunately, this appalling situation in global northern Christianity is glossed over by spiritual leaders, Christian scholars, and historians in this part of the global hemisphere. Still on Blake’s report analysis, Professor Wray, in spite of this horrendous picture painted by the atheists, still believes that the interests of the nones will soon overshadow those of the religious right in just a matter of years. She states clearly that “Nones are going to vote as a bloc, and they’re going to be pretty powerful. White evangelicals will eventually be eclipsed by the unaffiliated.” Threatening further, Blake reports Wray’s position thus:

Wray says those who are optimistic about the future of the American church underestimate how quickly Christianity can lose its influence even in a place where it once thrived. She cites what’s happened in the Republic of Ireland, an overwhelmingly Catholic country. The Catholic Church prohibits divorce and was once so powerful in Ireland that the country wouldn’t legally grant its citizens the legal right to a divorce until 1995. ... But Wray adds that she recently traveled to Ireland and discovered many of its citizens have left the religion. Churches are being closed and turned into apartment buildings, she says. “People who went to mass everyday stopped going,” she says. “There’s this cultural Catholic identity, but as far as practicing their faith, it’s just disappearing. So within a generation, that’s all it took. It’s just shocking.”

However, the recent report reveals that the American church’s future will find solace and salvation in the booming of Christianity in the Global South. Most of the religious scholars CNN spoke to believed that "the American church may find salvation in another demographic trend: the booming of Christianity in what is called the "Global South," the regions encompassing Latin America, Africa, and Asia". To buttress this, the world’s largest megachurch today is not in the USA. It’s in South Korea. The report indicates that The Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea has a weekly attendance of about 600,000 members (CNN report, 2023) [1], which we can regard as the most populated single megachurch in the world today. This church has the largest Pentecostal Christian Congregation in South Korea. The church was founded by David Yonggi Cho and Choi Ja-Shil in 1958. The church is currently led by Senior Pastor Yong Hoon Lee<sup>4</sup>. The USA may benefit from the influx of immigrants from the Global South because the US has more immigrants than any other country. It also reveals that Latin America and Asia now make up the overwhelming majority of immigrants to the USA,

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<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoido\\_Full\\_Gospel\\_Church](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoido_Full_Gospel_Church)

and many are bringing their religious fervor with them. This migration is now called the "Browning of America," a phrase describing a demographic shift that is expected to make White people the minority in the USA by 2045. The US religious scholars rely on the "Browning and Africanization of America", or rather, the

Global South, to revitalize and salvage the future of the American church. The predictions about the decline or extinction of Christianity in America may be premature or not accurate based on Blake's recent report:

Those who predict that the church in America will collapse often overlook how the migration of Global South Christians to America will revitalize the country's religious landscape, scholars say. Christianity could rebound in America if White Christians embrace this one change, they say. Tish Harrison Warren, a New York Times columnist, pointed out recently that Latino evangelicals are now the fastest-growing group of evangelicals in the US. "We cannot assume that America will become more secular so long as the future of America is less white," Warren wrote. The influx of Black and brown Christians from places like Latin America and Asia collides with another trend: a burgeoning White Christian nationalist movement that insists, incorrectly, that the US was founded as a White, Christian nation. It is hostile to non-White immigrants. Some churches may discover that Jesus' command to welcome the stranger collides with their definition of patriotism, Hamalis says. "Many congregations don't realize how much of their Christian identity is wrapped up with a kind of (Christian) nationalist narrative," Hamalis says. "There's nothing wrong with loving one's country, but from a Christian perspective that ought to always be secondary to the mission of building the body of Christ and witnessing to the Gospel in the world."

Blake's report reads in part:

For one, declining church membership doesn't automatically translate into declining influence. Consider some recent landmark events. White evangelicals played a critical role in getting former President Trump elected. Conservative Christian groups played a crucial role in the recent passage of state laws limiting LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer] rights. And the Supreme Court's decision last year to overturn *Roe vs. Wade* was a massive victory for many conservative Christians. And atheism remains a taboo in American politics. American voters still prefer candidates – including presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden. "Christianity still holds a lot of capital in this country," says Lee M. Jefferson, an associate professor of religion at Centre College in Kentucky. "There has always been a popular notion that a religious community's strength or influence is connected to numbers and attendance," Jefferson says. "Even if there is ample space in cathedrals, Christianity will still hold some strong relevance in different landscapes in the US." Even the rise of the "nones," the growing number of Americans who say they don't care about religion, is not as much of a threat to the church as initial reports suggest, scholars say. A growing number of Americans may no longer identify as Christian, but many still care about spirituality, says Hans Gustafson, author of "Everyday Wisdom: Interreligious Studies for a Pluralistic World."

