

Our Global Families



Christians Embracing Common Identity
in a Changing World

Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu

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To David B. Barrett,
who taught me to value what I count.—TMJ

To my children,
for enlarging my heart and my world.—CMW

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Our Global Families

Introduction

Our Two Global Families

Anyone who is married will tell you how challenging it can be to get along with the two different extended families of the bride and the groom. While the groom ponders the strange behavior of the bride's relatives, the bride is likely to enlighten him about irregularities in his own family. Truth be told, in order to get along well, both sides must give and take with a humble and willing spirit. Although we (the authors) are still learning to navigate this in our own journeys together with our spouses, we've also been pondering how we've been challenged in a much wider context with our two "global families."

We were born into the human race—one of our global families. As only two of more than seven billion individuals, we are increasingly aware of both the joys and the challenges of getting along with this unfathomable mosaic of peoples, languages, ethnicities, religions, and cultures. For over one hundred years the human family has come together every four years (only recently alternating in summer and winter) for a family reunion of sorts around our most accomplished athletes. These Olympic Games are generally a time of global solidarity and celebration. But other get-togethers are not so pleasant. In recent global meetings world leaders have had grave disagreements on trade, global warming, nuclear weapons, and a host of other issues. Consequently, while the global human family seems to have the know-how and resources to live well on our planet, we flounder when trying to work together to "save" it. Nonetheless, the human family overflows with creativity, producing technological marvels, impressive structures, dazzling works of art, poignant films,

beautiful music, and stunning works of literature. It's a resourceful, chaotic family to belong to, and we are glad to be a part of it.

We were both baptized into the Christian church as well—our other global family. The global Christian family is made up of 2.4 billion people (about a third of the human family). This year 45 million babies will be born into our Christian family, 22 million of us will die, 16 million will join us as adult converts, and 12 million will defect, most to agnosticism. As a result, there will be a net gain of 27 million Christians. That's a lot of new family members to become acquainted with!

We've been thinking a lot about our Christian family, Todd having recently completed the *Atlas of Global Christianity*. The *Atlas* documents six major Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Independent, marginal), three hundred minor traditions (Lutheran, Methodist, etc.), and 41,000 denominations (for example, well over 150 Presbyterian denominations in South Korea alone).¹ In addition, Christians are now found in every country of the world. Our personal journeys wind their way through this international and ecclesiastical diversity.

I (Todd) was baptized as a Scandinavian Lutheran, later joined a Charismatic mission agency (Youth with a Mission), married a Presbyterian in a Congregational church, baptized my first daughter in an Anglican church (in Singapore), worked in a Baptist mission headquarters, joined the faculty of an Evangelical seminary, and spent my sabbatical year attending an international interdenominational church in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

I (Cindy) grew up agnostic in the home of Taiwanese immigrants. I came to faith in Christ in college, never really identifying with a particular denomination. After graduation I responded to God's call to the mission field and have since found myself serving and worshiping in a variety of settings: a church plant in Mexico City with an Evangelical mission; a missional house church in downtown Houston; government churches, house churches, and international fellowships in China; and small and large, ethnic-specific and multiethnic, denominational and nondenominational, urban and suburban church plants and established churches in major US cities.

But who are we other than, first and foremost, followers of Jesus Christ? Our friend and colleague Timothy C. Tennent, president of Asbury Seminary, puts it this way:

In the context of global Christianity we must first and foremost see ourselves as Christians proclaiming the apostolic faith and only secondarily as Reformed Christians, Pentecostal Christians, Dispensational Christians, or Arminian Christians. We must learn to think of ourselves as members of a massive global

Christian movement that is looking more and more like John's vision in Revelation 7:9, which encompasses people from every nation, tribe, people, and language.²

This is the foundational reality supporting our book.

As part of that reality, the complexion of our Christian global family is changing (quite literally). Christians were over 80% white in 1910 but are now over 60% nonwhite. Even Todd's Lutherans are looking less German and Scandinavian every year! Our Christian family (like the human family) is represented by thousands of ethnic backgrounds and thousands of languages around the world. This positive development brings a new set of challenges. Some advocate the abandoning of all Western forms of Christianity in favor of the dynamic structures of churches of the Global South. Others ponder how to "manage" the seemingly unorganized and messy spread of Christianity in Africa and Asia. But the truth is that we all belong to Christ and we will have to learn how to interact in ways that strengthen the church in every country.

One thing is for certain: both of these families are global, and they don't always understand each other or agree on how to treat each other. Members of our Christian family are divided over the many problems that face the whole human family. Some would be glad to leave (i.e., "be raptured") as soon as possible. Others want to stick around to tackle global problems as an integral part of their Christian faith. What worries us most is how little interaction there is between the two global families. Our own research shows that almost 90% of all Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus do not personally know a Christian.³ In addition, most Christian missionaries over the past century have worked among tribal religionists or other Christians. Yet at the heart of the gospel message is the incarnation of Jesus Christ for the whole world. He came and lived among us so that we could live with grace and humility among our entire human family.

We can't be content as Christians if we separate ourselves from either of our global families. I (Todd) recently spent my sabbatical year in Thailand, a Buddhist country, and I was continually amazed by how wonderful it was to be a Christian in that context. I shared communion with Christians from hill tribes in the Golden Triangle (the infamous area overlapping Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand). I rented my home from a kind Buddhist professor who was genuinely interested in my research. Every day I interacted with people from both global families. It is richly rewarding to love and to be loved by both families.

