

LausanneWorldPulse.com

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A free, monthly online publication that provides you with evangelism and missions news and information.

April 2007

WORLD NEWS BRIEFS

ARGENTINA

The Latin American Council of Churches, known under its Spanish acronym CLAI, has elected Panamanian Episcopal (Anglican) Bishop Julio Murray as its first black president in a tightly contested election. "I am very happy about this election," said the Rev. Antônio Olimpio de Sant'Ana, the executive secretary of Brazil's National Ecumenical Council to Combat Racism. "We need to have more black people represented in this church body and we also need to have women in the leadership." Murray won after a third run off in voting for the presidency of the 150-member church council that is represented in twenty countries. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

[Integrated Community Development International](#) (ICDI) in Boali, Central African Republic, officially began broadcasting the gospel via shortwave with help from [HCJB Global Voice](#). This is the country's first privately-owned shortwave station, making Christian broadcasts available to most of the country's 3.5 million people. ICDI plan to use the radio broadcasts to help disseminate community health information and to spread the gospel. The station, broadcasting at 6030 kHz, airs eight hours daily with programming in French and three African languages, Sango, Aka and Fulfuldé. ([ASSIST News Service](#))

CHINA

There are 113,000 Internet cafes throughout China, serving over 123 million Internet users. Of this number, an estimated eighteen million of these users are under the age of eighteen. According to new governmental regulations, those under eighteen will not be permitted to use the Internet. ([China Clippings](#))

CHINA

With increasing restrictions within China, radio becomes an even more attractive means of gaining information from the outside world. [Alliance Radio in Hong Kong](#) continues to prepare and broadcast programs over Christian radio stations outside of China. Popular programs are being prepared for the thousands of workers who live in crowded dormitories and who work at difficult and sometimes dangerous jobs in the Pearl River Delta. These programs are being aired in the factories by the Chinese business people who operate them. A project that was inaugurated last year is the "Food for Life" nurturing program. Over two thousand sets of two CDs each were sent to rural workers in Shanghai, Shenzhen and Dongquan industrial centers so that the people could listen to heaven's message in their dormitories. ([China Clippings](#))

COSTA RICA

The first Iberoamerican Wesleyan Women's conference was held in February in San Jose, Costa Rica. Over two hundred women from thirteen different countries attended this event, including two women from Spain and four women from Equatorial Guinea, Africa. This event was the first Wesleyan Women's conference in Iberoamerica

as well as the first event with representation from Spain and Equatorial Guinea, Africa. The largest delegation aside from Costa Rica was from Panama, with an attendance of twenty-five. Martha Blackburn, general director of Wesleyan Women, was a keynote speaker, emphasizing being a “Light to the Nations,” which was also the theme of the conference. Reverend Zulay de Azofeifa was appointed director of Wesleyan Women of Iberoamerica. A committee of six women from six different countries was appointed to plan the future ministry of the Wesleyan Women of Latin America. ([Wesleyan Information Network](#))

INDONESIA

Leaders from the Christian Conference of Asia have concluded five days of celebrations in Indonesia for their fiftieth year as a grouping with one leader calling for stepped-up efforts by churches to fight corruption and nepotism in the region. “The celebrations were not just about the past; they were also a time to look to the future and to identify new opportunities to equip the churches to venture into ministries unique and decisive in the Asian context,” said Prawate Khid-arn, general secretary of the conference. ([Ecumenical News International](#))

NORWAY

Approximately seventy people met on 2 December 2006 in Oslo, Norway to celebrate the official organization of the country's first Church of the Nazarene. Between thirty and fifty people now comprise the Portuguese-speaking congregation, which began as fifteen to twenty people meeting in 2002 at the home of Jorge Rocha, a Cape Verdean bi-vocational pastor. Rocha, who pastored several home churches during the decade he lived in Brazil, was ordained at the Scandinavia District Assembly in May 2006 after fifteen years as a licensed minister. It marked the district's first ordination in fifteen years. ([Nazarene Communications Network](#))

RUSSIA

Leaders from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia gathered recently to address the issue of unity among evangelicals in Russia. Participants not only discussed working together with different groups and denominations, but also addressed the differences between the older generation of believers and the new generation of young Christian leaders. “Today’s young Christian leaders understand that they stand on a foundation that was forged through suffering and persecution,” points out Sergey Rakhuba, vice-president of ministries at [Russian Ministries](#). “As the older generation of Christians passes on its wisdom and experience, the next generation of believers is ready to pick up the baton of leadership and run the race God has for them.” ([ASSIST News Service](#))

PUBLISHER’S MEMO

[A Continued Commitment to the Call as World Christianity's Center of Gravity Shifts](#)

By Doug Birdsall

As we enter into the spring and Easter season, we are reminded of transformation, renewal and fresh beginnings. We as the global Church are indeed in the midst of great transformation and renewal. As Dana Robert, Philip Jenkins, Todd Johnson and other scholars have demonstrated, we are in the midst of an incredible shift of the center of gravity in world Christianity from the global North to the global South (see Bradley Coon’s [article](#) in this month's issue for more on this).

The average world Christian no longer looks like a middle class, middle-aged, Caucasian, North American male from a mainline denomination. Today, the average world Christian looks more like a subsisting 18-year-old African female from an independent, charismatic denomination. With this seismic shift of the center of gravity from the global North to the South, Lausanne is committed to being a movement that fully reflects the demographic and theological realities of the entire global Church. Although the world we live in is changing,

our commitment remains the same—the whole Church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world. The only difference now is in our understanding of the composition of the “whole Church” and the “whole world” in our time.

This issue of Lausanne World Pulse, focusing on **contextualizing the gospel**, is especially relevant to this topic. As we adjust our view of the whole Church and the whole world, so too must we adjust how we share the whole gospel in ways that are effective, challenging and life-changing.

As the demographic realities of the Church change, Lausanne is committed to joining hands and raising up leaders with particular interest in the global South. This is to ensure that participation and leadership in the movement is reflective of the global Church. It is also to encourage synergistic cooperation and partnership, not domination between leaders from the North and the South.