“Just because more Americans are disaffiliating with institutionalized religion — most notably Christian traditions — this does not always mean that people are becoming less religious,” says Gustafson, director of the Jay Phillips Center for Interreligious Studies at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. “Many still practice spirituality: prayer, meditation... and sometimes even regularly attend religious houses of worship,” he says. ... Despite the optimism of many religious scholars, the future of Christianity in America still seems uncertain. Poll numbers about the decline of religiousness in the US cannot be ignored, along with something more intangible: the frailties of human nature.

Given the above permutations, the following questions are begging for answers:

1. What if the US enters another xenophobic period and limits migration from non-White Christians?
2. What if progressive Christians prove unwilling to align with non-White immigrants, who tend to be more conservative on issues of sexuality and gender?
3. And what if some Christians still cling to the belief that America is supposed to be a White Christian nation, even if that assumption causes them to close their church doors to non-White immigrants who could be their salvation?

Then, this short answer was given: "If that happens, an Easter morning symbol in American churches won't just be an empty tomb, but empty pews. The permutations continue with Hamalis and Warren. In his response, the religion professor, Hamalis, saw Christianity boom in South Korea. He says Christians who fear that kind of future can find succor in the Easter message. He emphasizes that "From a Christian perspective, there's nothing to fear because even death has been conquered" and that "when we are liberated from that fear, we can embrace the person who's different from us, who speaks a different language, or who comes from a different culture. We can put ourselves out there in a way that we can't if we're just afraid." He and other scholars envision a vibrant future for Christianity in the US, which is shared by Warren, the New York Times columnist:

The future of American Christianity is neither white evangelicalism nor white progressivism. The future of American Christianity now appears to be a multiethnic community that is largely led by immigrants of the children of immigrants.

Blake concludes his report by saying that for the American church to experience resurrection and reverse shrinking membership, it is necessary to embrace the future that American religious leaders and scholars refer to.



## Data Analysis and Discussions

It is very apparent that over the past 100 years, Christianity has experienced a profound shift from the Global North, its acclaimed geographical centre of gravity, to the Global South, its former mission centres. Whereas in 1900, over 80% of all Christians lived in Europe and North America, by 2005, this proportion had fallen to under 40% and may likely fall below 30% before 2050 given the available data.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1.**

### *Christians by UN region, 1900 to 2050*

	1900			1970			2005			2025			2050		
	Pop Mn s	% Xn	% of all Xns	Pop Mn s	% Xn	% of all Xns	Pop Mn s	% Xn	% of all Xns	Pop mn s	% Xn	% of all Xns	Pop mn s	% Xn	% of all Xns
Africa	10	9	2	143	40	12	411	46	19	621	48	24	899	50	29
Asia	22	2	4	101	5	8	531	9	17	503	11	19	621	12	29
Europe	381	95	68	492	75	40	553	76	23	535	77	20	480	76	16
Latin America	62	95	11	269	95	22	517	93	24	629	92	24	694	90	22
Northern America	78	97	14	212	91	17	275	83	13	306	78	12	356	80	12
Oceania	5	78	1	18	93	1	26	80	1	30	76	1	34	73	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,234</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,626</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,083</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, Todd M.J. Christianity in Global Context: Trends and Statistics. *Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Prepared for the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*