One of the rewards of knowing so many people of other religions is that virtually every day is a holiday in someone's tradition! One day, it's Eid al-Fitr,

the end of the Muslim fast; a month later, Khao Phansa, the beginning of Thai Buddhist lent; and after another month, Zarathosht Diso, commemorating the death of the prophet Zoroaster. Knowing people of other faiths creates opportunities for celebration—a ritual shared by humanity.

In North America, where we both live, Christians are increasingly likely to have daily contact with representatives of both families, from far away as well as from nearby. We will continue to send missionaries to work around the world, most strategically among peoples with no Christian witness. Unlike our great-grandparents' generation, Christians today will do mission and development in concert with a truly global Christian family to serve the global human family. Whether we are from India, Brazil, Nigeria, or the United States, we have to ask ourselves afresh how best to participate in our global fellowship while at the same time incarnating the gospel among our human family. As Christians we all belong to both the global human family and the global Christian family. How well we imitate Christ in our relationships with both global families is one of the great challenges of the twenty-first century.

Our Motivation

In 2012, I (Todd) traveled to Chicago on three occasions to summarize the findings of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* and to make modest suggestions for what this might mean for the Christian identities of three different audiences. In February I came as the guest of the Board of Directors of Wheaton College, a major Evangelical college. There I outlined changes in the composition of global Christianity and how these might impact global Christian education. I emphasized how important it is to give young Evangelicals a sense of belonging in the global Christian family as well as help them acquire the skills to interact thoughtfully with people from other religions.

In June I returned to Chicago to give a similar talk to the synod of the Reformed Church in America. Here I emphasized how a denomination might cooperate with other Christian denominations and how it might better train its members to interact with non-Christians.

I returned for a third time in July, this time to speak to five thousand Korean and Korean American Christians interested in missions about their strategic role in global Christianity. Once again, I emphasized the importance of unity in the global body of Christ and in the ability of Christians to understand and communicate well with people in other religions.

After these three trips, I realized that whether it is at a college, a denomination, or a mission agency, we as Christians (especially Evangelicals) need

more tools to understand how to navigate today's changing world. First of all, we need a broader sense of Christian identity as we attempt to express our faith within the myriad of Christian denominations and traditions worldwide. How can we be faithful to our own tradition while being generous and engaging with Christians of other traditions? Second, we need to be better informed about other religions and build more significant friendships with people of other religions. Third, we need to be more realistic about our ability to change the world (solve the world's problems). These three ideas form the basis for this book.

Cindy and I got to know each other at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, in 2011. I served as Cindy's advisor for her master's integrative project, which focused on the global refugee crisis. While she carefully described the situation around the world, she made a strong case from the Scriptures for welcoming and hospitality. The resonance in vision with some of my own convictions led me to the idea of coauthoring this book. We bring Cindy's passion for biblically informed action to this book.

While we want to provide a strong biblical, theological, and historical case for our common Christian identity, we also want to see the practical ways in which this might impact our two global families, human and Christian. First, we look at how we might better get along with our Christian family. While much has been written about relations between different churches, we want to forge a new direction by emphasizing common Christian identity. Second, we look at interfaith relations through the same lens of common identity and offer some ideas about how these relationships might improve. Third, we are aware that both families are concerned about the world's social problems. We address how common identity might be helpful in working together for justice and peace.

While we celebrate the diversity of both our human and Christian families, we are concerned about the deep divisions in both of these families. These divisions work against our desire to see the world transformed and to see human beings flourish. This book is an attempt to address these divisions, especially from the point of view of identity. We address these challenges by bringing together reflections from a diverse group of theologians, historians, musicians, and others. Our book aims to offer a big picture of the global landscape. While many of the topics within deserve their own "zoom lens" treatment, we have chosen to present the information in a concise package in order to capture as many relevant themes as possible. The distinctive of the book, then, is its synthesis of a wide base of information tied to the field of religious demography. *Our Global Families* is divided into four parts with

a series of chapters that build a case for embracing common identity in our changing world.

Our Changing World

Part 1 offers an overview of how the world is changing in both religious and social dimensions. While these changes are more widely known today than they were just forty years ago, we need to dispel a few myths (or conventional wisdom). In the case of Christianity, the myth is that it is a Western religion. In the case of religion, the myth is that it is disappearing along with superstition. In the case of the world's problems, the myth is that they can be solved merely by the application of technology and science. In all three cases, the myths are far off the mark.

Chapter 1 gives a compact assessment of the status of Christianity around the world today (2015) and how this has changed, especially in the past 115 years. This demographic overview highlights the profound diversity of the world Christian movement, in traditions, denominations, languages, renewal movements, and other ways. It documents the demographic shift of Christianity from North to South, from West to non-West, from Europe/North America to Africa/Asia/Latin America.

In chapter 2 we offer an overview of the changing global religious scene, with an emphasis on global religious resurgence. While in the past sociologists predicted the demise of religion, instead it has become more significant around the world, both in numbers and in influence. From the standpoint of Western countries, which show a rise in those leaving traditional religion, this seems counterintuitive. But globally the percentage of people professing a religion is on the increase, especially in the most populous countries such as China and India. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the past forty years, the main cause of the resurgence was the unanticipated collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union. The majority of atheists and agnostics globally were (and are) to be found under Communist rule. Today, in virtually every ex-Communist country, religion is on the rise.