One such example of these efforts is illustrated in the 2006 **Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering** in Malaysia. Sixty-five percent of participants were from the global South, seven percent from Eastern Europe and twenty-eight percent combined from Western Europe, North America and Australia. Our commitment to being the whole Church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world was not only espoused, but embodied and celebrated.

Lausanne is not only committed to being reflective of the global realities of the Church, but to providing a platform, especially to a new generation of leadership. We as the Church need to hear the prophetic voices from both the North and the South. It is our hope that by providing a platform, we can all hear the voices from the South in particular to help overcome the negative association of the Church with the “West.” In reality, the Church in the West is a minority. Christianity is truly a global religion.

Lausanne is also committed to finding a new equilibrium in which the Church as a whole can interact. The dramatic shift from the North to the South is tremendous in terms of population; however, it remains dramatically uneven in terms of resources. Much of the financial, educational and technological resources continue to reside in the North, although the demographic resources have shifted south. In light of this disequilibrium, Lausanne is committed to finding a new equilibrium where North and South may interact with each other synergistically on the basis of shared calling, vision, need, resources and mutual respect.

It is indeed time for the whole Church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. How we do this will change as we come to terms with the shift in the global Church’s center of gravity. But that we will do it is unwavering. This is our shared commitment, vision and call. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Doug Birdsall is executive chair for the **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization**, and director of the J. Christy Wilson, Jr. Center for World Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has served as a missionary in Japan with Asian Access/LIFE Ministries since 1980. Birdsall has been president of **Asian Access**, a mission focused on evangelism and church multiplication, since 1991.

WORLD EVANGELISM & MISSIONS REPORTS

Border Station in Guatemala Reaching Mexicans with Christ’s Love
By **Kenneth D. MacHarg**

Radio Impacto, a small, 1,000-watt FM Christian radio station in La Mesilla, Guatemala, is also planting churches.

“Our goal is to reach Chiapas state [in southern Mexico] with the gospel,” said Christian Villatoro, pastor of the fast-growing Twelve Pearls Evangelical Church and general manager of the radio station. “It’s difficult to do ministry in Mexico and almost impossible to put a Christian radio station there. So we decided to focus our broadcasts to that audience.”

To do that, Radio Impacto incorporates Mexican music and invites pastors from Chiapas state to appear on the air regularly. In Mexico, it is illegal for a radio station to be owned by a Christian organization. Villatoro knows that the broadcasts are bearing fruit.

“Three years ago a listener traveled all the way from his small town in Mexico to visit me here in Guatemala,” Villatoro said. “He told me that he was Roman Catholic but had doubts about his faith. I invited him to my house and two hours later he accepted Jesus Christ. Today, in his town, there is an evangelical church and a growing number of Christians.”

Villatoro says that someone from Radio Impacto visits that town every eight to ten days to provide training and discipleship and help the new church grow. Radio Impacto is on the second floor of the Guatemalan church’s new building. The bare walls of the control room and studio reflect the station’s austerity, but the on-the-air enthusiasm witnesses to the fervor of staff members to reach Mexico for Christ.

Largely a self-developed ministry, the radio station reflects a church that bustles with activity. The station was started about five years ago by Ronaldo Orellana, a local businessman and a member of Villatoro’s church.

While a live program involving greetings and announcements for Mexican listeners is underway in the studio, one hundred women have gathered in the church’s old worship center for an afternoon meeting. Their efforts are almost drowned out by hundreds of teenagers in the adjoining school also operated by the congregation.

The station is supported by the church’s four hundred members who also provide volunteer help on and off the air. Each week the church offers three worship services and has 225 participants in a women’s Bible study, one hundred teenagers involved in youth ministries, one hundred men meeting for prayer and a number of daughter churches springing up throughout Mexico and Guatemala.

Villatoro says that thirty percent of Guatemala is considered to be evangelical, but in his town the number reaches thirty-five percent of the population. In contrast, the evangelical population in Chiapas is about nineteen percent.

He is grateful for the help provided to his station by **HCJB Global Voice** engineer Steve Sutherland from Quito. The missionary has visited the station three times in the last two years to help improve the technical quality of the signal. The station also uses several hours of programming, including special releases for women, men and children from ALAS-HCJB, the mission’s Christian Spanish programming satellite network with about ninety affiliates across Latin America. In addition, HCJB Global Voice’s radio development ministry recently provided a training workshop for Radio Impacto’s staff.

Despite all of the work involved with serving an active church, operating a school and running a missionary radio station, Villatoro is not done yet. “We need to increase our transmitter power,” he said. “We moved the antenna to a higher mountain a year ago, but now we need to go up to at least three thousand watts so that we can put a better signal into Mexico and reach farther into the country.”

The pastor indicated that the station has a strong signal in large cities such as Tuxtla Gutiérrez, but that there are pockets of Chiapas where the signal is spotty. “We need a new transmitter and we need some remote control equipment,” he explained.

Through Bible studies, music, on-air telephone conversations and other programs, the team at Radio Impacto is addressing serious problems among the Mexican audience. Drug addiction and the growing influence of gangs among youth are two concerns that drive many programming decisions.

(This article is edited from a news release by [Missionary Journalist](#).)

Kenneth D. MacHarg has served as a missionary journalist with [HCJB Global](#) and the [Latin America Mission](#). Currently, he writes for Christian publications about what the Lord is doing around the world.

[Christian Churches Together Launched in Pasadena, California, USA: Stresses Evangelism and an End to Poverty](#)

A consensus on the importance of evangelism and the need to eliminate domestic poverty marked the official formation of Christian Churches Together (CCT) meeting 6-9 February 2007 in Pasadena, California, USA.

The CCT is composed of thirty-six churches and national organizations from virtually all US Christian groups who have been seeking to come together for fellowship, worship and opportunities to share in important ministries. “Remember that you belong to God and God does not belong to you,” said the Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens, quoting his mother’s early admonition. That, said Pickens, is the wisdom that will hold CCT groups together.