**Table 2.****Global population and Christians by major cultural tradition, 1900 and 2005**

Cultural tradition	Population (millions)	% world pop	Christians (millions)	% of all Christians	Population (millions)	% world pop	Christians (millions)	% of all Christians
AFRICAN (Bantu, Nilotic, Sudanic)	68	4	2	*	591	91	320	16
AFRO-AMERICAN (USA Black, Creole)	22	2	23	4	148	2	128	6
ASIAN (Chinese, Indo-Malay, Korean)	684	42	35	6	2,437	38	369	18
EUROPEAN (Caucasian, Germanic, Slav)	441	27	440	79	938	15	685	34
INDO-IRANIAN (Dravidian, Iranian, North Indian)	302	19	7	1	1,528	24	79	4
LATIN AMERICAN (Mestizo, Amerindian)	48	3	44	8	390	6	362	18
MIDDLE EASTERN (Arab, Berber, Ethiopic)	52	3	9	2	404	6	63	3
OCEANIC (Fijian, Melanesian, Papuan)	3	*	1	*	17	*	14	1
WORLD POPULATION	1,620	100	562	100	6,454	100	2,020	100

**Table 3.**

*Top 10 Christian countries, 1900 to 2050*

1900		1970		2005		2025		2050	
Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)
USA	73	USA	191	USA	251	USA	280	USA	329
Russia	62	Brazil	92	Brazil	167	Brazil	193	China	218
Germany	42	Germany	70	China	111	China	174	Brazil	202
France	41	Russia	50	Mexico	102	Mexico	123	Congo-Zaire	145
Britain	37	Mexico	50	Russia	84	India	107	India	137
Italy	33	Britain	48	Philippines	74	Philippines	96	Mexico	131
Ukraine	29	Italy	48	India	64	Nigeria	95	Nigeria	130
Poland	22	France	43	Germany	62	Congo-Zaire	91	Philippines	112
Spain	19	Philippines	34	Nigeria	61	Russia	85	Ethiopia	104
Brazil	17	Spain	33	Congo-Zaire	53	Ethiopia	67	Uganda	95

**Table 4.**

*Top 10 Muslim countries, 1900 to 2050*

1900		1970		2005		2025		2050	
Country	Muslims (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Muslims (millions)	Country	Christians (millions)	Country	Muslims (millions)
India	32	India	63	Pakistan	155	Pakistan	238	Pakistan	332
China	24	Pakistan	60	India	134	Bangladesh	185	Bangladesh	228
Pakistan	21	Bangladesh	54	Bangladesh	133	India	167	India	188
Bangladesh	19	Indonesia	51	Indonesia	122	Indonesia	138	Indonesia	141
Indonesia	16	Turkey	36	Turkey	71	Egypt	89	Nigeria	111
Turkey	11	Egypt	29	Iran	68	Iran	87	Egypt	110
Iran	10	Iran	28	Egypt	64	Turkey	86	Iran	101
Egypt	9	China	21	Nigeria	55	Nigeria	82	Turkey	95
Russia	7	Nigeria	21	Algeria	32	Afghanistan	44	Yemen	84
Afghanistan	5	Morocco	15	Morocco	31	Yemen	43	Afghanistan	67

**Note:** Figures may not sum to the total due to rounding. Source: World Christian Database ([www.worldchristiandatabase.org](http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org)), following the methodology of the World Christian Encyclopedia, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2001) and World Christian Trends (2001).

Table 1 shows the dramatic rise of Christianity in the Global South of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and its corresponding sharp decline in the Global North of Europe and Northern America. Table 2 illustrates this major shift to the Global South from the Global North by highlighting the cultural traditions of Christianity. It is clear from the table that Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans are more typical representatives of Christianity than Americans or Europeans. The Europeans (including Americans of European descent) that were in the vast majority one hundred years ago are now in the minority today. In Table 3, there are lists of the top 10 Christian countries by size. In 1900, with the exception of Brazil, the top 10 were all Western countries; unfortunately, by 2050, Europe may likely lose its relevance in Christianity. From the table, only the U.S. will make the list unless God intervenes. Conversely, Table 4 lists the top 10 Muslim countries for the same dates. It is interesting to note that, beginning in 2005, India and Nigeria are common to both lists in tables 3 and 4. Going by these predictions, by 2050, the Indian and Nigerian Christian populations will increase to 137 and 130, respectively, while the Muslim populations for both countries will have a concomitant increase of 188 and 111, respectively.