In chapter 3 we discuss the phenomenon of globalization and how it has increased human interconnectedness. The world has, in a palpable sense, gotten smaller. Issues that affect one part of the world have unprecedented potential to impact the rest of the world. In this chapter we survey some of the world's major social, economic, and health issues. We are particularly interested in Christian participation in overcoming these challenges. Later in the book (chap. 11) we examine how Christians and others are working for the common good.

Our Changing Identity

Part 2 examines how the changes in part 1 have impacted Christian identity around the world. As Christian diversity increases globally, there is a greater need to emphasize the similarities of our shared faith. Consequently, we draw on a wide range of sources to explore unity in diversity.

At its core, globalization is about shifting forms of human contact. Increasing contact between Christians around the world sparks reflection on identity. In chapter 4 we explore identity issues and the implications the complexities of globalization have both for Christian identity and for relating to other religionists. We lay out a vision of a new-humanity identity, one that glorifies God through the diversity-in-unity of its members. Local churches, then, are bridging-places, centers of reconciliation, where all the major diversities that separate human beings are reconciled through the power of the Holy Spirit. But Christians also belong to the global human family. As members of a common humanity, we should express concern for all.

In chapter 5 we are concerned with global concepts and identity. At the core of our argument related to global Christian identity, we find centuries of writings on the subject of global citizenship. While these originated in Greek philosophy, they gained strong Christian support, especially from Augustine. We build on this literature in making a case for a primary global Christian identity. Christianity can and should go deep within each culture of the world but at the same time is never fully at home in any particular culture. It's in this dynamic between the local and the universal that we can better understand global Christian identity.

On the subject of identity, while people have multiple dimensions to their identities, they are often expected or forced to claim a single dimension, sometimes leading to violent confrontations. We see that this is true both within Christianity (emphasizing sects or denominations over unity) and outside of Christianity (emphasizing only religious identity in relationship with others). We find helpful parallels to these identity problems in world music, which balances the tension between diversity and similarity.

In chapter 6 we focus on how Christians shape their local identities through contextualization, incarnational ministry, indigenous theology, and worship. Christians depend on biblical revelation that is universally true, but the Christian message is planted in the soil of every people on earth and produces a unique plant in each case. The aim of Christian mission is to allow the message to be formed in the context of the culture. Given the great diversity of the world's peoples, it is not surprising to see great diversity in the worldwide church. We examine innovative strategies, such as Muslims continuing to go to

the mosque while following Christ. We also look at ethnodoxology (worship in different cultures) and how it enriches our global Christian family.

Our Changing Relationships

In light of our findings in parts 1 and 2, in part 3 we ask how these realities might apply to our relationships with others. As stated earlier, we are deeply concerned about the divisions both in the Christian family and in the human family. We tell our own stories of ecumenical and interfaith involvement in Boston and Houston. We examine the problems in each and then set forth some strategies that might be used to remedy both.

First, in chapter 7, how do we relate to other Christians? We look briefly at twentieth-century strategies for Christian unity and contrast these with current strategies. Central to this is properly living out one's specific, local identity in the context of one's global Christian identity. Christians see ways in which they differ (ethnicity, language, denomination) as well as ways in which they are the same (practice, core theology, creeds).

In chapter 8 we extend this discussion on identity to our relationships with people in other religions. In the twentieth century many sociologists predicted the demise of religion. Religion has not only survived—it has thrived. The result is a world that is diverse and complex. In order for Evangelicals to navigate the crossroads of a multifaith world, we must understand how to view ourselves and others religiously. Today, religious people represent 88% of the world's population, so it is a significant undertaking both to understand and to interact with people of other religious traditions. Of course, the other 12% are agnostics and atheists who also need to be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of how vitriolic a small number of atheists have been in attacking religion. Many Christians want to engage the world but are concerned about how to maintain a strong Christian identity. We discuss various perspectives and paradigms of religious engagement, focusing on interfaith dialogue and friendship. In a globalized world, Christians must work together with others to address globalized problems. We address Christian relations with both the religious and nonreligious (namely, atheists and agnostics). We look for ways in which Christians might be more expansive in their relationships with others. A Christian approach to others should be based not in hostility but in benevolence.

In chapter 9 we look at how we might more effectively build relationships with others (both Christians and non-Christians). We examine the biblical values of hospitality and friendship. We advocate a hospitality that reflects

the kingdom of God and has the power to transform communities. This type of hospitality is both covenantal and sacramental in nature. Extending hospitality is an invitation to unity with Christians. It is also an invitation to community with all other members of our global human family. In order to develop friendships, we should learn to develop some skills in cross-cultural intelligence. Through friendship with others, we have opportunities to witness to the love of Christ.

Changing Our World

In part 4 we ask how our global Christian identity impacts our role in human flourishing. We examine what Christians are doing around the world while also addressing possible limitations in what Christians might be able to achieve in changing the world. Finally, we look at practical ways that Christians might address social, economic, health, and education challenges.

In chapter 10 we draw from three voices that address the limitations of our efforts in changing the world. We examine James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World*, Tyler Wigg-Stevenson's *The World Is Not Ours to Save*, and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's *To Heal a Fractured World*. Each of these authors offers criticisms of overly optimistic and simplistic ways of transforming the world. We summarize Hunter's critique of Christian plans to transform the world and his proposed solution of "faithful presence." We agree with Hunter that Christians have not appreciated the complexity involved in changing the world and have consequently launched numerous largely ineffective plans to make the world a better place.