“CCT is good news for American Christians,” said the very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America. “Our gathering of the wider spectrum of US Christian churches is succeeding in building mutual trust and overcoming stereotypes. Our common hope and expectation is that CCT will enable our churches to offer a strong and united Christian moral voice and vision in the public square.”

Christian Churches Together (CCT) began in 2001 out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today. Over the past five years, with a focus on praying together and building relationships, CCT has become the broadest, most inclusive fellowship of Christian churches and traditions in the US, including Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, historic Protestant and Racial/Ethnic churches among its participants.

A celebration and commitment service highlighted the gathering that included over 150 participants and observers and a group of seminary students and young leaders. The thirty-six founding members includes the most recent groups to become official participants in CCT: the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

“Seeing the leaders of all the participating churches and organizations standing and praying together in their commitment to this vision was a powerful, visible sign of hope,” said the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson of the Reformed Church in America, chair of the CCT steering committee. “We have said from the beginning that our purpose is to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world.”

Evangelism and the need to eliminate poverty in the US were major topics at the meeting. Dr. William Shaw of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., declared that poverty in the United States to be a “scandal.” Poverty “will not be redressed without intentional and painful effort by the total US community,” he said. “CCT calls the country’s conscience to that effort and commits itself to being a part of that redressing.”

CCT participants continued discussions from the 2006 annual gathering in Atlanta, Georgia, on the topic of domestic poverty. A committee was appointed in Atlanta to find common ground and propose ways for CCT to challenge US Christians and the whole country to address the tragedy of poverty in our own neighborhoods. CCT considered the committee's proposals and approved a statement on poverty while agreeing to continue addressing domestic poverty in the future, including a strong focus at the 2008 annual gathering in Washington, D.C.

The text of the statement on poverty is below.

The discussion on evangelism was made open to a group of seminary students and young leaders. The group represented the diversity of the five faith families of the CCT. "Their excitement and contributions were welcomed and CCT leadership expects to look for ways to include these perspectives in the future," Granberg-Michaelson said.

Worship services included liturgies from all of the five faith families and musical contributions from a Korean choir of pastor's wives. At the invitation of His Eminence, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, CCT participated in evening prayer and dinner at the Armenian Orthodox Center of Los Angeles (California).

On the first day of the gathering, participants addressed the theme "Is Jesus' Proclamation Our Proclamation?," responding to Luke 4:18. Participants in CCT discussed evangelism in their church and faith family contexts and how evangelism shapes or includes actions toward social justice and the healing of the deep hurts in our world.

Bishop Stephen Blaire, Catholic Diocese of Stockton, noted that one of the common threads discovered in this day-long discussion was an understanding that evangelism is rooted in personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Shared learning is a crucial part of the fellowship of the CCT. Each family shared some history, perspectives and practices related to evangelism with the other churches. Participants wrestled with the challenge to consider future cooperative possibilities while recognizing and affirming the common efforts and cooperation that already exists on many levels.

Bishop James Leggett of the International Pentecostal Holiness church proclaimed that we must follow Jesus in his prayer "that all might be one." Along with Dr. Shaw, Rev. Pickens, Bishop Leggett and Father Kishkovsky, Bishop Richard Sklba of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (representing Cardinal William Keeler of the Archdiocese of Baltimore) joined together as the presidents of the five faith families of CCT and, in a symbolic action of lighting candles, committed "to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world."

Christian Churches Together's Statement on Poverty

As Christian leaders in the wealthiest society on earth, we are called by God to urge our churches and nation to strengthen and expand efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world. The gospel and our ethical principles place our service of the poor and vulnerable and our work for justice at the center of Christian life and witness.

Our common faith compels us. Christ our Lord teaches us that when we serve and stand with "the least of these," we serve and stand with him. Our Bible teaches us in hundreds of places that the God we worship has a special concern for the poor. God judges individuals and societies by how they respond to the needs of the poor. As leaders in Christian Churches Together, we believe that a renewed commitment to overcome poverty is central to the mission of the Church and essential to our unity in Christ. Therefore, in order to obey our God, respect the dignity of every person and promote the common good of society, we must act. Our focus here is domestic poverty, but we reaffirm our commitment to overcome poverty all around the world.

Widespread and persistent poverty challenges us to action. The painful truth is that about thirty-seven million people in our country live below the poverty line. Tragically, eighteen percent of all our children struggle in poverty. The sad reality is that millions in our nation work hard and still cannot escape poverty. We lament this ongoing poverty. Our faith in Christ, who is the truth, compels us to confront the ignorance of and indifference to the scandal of widespread, persistent poverty in this rich nation. We must call this situation by its real names: moral failure, unacceptable injustice. Our faith in Christ drives us to call our churches and our society to a more urgent, united response.

We are grateful for the vast array of ways our churches are already helping millions of struggling people. We want to build on these efforts, learn from each other and collaborate more closely. But we can, we must, do more.

We also recognize and encourage leaders in community, economic and public life who seek justice for poor people in our land. But we can, we must, do more. Our goal must be the elimination of poverty in this land. As we as Christians renew and strengthen our efforts to overcome domestic poverty, we will seek to work with people of other faiths and all persons of good will in this urgent task.

Unfortunately, partisan and ideological divisions too often promote one-sided solutions and prevent genuine progress. We believe substantial success in reducing domestic poverty requires an overall framework that insists that overcoming poverty requires: both more personal responsibility and broader societal responsibility; both better choices by individuals and better policies and investments by government; both renewing wholesome families and strengthening economic incentives. We believe that genuine success in reducing American poverty will require greater commitment and concrete action by all four of the following: (1) churches, neighborhoods, communities and faith-based and other organizations; (2) government that implements better public policy at local, state and federal levels; (3) individuals and families; and (4) the market and private sector (employers, unions and other economic actors).

We are leaders of the Christian community, not an interest group. We have no partisan political agenda. We are conservatives and liberals, Independents, Republicans and Democrats. Together we believe that our faith demands and the people of this land yearn for concrete proposals that transcend divisive political divisions.