### **Possible Implications<sup>6</sup> for Global Christianity**

The rise of Global South Christianity and the fall of Global North Christianity call for focused attention and a creative response. The demographic trends described above and the fast growth of world religions, especially Islam, has tremendous implications for both global hemispheres. No doubt, these trends have an ambivalent nexus towards the two global hemispheres: challenges and opportunities. Here are some of the possible implications of these trends:

1. The challenge for the global Church in the Southern hemisphere is meeting the basic physical needs of new converts. For instance, most, if not all, of the African countries' economies are still limping. For the church on this kind of poor continent to meet the basic physical needs of the new converts, who are themselves poor, will be a serious challenge if adequate preparations are not made. There will definitely be an increase in the need for adequate and quality education, health care, food security, employment for the millions of energetic young people, and other social services. How many of our African churches are currently meeting these needs? The greater chunk of new converts to the Global Southern Church is likely to be young, poor, uneducated, hungry, orphaned, and others that are bedeviled with numerous challenges.
2. The challenge the Global South is likely to face is training more pastors to keep up with the phenomenal increase in believers. Right now, the harvest is truly plenteous, but the laborers are few (Matt. 9:36; Lk. 10:2). Churches are planted here and there, but there are no trained pastors to man them. The few people who are ready to pastor these churches

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<sup>6</sup> The work of Mwashinga, Christopher R. (2016) help tremendously in this regard.

are not well trained, if they are trained at all. Thus, the increase may pose a serious challenge to the Global Southern churches.

3. The presence of world religions, such as Islam, Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., in the Global South poses another challenge to Christianity in this global hemisphere.

Conversely, the present trends provide a variety of opportunities for the Global Southern churches:

1. The church in this region can take advantage of the daily influx of young people who are converted to Christianity by training them and sending them out to the Global North as missionaries to preach the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. If well managed, through the tithes and offerings, these young converts could support the mission of the church and fund projects that are geared to supporting the millions who flock into the church through the ongoing process of the global South movement.

### **Recommendations and Suggestions**

To deal with the social challenges the Global South will face, there is an urgent need to have relevant programs in place in anticipation of the arrival of the new members. These programs will have to be not only relevant to the needs and aspirations of these new converts but also sustainable, since the work of feeding the hungry, ministering to the poor, instructing the less educated, and supporting the orphaned is not a sprint but a marathon.

To cope with the increase in new converts and immigrants in both the global south and North, there is a need to train more pastors to ensure proper spiritual care, which is crucial for the growth of the new believers and their integration into the church. Without proper and timely spiritual support and care, the new converts may feel like sheep without a shepherd in a world that is not always friendly to those who are converted to Christianity.

There is an urgent need for the Global Southern and Northern churches to embark on training members and new converts on how to co-exist with and share the gospel message with followers of the rival religions. In doing this, the church will have to reach the adherents of these world religions while feeding and keeping an eye on its own members, lest they wander outside of the fold and end up in non-Christian folds. The Global North should encourage the immigrants from the Global South to do a reverse and rescue mission by creating an enabling environment for their churches to thrive and rekindle the fire of revival in the Global Hemisphere.

The Full Scholarship Scheme (FSS) should be established by the Global North for Global Southerners who receive the call of God into the ministry of Christ as missionaries, pastors, evangelists, teachers, prophets, and apostles and relevant ministry works, and who wish to study in theological colleges, seminaries, or Christian universities in the Global North. There is also a need to launch other strategic schemes to explore the opportunities the global South phenomenon may provide for the fulfillment of the great commission in both global hemispheres.

There should be fresh thinking about the challenges the global church, or Christianity, is facing as a result of these developments in the areas of mission and discipleship to fulfill the divine mandate on earth. This may also include equipping young people with the necessary skills and encouraging them to start income-generating projects under the supervision of the church so that they might become as self-sufficient as humanly possible in their environments. This will also benefit the church greatly.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has critically and scholarly examined the trends in world Christianity using the concepts of Global South and Global North Christianity to show and evaluate some trends in world Christianity in general. The study shows that Christianity is in sharp decline in the Global North compared to its rise in the Global South. These global trends in Christianity have turned the Global South into the new centre of world Christianity. This shift in the global centre of Christianity calls for an urgent response to salvage Christianity from extinction in this part of the global hemisphere (the Global North). Being aware of some implications these global trends may pose, the paper recommends and suggests some steps that have to be taken towards formulating a creative response to the challenges for the relevance of the Global Southern Churches on their continents. And there should be an urgent need for a well-organized reverse and rescue mission in the Global Northern hemisphere before it is too late.

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