In chapter 11 we offer practical ways that Christians might help the poor, heal the planet, and work for justice. We reflect on how various Christian groups try to meet the world's social challenges. We look at how churches, mission agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and individual Christians have addressed social issues. These range from global strategies, such as the Micah Challenge, to local strategies, such as mobilizing Christians for action in our respective communities. We also look into how Christians (especially Evangelicals) struggle to navigate the tension between evangelism and social action.

Conclusion

We believe there is a strong biblical case for emphasizing commonality both in the Christian community and in the human community. Yet the world and the church seem to lead people in the direction of emphasizing difference instead

of similarity. Understanding this and applying practical means to overcome it will be one small but significant step in the right direction. This is borne out of personal conviction and experience.

In December 1979, I (Todd) found myself on the Thai-Cambodia border in the world's largest Cambodian refugee camp, Khao-I-Dang. I was part of a Youth with a Mission (YWAM) team and working for the International Committee of the Red Cross constructing hospital clinics out of bamboo and wire. At one point I was the only American on my YWAM team, which consisted of a few Europeans, Africans, and Asians. As we worked together among the Thais and Cambodians, we clearly did not represent any single national, political, ethnic, or social agenda. We represented many denominations and many places around the world. We were there as part of the human family and, specifically, the global Christian family. It was there in Thailand that I first realized that my fundamental identity was as a follower of Christ, not a Scandinavian Lutheran from Minnesota.

I (Cindy) am involved with Vox Culture, a nonprofit organization that fights poverty and injustice in the city of Houston. The members of our core team represent a tremendous diversity in religious, ethnic, professional, and educational backgrounds. Our diversity brings talent to the organization and expands our network in ways that would be less effective if we were similar. Despite our differences, we are like-minded in so many important areas. Through working together for the common good and addressing social ills facing our community, I experience a deep sense of camaraderie with my friends at Vox.

Our hope is that this book will help Christians embrace common identity with both our global Christian family and our global human family and learn to flourish within those two diverse communities. Valuing common identity above that of any specific ethnic, linguistic, national, or social identity is a Christian virtue. And this might very well be a missing dimension in humanity's attempts to overcome the greatest global challenges. As followers of Christ we can do no less than to faithfully follow Jesus's example of loving our neighbors enough to get to know them and identify with them.

PART ONE



Our
Changing
World

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1

Meet Your Global Christian Family

You don't choose your family. They are God's gifts to you as you are to them.

—Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*

The whole church, and hence every individual member, stands in the line of succession from the apostles.

—Hans Küng, *The Church*

Ever since I (Todd) was a small child, I have counted things. Math was my favorite subject. When my family went on road trips, I calculated the miles, counted the landmarks, and kept track of different colors of cars. Later, in my early twenties, I lived in the inner city of San Francisco, working in a homeless shelter by day and mobilizing students in surrounding universities for mission by night. One day a friend and I noticed a large pallet of bricks across the street at a construction site. Offhandedly, I said to him, “I bet there are 2,500 bricks on that pallet.” He asked, “How do you know it’s 2,500?” “It just looks like 2,500 to me” was my unhelpful reply. Curiosity propelled us across the street, where we examined the pallet. It held ten rows of bricks by ten rows, stacked twenty-five high—2,500 bricks! My friend looked at me

meaningfully and said, “You should count something more important than bricks!” A year later, I encountered David Barrett, the world’s leading religious demographer, and under his tutelage I eventually started counting Christians.

In 1982 Barrett was featured in *Time* magazine for his achievement of compiling the *World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE)*.¹ This monumental thousand-page, oversize reference book cataloged the world’s Christians from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. Barrett uncovered 22,000 Christian denominations worldwide (today 45,000) and listed each of these, accompanied by membership estimates. I was so impressed with this book that I read it cover to cover, and when I got married in 1983, my wife and I gave a gift copy to our best man and maid of honor. A few years later I joined a doctoral program in which David Barrett was my mentor. I worked with Barrett after I finished my PhD, and together we produced the second edition of the *WCE* in 2001. Soon afterward, I established the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to continue Barrett’s work of counting Christians.²

So how many Christians are there, and where do they live? What languages do they speak, and what denominations or networks do they belong to? What does the global Christian family look like? In the Western world we typically think of a family as a nuclear family—mother, father, and a couple of children—but the Christian family is more of an extended family, a vast assemblage of aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives. Ever since the first century, the Christian family has reflected a broad and far-reaching collection of people related by faith. Christians have never spoken just one language, represented just one ethnicity, or lived in just one country.³

Christians are individuals who have distinct ethnic identities, speak identifiable languages, and make their homes in specific geographic locations.⁴ In fact, throughout the history of Christianity, the Christian message has often been embraced by whole villages, tribes, or peoples. At other times the number of Christians has declined in a particular place, either because they have been killed or because they have left their faith. Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette described these two trends as expansion and recession.⁵ Mission historian Andrew Walls called it “serial expansion,” where Christianity moves into new areas and dies out in areas of previous numerical strength.⁶ Historian Diana Butler Bass offers a moving and articulate defense of ordinary men and women and their essential contribution to Christian history.⁷ In the many ways the story is framed, our global Christian family has a long and illustrious lineage. From the shores of Galilee in the first century to the remotest villages in the Himalayas today, followers of Jesus Christ have gradually spread to virtually everywhere in the world. Barrett and I (Todd) estimated that there

have been approximately 8 billion Christians since the time of Christ (out of 38 billion human beings).⁸ Today (2015) the world's 2.4 billion Christians constitute 33% of the global population.

Who Is a “Christian”?