We give thanks to God for bringing together at one Christian table in Christian Churches Together for the first time in our history representatives of almost all the families in Christianity in the United States: Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Catholics, Racial/Ethnic, Orthodox and Historic Protestants. As a united voice of Christianity in this country, we pledge to strengthen our efforts to end the scandal of widespread poverty in the richest nation in history.

Four Objectives

CCT will promote its commitment to overcoming domestic poverty by inviting all Christians and all people, especially our leaders in public life, to embrace and implement the following objectives:

1. **Strengthen families and communities**, because they are essential bulwarks against poverty.
2. **Reduce child poverty**. We seek to cut child poverty by fifty percent in the next ten years.
3. **Make work work**, by combating racism and guaranteeing that full-time work offers a realistic escape from poverty and access to good health care.
4. **Strengthen the educational system** in our country with particular attention to the public schools, because access to quality education offers perhaps the best way out of poverty.

For up-to-date information, see www.christianchurchestogether.org.

(This article is edited from a Christian Churches Together news release.)

Group Plans Interactive Conference on Partnering with Indigenous Ministries

By John Lindner

A coalition of volunteers from American mission agencies and mission-minded churches is planning a conference in June 2007 that will incorporate speakers from the Majority World as well as from traditional American mission agencies.

The **Coalition On Support for Indigenous Ministries** (COSIM) is planning its 11-13 June 2007 conference at Wheaton Bible Church in Wheaton, Illinois, USA. Keynote speakers are Dr. Paul (Bobby) Gupta, president of **Hindustan Bible Institute** (HBI), and Dr. Sherwood Lingenfelter, provost, senior vice president and professor of anthropology at **Fuller Theological Seminary** in Pasadena, California, USA. Together they authored the book *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: Training Leaders for a Church-Planting Movement: A Case from India*, which tells the story of how HBI recovered its focus on planting churches among the unreached. It also provides the backdrop for the conference theme, “Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: From Frustration to Joy in Cross-cultural Partnerships.”

Along this line, John Watters, CEO of **Wycliffe Bible Translators International**, plans to share how Wycliffe implemented its Vision 2025 strategy, a partner-focused initiative that, he says, “has profoundly changed how Wycliffe and SIL approach the ministry of Bible translation throughout the world.”

Additionally, Emmanuel Ogunyemi, professor, vice president and academic dean at **West Africa Theological Seminary** in Lagos, Nigeria, will speak on “A Tenuous Partnership and Important Lessons Learned for Both Western and Non-Western Leaders.”

John Jusu, a missionary of the **Association of Evangelicals in Africa** working with the **Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology** in Nairobi, Kenya, will lead a workshop on “Important Lessons about Money and Financial Accountability in Cross-Cultural Partnerships—from Western and Non-Western Perspectives.” The workshop will be co-led with Mary Lederleitner, a researcher with Wycliffe.

Attendees representing mission agencies and churches will have opportunity to help form an online bank of resources, establish guidelines on how to select an appropriate overseas partner and learn how best to help train indigenous leaders. Complete details on the conference can be obtained at www.cosimnet.org.

John Lindner published *Christian Mission* magazine for **Christian Aid** for twenty-five years. He is founder of **World Christian Ministries**, which publishes *World Christian* magazine to tell the story of missions in the Two-thirds World.

WORLD PERSPECTIVES

Contextualization and God’s Global Mission

By Glenn Smith

It always struck me funny that classical philosophers and theologians began their writings with a prologue, which in Greek is called a *prolegomenon*. *Pro* expresses what comes first and *legein* means “to

say.” Therefore, a *prolegomenon* is a formal, critical introduction to a lengthy text. Why one needs to say something before one says it was a question I asked for years. I have come to understand the usefulness of such an approach!

For a number of years, I have been inviting students, audiences and readers to join me on the 19-kilometre trip that I make every day from my home in the inner suburbs of Montréal (Canada) to my office downtown. It provides a *prolegomenon* to the themes that inform this article. The themes include the social context in which we live our daily lives and our common ecclesial traditions rooted in the Bible, Christian history and theology.

But this article is also about reflecting on the mission of God. Systematic theologians warn us that too much emphasis on social context threatens to reduce the universal truth of scripture. On the other hand, church planters and evangelists warn us that too much theology often seeks to disguise itself as a universal truth-claim and takes us away from the real work of the gospel in particular contexts. I believe that contextual theology done in the framework of biblical theology seeks to situate itself between these two ends of the spectrum while heeding the warnings of the two. God is Alpha and Omega; however, Jesus became a first-century Jew and lived and laboured primarily in the cities of Palestine in the era of second temple Judaism.¹ We will return to this very issue at the conclusion of this article.

In many ways, my journey resembles the trip that you, the reader, would make through your context. I walk out the door of my home into an amazingly cosmopolitan neighbourhood called Chomedey, which is part of the Census Metropolitan Area of Montréal. In the homes on my street, I can hear several different languages, symbolizing a diverse array of cultures. What was once a former European immigration has now shifted to a truly global movement. When I first began thinking about my neighbourhood I was struck by the linguistic plurality. Today, the “Islamisation” of Chomedey is very real. As I stride toward the bus stop, I pass the only Protestant Church and then cut through the parking lot of the Roman Catholic parish. Thirty years ago, both churches were full for weekend services. The United Church had a Sunday school that taught over two hundred children. The exodus of Anglophones from Montréal has decimated the congregation. Today, forty people gather on Sunday for worship. The Roman Catholic parish once celebrated forty-five masses each week. Last year, they sold the parish to an immigrant Orthodox church.

These remarkable religious changes remind me that my neighbours are much more concerned with their own pursuits and the development of a personal value system rather than that offered by ecclesiastical structures. All things religious have been marginalized in Montréal.

A 12-minute bus ride takes me to the Metro (the subway) where I now enter another world, the metropolis of Montréal. It is one of the largest French-speaking cities in the world and the hub of a social transformation, better known as the Quiet Revolution that has altered the very face of Quebec.

The subway takes me into the heart of the city, but through several different “Montréal.” I pass under **student Montréal**, which includes four major universities and fifteen community colleges. Montréal has the most students per capita of any city in North America. The population of student Montréal, isolated by itself, would make it the thirteenth largest city in Canada.

Montréal is also a *hurting city*, with hundreds of AIDS victims, 238,000 people on the welfare rolls and, according to the Ministry of Justice, some nine thousand adolescent prostitutes. Harvest Montréal, the organization that orchestrates food distribution among the poor, gives out thirty-five tons of food a day to 150,000 people a week. In the east end of the city, because of the poor economic state of the residents, it pays for ninety percent of all pharmaceutical prescriptions. My Metro companions seem oblivious to these realities.

As we swing through parts of **ethnic Montreal**, I am reminded that the 200,000 elementary and secondary students in the five school boards of Montréal represent 192 countries.

At the McGill Metro stop, I am literally pushed out of the Metro car. Some 750,000 people call this home throughout the working week. This is **business Montréal**. The Census Metropolitan Area generates seventy-six percent of the entire Québec economy.

Several years ago, I began an interesting exercise with my students in a course I teach on urban ministry. The class begins by visiting a rather large ethnic grocery store, Inter-Marché, that is about a kilometre from the faculty building. The store has a huge inventory of foods from several different countries, arranged in aisles that represent the continents. Haitian food covers one third of the Caribbean aisle. Forty-five different flags hang from the ceiling, all contributed by the customers of the store. Inter-Marché is a success because the owner realized Montréal is changing and his store better adapt to new realities. He does a booming business.

In the same neighbourhood we also visit a church building. They read the English-only sign: “We worship God every Sunday at 11 AM.” It does not take great teaching skill to lead the discussion that evening on the nature of pastoral leadership in a changing situation. They suddenly want to know how to “exegete the neighbourhood,” much like they have learned to study a biblical text. I remind them, “We are not taking enough time to think biblically so as to act contextually.”

Some Critical Terms

Missiology is the exegetical, theological and cultural study about the mission of God in the world and the ensuing mission of the Church. For that reason, it is often defined as an inter-disciplinary field of reflection and action.² When we shape this discussion contextually and pursue this reflection, we are seeking to relate both spatial geography and mission. The former analyses the reasons for the spatial differences of human activity in urban areas for example. Missiology seeks a more adequate understanding of the apostolic mission of the Church while remaining faithful to the exegetical task of understanding the mind of the biblical writers. But this “fusion of horizons” is fraught with danger. We must not forget that when the exegete deals with the Apostle Paul, and when musicology accepts Paul’s apostolic work as normative for the continuing mission of the Church, then these two aims coalesce. In reality, as we study and listen to scripture and walk through the various contexts of life, we are faced with the basic question: “*How will the Church reflect biblically about the context and pursue relevant mission in the years ahead?*”

Missiology is a fertile field today for a battle over the definition of three terms—mission, evangelisation and contextualization.

1. Mission. Mission is the embodiment by the whole community of the followers of Jesus of the whole task of God in their specific context for the sake of the whole world. According to David Bosch, “Mission is the Church sent into the world to love, to serve, to preach, to heal, to liberate.”³ This embodiment therefore cannot be separated from Christian spirituality. This means living fully in the world in union with Jesus Christ and his people and growing in conformity to his person. It is a grateful and heartfelt “YES!” to God expressed both in act and attitude. The follower of Jesus lives in obedience and imitation of Jesus Christ and walks in the disciplined and maturing pattern of love for God. It is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. Spirituality is the process of developing a deep relationship with God. It is also about how Christians live their faith in the world. Spirituality cannot be divorced from the struggle for justice and care for the poor and the oppressed.

2. Evangelisation. Evangelisation is that set of contextual, intentional initiatives of the community of followers of Jesus within the mission of God to demonstrate in word and deed the offer that God gives to change one’s way of living and follow Jesus in every area of life.

3. Contextualization. Contextualization begins by attempting to discern where God by his Spirit is at work in the context.⁴ It continues with a desire to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish groups of people who desire to follow Jesus in ways that make sense to them in their context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and transforms their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their culture.⁵

The word literally means a "weaving together." Here, it implies the interweaving of the scriptural teaching about the city and the church with a particular, human situation, a specific context. The very word focuses the attention on the role of the context in the theological enterprise. In a very real sense, then, all doctrinal reflection from the scriptures is related in one way or another to the situation from which it is born, addressing the aspirations, concerns, priorities and needs of the local group of Christians who are doing the reflection.

The task of contextualization is the essence of theological reflection. The challenge is to remain faithful to the historical text of scripture while being mindful of today's realities. An interpretative bridge is built between the Bible and the situation from which they sprang to the concerns and the circumstances of the local group of Christians who are doing the reflection. The first step of the hermeneutic involves establishing what the text meant at the time it was written. The second step involves creating the bridge that explores how the text is understood in meaningful terms for the interpreters today. The final step is to determine the meaning and application for those who will receive the message in their particular circumstances as the present-day interpreters become ambassadors of the good news.

Contextualization is not just for the one communicating, nor about the content that will be passed along. It is always concerned about what happens once we have communicated; about the ultimate impact of the message on the audience.

Understanding Mission as *Missio Dei*⁶

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the Church has been pursuing missiology through the lens of the *mission of God*. The concept of the *missio Dei* finds its roots in the writings of Karl Barth who saw it necessary to emphasize the *action of God* in contrast to the human-centred focus of the liberal theology of his day.

Missio Dei establishes the priority of God's activity in terms of mission and characterizes God himself as being a missionary God. In this case, mission cannot be conceived of primarily or even essentially as an activity or program of the Church, but must be rooted in God.

In his tremendous love for the created order, God engages in the mission of salvation and redemption for the whole order through the Father's sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through this missionary activity of the triune God, the Church is formed and this new community is called to participate in the mission of God, to reach out with the salvation and redemption God has initiated and is pursuing in the world.