As we begin this journey into better understanding our global Christian family, invariably a question arises: Are we talking about the “true” or “invisible” church or everyone who considers themselves Christians? Since the authors are both Evangelicals, you might expect us to say that our global Christian family is made up only of Evangelicals. Evangelicals talk of the invisible church but tend to think this is mainly the visible Evangelical community. Or perhaps we make a little room for others and say that it might include a few Catholics, Orthodox, and liberal Protestants. Many Catholics consider only other Catholics as part of their family. The Orthodox do the same. We are concerned that each tradition within Christianity thinks like this, and this kind of thinking is precisely what we are trying to get beyond. We don't, in fact, decide who belongs to our family.

For the purposes of our book, we are adopting the United Nations' definition of a Christian as one who self-identifies as such.⁹ Under this rubric, our global Christian family is made up of all who consider themselves Christians whether or not they fit into our ideals of what it means to be a Christian. This view doesn't make any of us any less committed to our tradition, but it does mean that we are looking beyond our own network and expressing concern for all who call themselves Christians. This is how we use the term “Christian” throughout our book.

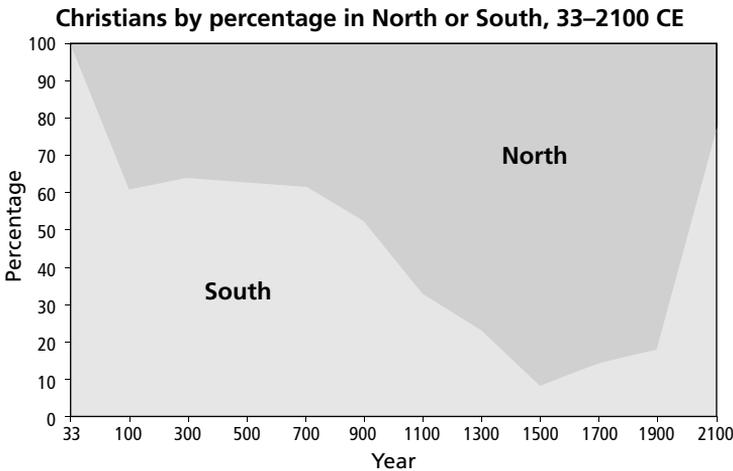
The Long View: Two Thousand Years

When we take a long view of Christian history, stepping back and considering two thousand years of Christian growth and decline, the demographics (or numbers) of Christians in this story are striking. Using clues from historical records, we can track the numbers of Christians in every continent of the world across the entire history of Christianity.¹⁰ The global percentage of Christians has gone up and down over time. Some high and low points are the years 700 CE (20%), 1000 CE (17%), 1300 CE (23%), 1600 CE (18%), and 1900 CE (24%). Asia had the most Christians for at least the first seven hundred years. By 1000 CE Europe had that distinction and has held it to the present. Today, in 2015, three continents (Europe, Africa, and Latin America) all have

approximately the same number of Christians. In a few short years, Africa will have, by far, the most Christians. In addition, Asia and Latin America will each have more Christians than Europe.

We can also group totals of Christians by Global North and Global South for the entire history of Christianity. By Global North, we are referring to Europe and Northern America; by Global South, we are referring to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.¹¹ For at least the first nine hundred years (until about 920 CE), Christians in the Global South outnumbered those in the Global North. Christians were all Southerners¹² at the time of Christ, gradually becoming more northern until 1500 CE, when fully 92% of all Christians were Northerners (Europeans). This percentage began to decline gradually until 1900, when it was 82%. After 1900 the percentage declined precipitously (while in the South the percentage rose meteorically). If these trends continue, by 2100 over three-fourths of all Christians will be living in the South.¹³ This represents a return to the demographic makeup of Christianity at the time of Christ (predominantly Southern) but also a vast extension of Christianity into all countries as well as thousands of peoples, languages, and cultures. The percentages are shown in graph 1.1, “Christians by percentage in North or South, 33–2100 CE.”

GRAPH 1.1



Source: *World Christian Database*, October 2013.

Recounting Christian Expansion and Recession

At the time of Christ’s crucifixion, Christians were concentrated in and around Jerusalem.¹⁴ From there Christians began to spread geographically

in several directions. The book of Acts provides a rough outline of early Christian expansion. Early Christianity grew first to the west, then to the east, and finally in the northwestern direction that would define the bulk of Christian history. Maps of early Christian expansion unmistakably illustrate this zigzag growth pattern.¹⁵ In the earliest Christian centuries, Christianity was introduced to dozens of peoples in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Those peoples included Jews, Romans, Greeks, Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Indians, Berbers, Syrians, and Persians. In the centuries that followed, Christians were found among the Vandals, Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Slavs, Turks, Russians, and Chinese. Nonetheless, after Constantine, Christianity was increasingly identified with European culture and political might. By 1500 the churches in Asia and Africa¹⁶ had waned and Christianity was almost exclusively identified as Northern and European. The European maritime rediscovery of the rest of the world brought Christianity “back” to Africa and Asia (and, for the first time, to the Americas), but unfortunately colonialism accompanied this Christian expansion even when missionaries opposed imperialism. The most recent centuries tell a story of European domination in theology, ecclesiology, and demography. All of that changed in the twentieth century, however.