This hermeneutical approach to the *missio Dei* or *mission of God* in city/regions reaffirms "the scandal of particularity." Urban missiology is rooted in the very particular stories of cities in the Bible and especially of the good news of Jesus' incarnation and the cosmic goal God has undertaken to re-inaugurate his reign through his death on the cross. There has been a tendency to question the uniqueness of God's participation with creation through the history of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, the concept of *mission* was broadened almost to the point that the Church was stripped of any responsibility for proclamation and service. In other words, the Church was excluded from mission. This resulted in an argument that God was working out his purposes in the midst of the world and its historical processes. It was simply the Church's responsibility to serve *missio Dei* by pointing to God at work in world history and name him there.

This focus on God's action in the world and its historical processes, to the exclusion of the Church's mission of witness and service, was closely tied to what could be described as an exaggerated eschatology in which the fullness of God's kingdom was expected to be accomplished through the social and political motions of history. In order to avoid the severing of the *missio Dei* concept from the teachings of classical Christianity, and in an attempt to hold together the whole mission of God for the whole city, it will be important to hold the universal concept of the *missio Dei* together with the particular history of God's plenary revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ and read the story in our own unique contexts.

Following Jesus in the City

We can therefore state that the comprehensiveness of the mission of the Church in the city requires the proclamation of the gospel, the planting and nurture of congregations and the application of the principles of Christ's lordship to all areas of community life. It means concern for all that is city, even for the cosmos above and beneath the city, from the quality of the air people breathe to the purity of the water in the river and canals.

Following Jesus in the city means getting serious about issues like good schools, responsible government, sanitation and clean streets, fairness in the marketplace and justice in the courts. It means working to eliminate squalor slums and every depressing condition that dishonours God by degrading human life. Once urban disciples see the big picture of what it means to be citizens of the kingdom in the cities as they are, they begin to work from a new and enlarged perspective. Obedience to King Jesus takes them to every nook and cranny of city life. They find the challenges innumerable and the cost often high. But they know that while the dark powers are awesome, God's rule is greater and its advance is worth every sacrifice.

The walk through the neighbourhood and into the workplace causes one to reflect on these issues. How can we be faithful to Christ Jesus and to the demands of his kingdom rule in our various contexts? Being in touch with the context without understanding and communicating what the Bible says about the themes that surface in the neighbourhood or the workplace will inevitably lead to relativism reminiscent of the extremes of a sort of religious "do goodism." Being in touch with the truth (orthodoxy) as one listens attentively to the context calls for radical forms of obedience on the part of God's people (plausibility).

My three daughters are musicians. On a weekly basis, one of them is at the piano with her other instruments and her music sheets transposing the score. She is not changing the melody, harmony or essence of the composition; instead, she is putting the music in a different key. A practitioner with the community of faith listens to the text, the social context and the worldviews of the milieu to better understand how to weave a score for the situation. As John Frame stated, "We do not know what scripture says until we know how it relates to our world."⁷

Endnotes

1. Bauchkam, Richard. 2003. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker. Bauchkam reminds us that the issue of universality and particularity is essential to mission and to how we read the Bible.
2. It begins on the exegetical level (Christian faith is a missionary faith rooted in Jesus' practices, the hope of the rule of God and his justice) and follows with historical, theological and practical reflection and initiatives. It is inter-disciplinary because it takes into account cultural studies, holistic community transformational development theory and practice, a critique of the past, contextualisation and strategies that move the people of God in their local situation forward.
3. Bosch, David. 1991. *Transforming Mission*. Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 412.
4. This approach to urban mission hermeneutics is intentional on my part. A lived experience in context is a preliminary step in all contextual theologies. This is certainly true in theologies of liberation. Leonardo Boff and Clodivis Boff call this the preliminary stage of all theologising, a living commitment with the poor and oppressed. Robert Schrieter (1986) summarizes the biblical foundation well: "...the development of local theologies depends as much on finding Christ already

active in the culture as it does on bringing Christ to the culture. The great respect for culture has a Christological basis. It grows out of a belief that the risen Christ's salvific activity in bringing about the Kingdom of God is already going on before our arrival. From a missionary perspective there would be no conversion if the grace of God had not preceded the missionary and opened the hearts of those who heard." (*Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis, 29).

5. This reflection is inspired by an article by Whiteman, David. 1997. "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. 21(1): 2-7.

6. I am grateful to John Vissers and Roland De Vries for helping me in the formulation of the following section. See their unpublished paper, "Evangelizing the Church: Towards A Reformed Theology of Mission for Canadian Presbyterians."

7. Frame, John. 1976. *Van Til the Theologian*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey, USA: Pilgrim, 25.

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Contextualization that Is Comprehensive

By A. Scott Moreau

When you use the word "contextualization" most cross-cultural workers assume you are talking about theology. However, the foundational idea of contextualization applies more broadly than just to theology—it applies to the whole of the Christian faith. The ultimate goal of contextualization is to make the entirety of the Christian faith, including both the message and the way Christians live their faith out in local settings, enfolded in a way that is understandable (and, insofar as it is possible, commendable) to the non-Christian people among whom that faith is lived out.

The current approach toward contextualization as limited to being a theological task is an appropriate foundation—but no more than a foundation. Contextualization must be at its core theological, but it must go beyond theology. In this brief article I will outline an approach to contextualization that includes theologizing but also incorporates all that the Christian faith is and all that following Christ calls us to do. I call this approach *comprehensive* contextualization.

Comprehensive Contextualization

Comprehensive contextualization is a seven-dimension approach drawn from religious scholar Ninian Smart's model for understanding religions.¹ The seven dimensions of comprehensive contextualization are (1) doctrinal, (2) mythic, (3) ethical, (4) social, (5) ritual, (6) supernatural experience and (7) artistic or material. We will explain each in turn.