The Short View: 115 Years

After 1900 something profound happened to the European dominance of global Christianity. Churches outside Europe and the Americas that had taken root in the nineteenth century grew rapidly in the twentieth century.¹⁷ Africa, in particular, led this transformation, starting with only 10 million Christians in 1900, rising to 380 million by 2000, and being expected to grow to over 560 million by 2015. Table 1.1 below shows the changing status of Christianity by continent over the past 115 years.¹⁸

This table illustrates several important trends. First, over the past 115 years Christianity changed very little as a proportion of the world’s population. In 1900 it was 34.5% of the global population, and today (2015) it is 33.0%. Second, one can see that Christianity has been growing more rapidly than the population in the Global South. Third, it has been growing more slowly than the population in the Global North. These two trends help to explain the *rapid* demographic shift of global Christianity to the South. While 82% of all Christians lived in the Global North in 1900, today nearly 65% of all Christians live in the Global South.

TABLE 1.1.
**Christians (C) by United Nations Continent
 and Global North/South, 1900–2015**

Region	Population 1900	C 1900	% 1900	Population 2015	C 2015	% 2015	C 1900– 2015	Pop 1900– 2015
GLOBAL SOUTH	1,135,392,000	98,674,000	8.7%	6,220,532,000	1,559,890,000	25.1%	2.43%	1.49%
Africa	107,808,000	9,918,000	9.2%	1,166,239,000	569,861,000	48.9%	3.59%	2.09%
Asia	956,196,000	21,914,000	2.3%	4,384,844,000	379,511,000	8.7%	2.51%	1.33%
Latin America	65,142,000	62,003,000	95.2%	630,089,000	581,730,000	92.3%	1.97%	1.99%
Oceania	6,246,000	4,839,000	77.5%	39,359,000	28,787,000	73.1%	1.56%	1.61%
GLOBAL NORTH	484,233,000	459,457,000	94.9%	1,104,251,000	860,433,000	77.9%	0.55%	0.72%
Europe	402,607,000	380,645,000	94.5%	743,123,000	579,789,000	78.0%	0.37%	0.53%
Northern America	81,626,000	78,812,000	96.6%	361,128,000	280,644,000	77.7%	1.11%	1.30%
Globe	1,619,625,000	558,131,000	34.5%	7,324,782,000	2,420,323,000	33.0%	1.28%	1.32%

Source: *World Christian Database*, October 2013.
 Note: C 1900–2015 and Pop 1900–2015 represent the annual average growth rate of Christians and population over the 115-year period.

Christian Traditions and Movements

Table 1.2 below illustrates additional changes over the 115-year period from 1900 to 2015. Of the major traditions in Christianity (described in more detail in chap. 7), Roman Catholicism represents just over half of the total Christian population. Catholics' percentage of the global population grew slightly to almost 17% today. This rise, however, masks a steep decline in adherents in Europe accompanied by a simultaneous rise in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Since 1900, Orthodox and Anglicans have declined as percentages of the population, both within Christianity and globally. Orthodoxy, decimated by the rise of Communism in Europe, dropped from over 7% of the global population in 1900 to 4% today. At the same time, the Orthodox fell from 21% to less than 12% of all Christians. Anglicans (along with Roman Catholics) lost many adherents in the Global North while gaining in the Global South. In 1900, Anglicans represented 1.9% of the global population, dropping to 1.3% in 2015. Over the same period, the percentage of Anglicans among Christians fell from 5.5% to 3.9%. Protestant Christians have grown slightly as a percentage of all Christians. Their share of the global population, however, decreased from 6.4% to 6.1% in the same period. Independents, on the other hand, increased their shares of the total Christian community and of the global population. Independent Christians, especially in Africa and Asia, represented only 1.6% of Christians in 1900 but rose meteorically

to over 17% by 2015. Their share of the global population also increased, from 0.5% to 5.7%.

Movements within Christianity and across the traditions likewise experienced changes in size and percentage over the 115-year period (see table 1.2 below). In 1900, Evangelicals, mainly Protestants in the Global North, represented 14.5% of all Christians and 5% of the global population. By 2015, these had dropped to 13.6% and 4.5%, respectively. Renewalists (Pentecostals and Charismatics), on the other hand, grew rapidly, from just 0.1% of the global population and 0.2% of all Christians in 1900 to 8.8% and 26.6%, respectively, by 2015.

TABLE 1.2.
Christian (C) Traditions and Movements, 1900 and 2015

	Name	Adherents 1900	% world 1900	% all Cs 1900	Adherents 2015	% world 2015	% all Cs 2015
Traditions	Anglicans	30,578,000	1.9%	5.5%	94,226,000	1.3%	3.9%
	Independents	8,859,000	0.5%	1.6%	418,168,000	5.7%	17.3%
	Orthodox	115,855,000	7.2%	20.8%	282,967,000	3.9%	11.7%
	Protestants	103,028,000	6.4%	18.5%	449,419,000	6.1%	18.6%
	Catholics	266,566,000	16.5%	47.8%	1,239,808,000	16.9%	51.2%
Movements	Evangelicals	80,912,000	5.0%	14.5%	328,582,000	4.5%	13.6%
	Renewalists	981,000	0.1%	0.2%	643,661,000	8.8%	26.6%

Source: *World Christian Database*, October 2013.
Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because of double-counting between traditions.

Recounting the Past Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, Protestant Christian leaders were full of optimism for what they anticipated would be a time of great strides for the church, a century of peace—a “Christian Century,” as the eponymous magazine put it. The advancement of Christianity was to go hand in hand with the “civilization” of the remotest parts of the world. Human beings would no longer exploit one another, being too advanced and educated to continue in the “primitive” activities and beliefs of “less civilized” times. In 1910, Evangelical Protestant leaders gathered in Scotland for the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, which encouraged Christians to engage in purposeful missionary work around the world. The “fundamental conviction” of the conference was that “the good news of Jesus Christ can take root in every culture across the world and produce fruit in church and society everywhere.”¹⁹

Yet all too soon, war and conflict crushed the optimism of the early twentieth century. This began with World War I in 1914, resulting in a severe decline of hope through traumatic and deadly events including the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of Adolf Hitler, World War II, the horrors of the Holocaust, fears of Communism, Mao Zedong in China, and Pol Pot in Cambodia. In the final decade of the twentieth century, the genocide in Rwanda and the civil war in Sudan killed millions, mainly Christians. More people worldwide were killed in warfare in the twentieth century than in the previous four centuries combined.²⁰ At the same time, more Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than in all previous centuries combined.²¹

During this century missionaries, mainly from the Global North, took the gospel to “the ends of the earth.” This provided the initial spark that helped to make Christianity a worldwide phenomenon (although local converts did almost all of the evangelism). Unfortunately, in this process Western Christianity was imposed on other cultures, giving the impression that despite its translatability, Christianity was a Western religion. Korean missiologist Moon-jang Lee notes, “The subsequent globalization of the image of Western Christianity poses a problem for non-Western Christianity. Though we talk about a post-Christian West and a post-Western Christianity, the prevailing forms of Christianity in most parts of the non-Western world are still dominated by Western influences.”²² Nonetheless, all around the world, indigenous churches contextualized the gospel in their own cultures (see chap. 6). Projections for the future show that the Christian churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania will likely continue to acquire an increasing percentage of global Christianity. As noted earlier, it is expected that by 2100 over three-fourths of all Christians will be from the Global South.

Anticipating the Christian Future

What does it mean for the future of Christianity that the proportion of Christians in the Global South continues to increase? Churches in the South are on the whole more traditional, conservative (theologically but not necessarily politically), and apocalyptic (concerned with end times) than churches in the North, which can seem to represent a more theologically liberal outlook.²³ As historian Philip Jenkins observes, “The denominations that are triumphing all across the Global South are stalwartly traditional or even reactionary by the standards of the economically advanced nations.”²⁴ Part of this dynamic is explained by the rise of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal during the twentieth century.²⁵ Christians in this broader movement now number well

over 600 million, with most members concentrated in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.²⁶ Churches in the North might easily dismiss this rapidly growing movement in the rest of the world as primitive or underdeveloped were it not for the fact that an increasing number of Southern Christians are emigrating to the North, bringing conservative, Charismatic Christianity with them.

Theology Moves South

Until now, Western scholars have written the dominant theologies of Christianity, but the massive movements of Southern Christianity, whether they be Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, or Independent, will likely chart the future of Christian theology. Theologians such as the Ghanaian Kwame Bediako have begun to outline the enormous challenges this project holds for African Christians.²⁷ Malaysian Methodist bishop Hwa Yung poses that as the Asian church grows rapidly, it needs to “self-theologize, developing a theology for itself that is rooted in one’s culture, history and context.”²⁸ The Northern church would do well to take on the posture of learning. British missiologist David Smith advises,

We are witnesses to the emergence of new centres of spiritual and theological vitality as Christians from the southern continents add their insights to the church’s total knowledge of the incomparable Christ. In the present transitional stage we are moving *from* a Christendom shaped by the culture of the Western world, *to* a world Christianity which will develop new spiritual and theological insights as the biblical revelation is allowed to interact with the many cultures in which Christ is now confessed as Lord.²⁹

An alternative is the possibility that the differences between Northern and Southern Christianities could cause them to drift apart to such an extent that “the North would define itself against [Southern] Christianity.”³⁰ But Cuban American historian-theologian Justo González calls the Western/Northern church to humbly join the larger movement of global Christianity.

The fact is that the gospel *is* making headway among the many tribes, nations, and languages—that it is indeed making more headway among them than it is among the dominant cultures of the North Atlantic. The question is not whether there will be a multicultural church. Rather, the question is whether those who have become so accustomed to seeing the gospel expressed only or primarily in terms of those dominant cultures will be able to participate in the life of the multicultural church that is already a reality.³¹

Theological Education and Leadership Training

The changing nature of theology has further implications for theological education and leadership training.³² Centers of theological education need to be established and further developed in the South, as there is a “great need for non-Western exegetical studies which will help [Southerners] understand the Bible better, and which will complement the work that is being done by Western writers.”³³ If the churches of the North are to participate in the life of the global church, their theological seminaries need a diverse curriculum of studies that include non-Western church histories and theologies, thereby reversing the assumption that Christians in the North possess the spiritual, theological, and material resources needed by the rest of the world.

Nonetheless, American theologian Harvey Cox cautions that it is premature to claim that the era of Western Christianity is over. Instead,

We are entering an era of global Christianities in which the new ecumenical challenge will be not the relations between and among traditional Catholics and Orthodox and Protestant Christians but the relations among them and the burgeoning new Christian communities that are now rooting themselves in Indic, Chinese, Inca, and African cultures.³⁴

With time, increasingly prominent theologies will emerge from the South; in the meantime the North will continue to contribute to the global discourse. We are, North and South, all part of the same family. We all need each other.