1. The Doctrinal (Theological) Dimension

The doctrinal dimension refers to beliefs expressed in religious form.² It is our attempt to answer questions such as, "How did the world come to exist?" and "What powers rule the world?" These beliefs are found in the Bible, and can be organized in a way that makes sense to a particular audience, whether through books, hymns, sermons, Bible studies and so on. This approach can be focused on a particular goal (liberation theologies) or around a particular set of practices (Pentecostal theologies). It may have a subset in mind (black theologies, feminist theologies) or try to be universal (Western systematic theologies). Although not always recognized as contextualized attempts at theologizing, that is precisely what each of these are.

2. The Mythic or Narrative Dimension

The second dimension is the mythic. In the broadest sense, myth refers to the stories of a culture that reflect how it thinks about the world. The way we are using the term should not be confused with the more popular idea of myths as stories that are untrue. Rather, myth in this sense is the power of the stories of a people to embody the things they cherish and value (as well as showing why some things are not valued). Typically, a society's myths express that society's ideals about several themes, including sacrifice, love, honor, power, wisdom and heroism.³ While in this sense the Bible can be seen as a "myth," the reality is that it is the one absolute and true Myth on which all other myths are based and by which all others are judged. It is the reality; they are merely shadows.

There are three ways that we contextualize myth. The first is to find appropriate and powerful ways to explain the biblical story, exemplified by movies such as *The Passion of the Christ*. A second way is to create stories that are true to the spirit of the Bible and capture the cultural imagination, such as the C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. A third way is to critically analyze the myths of a local society and use the understanding this analysis provides to help more clearly communicate Christian truths in that society, as Don Richardson did in *Peace Child*.

3. The Ethical/Legal Dimension

While the doctrinal dimension focuses on what is true, the ethical dimension focuses on how people should live. This includes how we are to interact with other people and with the rest of God's creation, and how society regulates behavior to prevent or stop people from behaving inappropriately.

Contextualizing the ethical dimension requires Christians to explore how to live out God's goodness in wise ways in light of culture. We are to love God and neighbor under scriptural standards and apply those standards appropriately in our contexts.⁴ While this includes personal ethics, it also applies to the ethical systems found embedded in cultural systems. For example, when a society dehumanizes a sub-group in some way (e.g., the so-called "untouchables" in India), Christians must respond.

4. The Social or Organizational Dimension

The social dimension is seen in the ways Christians organize themselves in light of scripture and local cultural values. It includes the sense of "togetherness" that comes from participating in Christian rituals together (e.g., communion) but also includes all of the institutions within the Church and how they are organized and run. For example it includes such obvious things as church governance. However, it goes beyond this to include:

- all forms of church association (formal and informal, from children's clubs to women's guilds to denominations)
- the means they have to exchange goods and services (voluntary labor, offerings, church dinners)
- the enforcement of their ethical standards (church or denominational discipline)
- how knowledge is passed on from generation to generation (from formal education to informal conversations with a youth leader)

5. The Ritual Dimension

The ritual includes not just what we formally think of as ritual, but any repeated symbolic actions done in relation to Christian faith. This can range from formal Christian rituals such as baptism, communion, marriages and funerals to non-formal ritualistic activities, such as sermons, committee meetings, evangelistic outreaches and prayer meetings.

Rituals serve several purposes for Christians in every society. Rituals such as baptism and communion establish spiritual and social identity of the participants. Rituals such as marriage and ordination mark changes in social status of the participants. Rituals such as prayer meetings and funerals help people face crises in their lives, giving them stability and comfort in the midst of trials. Understanding how the rituals in a society work and how—or whether—they can be modified for use by local Christians is an important component of comprehensive contextualization.⁵

6. The (Supernatural) Experience Dimension

The dimension of supernatural experience takes into account the fact that in every society people encounter the supernatural, whether through dreams, visions, miraculous experiences, signs and wonders or other means. While many in the Western Church have followed the lead of Western culture and dismissed such encounters,⁶ the Majority World Church pays careful attention to them and acknowledges them as real and needing to be addressed.

This is a difficult area to contextualize, since they are less amenable to “control” than doctrine or rituals. Contextualization of this dimension should include at least three components:

- Local Christians must study the scriptures and develop biblically-based perspectives on them.
- Christians can then consider developing biblically-founded rituals that enable encounters with God through Christ (e.g., prayer services) as well as rituals that will help people who struggle with negative experiences (e.g., demonic expulsion).
- Those who follow Christ need to be given the freedom—and the language—to talk about their experiences and find Bible-centered and culturally-sensitive ways to handle them.

7. The Artistic or Material Dimension

Christians around the world express their values and ideals through artistic and material means. From church architecture that values the sermon (seen by the elevated pulpit facing the congregation) to sculptures that portray Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf to clothing that indicates status and authority, Christians regularly create and use imaginative ways to express thoughts, feelings and attitudes about their faith. A comprehensive approach to contextualization recognizes this as an essential element of the faith of a local body of believers and finds ways to enable them to express their artistic giftedness in Christ-honoring ways.

Conclusion

Comprehensive contextualization involves far more than just developing good theologies. It entails finding ways to enable the entire Christian faith to dwell in a local culture in ways that both affirm the cultural values that are congruent with scripture and judge the culture for values that cross scriptural boundaries. It is my dream that as we contextualize the whole of our faith across a multitude of cultural boundaries, the entire Church will be enriched by the gifts of faithful service and living found in the uncounted numbers of local communities in which Jesus is honored as Savior and Lord.

Endnotes

1. Smart, Ninian. 1996. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs*. Berkeley, California, USA: University of Californian Press.
2. Ibid, 10.
3. Ibid, 130-131.
4. Adeney, Bernard. 1995. *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World*. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press.
5. See Zahniser, A. H. Mathias. 1997. *Symbol and Ceremony*. Monrovia, California, USA: MARC.

6. Hiebert, Paul. 1982. "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." *Missiology: An International Review*. 10:1 (January), 35-47.

(This article is adapted from a chapter in The Changing Face of World Missions, 2005. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker; and from the article "Contextualization that is Comprehensive" in Missiology: An International Review 34:2 [July 2006], 325-335.)