“They Speak in Many Tongues”

The rapid growth of Christianity in non-Western, non-English-speaking countries also implies that the language of Christians is changing. Already by 1980, Spanish was the leading language of church membership in the world (because of Latin America, not Spain).³⁵ European languages dominate the top ten, including English (2), Russian (4), German (6), French (7), Polish (8), and Ukrainian (9). But languages of the Global South are moving up the list: Portuguese (3), primarily because of Brazil; Chinese (5); and Tagalog (the Philippines) (10); with Amharic (Ethiopia), Korean, Yoruba (Nigeria), Igbo (Nigeria), and Cebuano (the Philippines) not far behind. Of course, Christians in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania worship in numerous other languages besides Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Yoruba. Thus, the translation of the gospel into indigenous languages and cultures has become increasingly important.

Missions historian Lamin Sanneh writes that “Christianity could avoid translation only like water avoiding being wet.”³⁶ He contrasts this with Islam, in which true followers must worship in Arabic regardless of native language or culture. In Christianity, all languages and cultures are validated by the translation of the Scriptures. For many people groups who have no written language, Bible translators not only provide Scriptures in the mother tongue but also encourage wider literacy and other forms of education.

Western scholars will also have to recognize and seriously consider writings in non-English and non-European languages. There is a great need for Christian scholarship in these languages to be translated into English, French, German, Spanish, and other Northern languages. Apart from the shift away from Northern languages as the dominant languages of Christianity, there is also a need for a change in the perception of missions as a Northern phenomenon. For the past several hundred years, Christians in Europe and the United States have been “the church” and the rest of the world has been “the mission field.” The shift of Christianity from Europe to the southern hemisphere means that Africa, Asia, and Latin America can no longer be seen as the periphery. Instead, Christian mission to the whole world will require participation from all Christians—North and South—to be successful.

The Poor Are Still with Us

Another daily reality for Southern Christians is poverty. Much of the Global South deals with serious issues of poverty and a lack of access to proper health care. We examine these in chapters 3 and 11. Countries that have been hardest hit by AIDS—such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland—are also countries where Christianity is flourishing. Accounts of healing and exorcism found in the Bible are taken more seriously by those without access to necessary medical care. I (Todd) have an American Pentecostal student who recently returned from Mozambique where she witnessed for the first time healing and deliverance from demonic powers. Many of my Pentecostal/Charismatic students in Boston hail from the Global South and attest to miraculous works prevalent back home.

David Smith describes these churches as “overwhelmingly charismatic and conservative in character, reading the New Testament in ways that seem puzzlingly literal to their friends in the North,” and as “largely made up of poor people who in many cases live on the very edge of existence.”³⁷ Thus the growth of Christianity in poorer regions implies not only an alternate *reading* of the Bible, but indeed a different *experience* of the Bible. For the poorer Christian

communities in the South, meeting the social needs of people is integral to Christian witness, theology, and ministry. For the Western church and missionaries, poverty and AIDS in the South cannot be ignored. Assistance must be granted with humility and in acknowledgment of a crisis *within* the church.

Clash or Cooperation?

The shift of Christianity's demographic center to the South brings to the forefront the potential for conflict between Christians and non-Christians. How will Muslim-Christian tensions in countries like Nigeria, Sudan/South Sudan, Egypt, Indonesia, and the Philippines be resolved? What is the future of the Christian church in Hindu India? How will Buddhists and Christians coexist in Southeast Asia? We examine these issues in chapters 8 and 9. Furthermore, although these religions are found primarily in Asia, increasing numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are living in North America and Europe. Christians around the globe have an opportunity to show hospitality to non-Christian neighbors and to take a genuine interest in their religions and cultures.

Persecution

For some time now, most Christians in the North have experienced religious freedom and comfort.³⁸ The spread of Christianity to the South, where it often clashes with other religions, brings with it the reality of persecution and martyrdom experienced by the church in the past. In places like the Middle East, Nigeria, Sudan/South Sudan, India, and China, many Christians live with the risk of losing their lives. The Pew Research Center reported in 2012 that Christians are the most widely persecuted religious group (139 countries).³⁹ Christian discipleship, often defined in the New Testament by suffering and persecution, is taking on greater significance for the global church. As increasing numbers of Christians suffer and die, the global Christian family suffers and takes on responsibility for mutual comfort, support, and advocacy.

Southern Christianities Yet to Emerge

It is important to remember that at least four thousand cultures (out of 13,000) have not yet been reached with the Christian gospel.⁴⁰ The gospel command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) means that four thousand new cultural forms of Christianity have yet to emerge. These indigenous forms are

sometimes referred to as “Christianities,” contextualized forms of Christianity, highlighting the unique features of each that make them starkly different from each other. Most of these cultures are Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. Who from the North or South will be presenting the gospel to these peoples? What cultural expectations are likely to be formed for those who choose to follow Christ? We look at this more closely in chapter 6.

Conclusion

All of these factors point toward a future for the global Christian family that represents both opportunity and peril. What is certain is that in either case Christianity will not be drawing on a dominant Northern or Southern cultural, linguistic, or political framework for the answers. Global Christianity is a phenomenon not of uniformity but of ever-increasing diversity, a feature we will explore further in chapter 5. Episcopal priest Paul-Gordon Chandler writes, “It is like the canvas of a beautiful painting with contrasting and complementary colors. The foundation for our unity as Christians throughout the world is not our likeness but our diversity.”⁴¹ The unanswered question for Christians from both the North and the South is how well we will work, minister, and grow together as a family in the context of this astonishing diversity. Today, the global composition of our Christian family provides clues about where one might look to find both the answers and the leadership for that quest.