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Contextualization in the Islamic Context

By Roy Oksnevad

Contextualization in ministry to Muslims is highly contested and has caused great confusion. Some see contextualization as a universal remedy to the obstacles in Muslim ministry. Others feel that contextualization is deceptive manipulation to get converts.

The task of Muslim evangelism is difficult because there are cultural, theological and social barriers that are believed to be the reason why Muslims historically are resistant to the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. Western missionaries make claims that the single greatest hindrance to seeing Muslims come to faith in Christ is not a theological one (i.e., accepting Jesus as Lord), but rather one of culture and religious identity (i.e., having to leave the community of Islam). They argue that for the sake of God's kingdom much of our missiological energy should be devoted to seeking a path whereby Muslims can remain Muslims, yet live as true followers of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, Western missionaries believe that if the barriers are removed, there will be more conversions.

Western Christians are looking for ways to minimize the isolation and persecution former Muslims (MBBs, Muslim Background Believers) face from their community and family so they can be effective witnesses within their context. It is believed that contextualization will minimize the isolation and persecution so MBBs can remain in the community and be effective witnesses. Contextualization is also applied to the Western missionaries who are often misunderstood. They seek to minimize the cultural, theological and social distance between Western Christians and the host culture through contextualization.

Definition of "Contextualization"

There is much confusion over the word "contextualization." Contextualization is "taking the unchanging truth of the gospel and making it understandable in a given context." The goal is not to make scripture as Islamic as possible; rather, it is to communicate the unchanging truth in the particular Islamic context so it makes sense. We must allow for a biblical theology to develop from the culture rooted in scripture without Western forms constricting the worldview of the target group. Contextualization is to assist in the process of transformation (Hebrews 5:11-14) of the individual, community and society, while avoiding syncretism (an overlay of Christianity on a non-Christian core).

Historically, missionaries went to Islamic countries and built churches that replicated the form and content of the church the missionary was familiar with. Therefore, the church was foreign in structure, worship songs, style of worship and even language. Moves such as simple structures, using language of the people and respecting cultural taboos were made to make the church more contextual. The process of contextualization has also pushed the boundaries.

Controversy comes when contextualization takes on uniquely Islamic forms and gives them new meaning. Some of the controversies are:

- Are believers to be called just “Muslims” or “Muslims, Followers of Isa”?
- Is mosque attendance to be allowed as a transition or to be encouraged as a strategy of permanence?
- Does the convert pray his *salat* in exactly the same way as Muslims?
- Do the converts verbally or by implication recite the *shahadah* affirming Muhammad as the prophet of God?
- Is mosque participation encouraged only for MBBs or is it to be advocated for Christians as well?
- Do Christians legally become Muslims?
- Should Christians go on the *Hajj*?

Theological Considerations

The motivation for contextualization is often driven by pragmatics. Various passages are used to support different views of contextualization. The most common one is 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: “I become all things to all men to save some.” To avoid proof-texting, the Christian worker needs to search the scriptures to see if there are other passages that might contradict the basic assumptions or particular applications applied to a particular passage. For instance, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 is a call to separate from the world: “Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul did not urge an idolater to remain in heathen temples. Theories for contextualization should not rest on the interpretation of one passage.

Theology of Suffering

The desire to eliminate needless suffering MBBs go through is praiseworthy. Western Christians have not had to face persecution on the level that MBBs face. However, the early Christians faced many of the same honor/shame issues and were taken to court on false charges. What is needed is to have a clear theology of suffering which should include the following three points:

1. **Accepting it.** Suffering is universal and a part of the Fall (Genesis 3).
2. **Embracing it.** Suffering for being a Christian is shared. Jesus said that: the world will hate us without reason (John 15:18-25); living a godly life will bring persecution (2 Timothy 3:12); and Satan seeks to destroy all Christians and our faith (1 Peter 5:8-11).
3. **Enduring it.** Suffering is Christ-like (1 Peter 2:21-24). The early Church considered it a privilege to suffer along with Christ (2 Corinthians 4:10-12, Philippians 3:10-11). Suffering produces a mature faith (2 Corinthians 4:17; James 1). We are to fix our eyes on the eternal home (2 Corinthians 4:18; Hebrews 11:1).

Jesus Christ taught his disciples that they would face persecution and because of this, they would be blessed. Persecution is not to be avoided at all costs; we should have a theology of persecution and a plan for persecution. Persecution is normative in the Christian life.

Obstacles Facing MBBs

There are often severe consequences for MBBs who declare their new life in Christ to their family and often must move away for safety. What makes contextualization difficult within the Islamic community is the deep-seated sense of honor and shame associated with the religion of Islam. Muslims have a doctrine for the treatment of non-Muslims called *dhimmi* which separates non-Muslims communities into a second-class citizen. The law of apostasy within Islam punishes defection from Islam with death. Even if the family or community is not willing to carry out death for apostasy, marriages can be dissolved.

Obstacles Facing Western Workers

Christianity is closely associated with Western culture and is judged to be polytheistic and decadent. Western workers seeking to distance themselves from these stereotypes try to identify as closely with the host culture. This would mean taking on Islamic dress, keeping religious practices of fasting and times of prayer and respecting *pardah* in how they relate to the sexes. A caution is that form is not neutral. It has meaning. Missionary statesman Phil Parshall reminds us that “meanings lie behind the forms and are often hidden and misunderstood by the outsiders.”

Principles for Application

Contextualization needs to be done through the following five filters:

- **Scripture.** All considerations for contextualization must be subjected to the authority of the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-16).
- **Holy Spirit.** We must rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must encourage the national believers to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as they consider the contextualized expression of their faith in Christ (John 14:26).
- **Counsel of godly leaders.** In all our attempts to contextualize, we should seek out the counsel of godly leaders (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22; Acts 15:6-21).
- **Worldview.** We should responsibly communicate the gospel in such a way as to penetrate the worldview of the people in the target culture introducing life-transforming biblical truth, in cooperation with the local believers. A worldview consists of the unquestioned assumptions and perceived truths by which an individual or society interprets what happens around him or her (John 4:7-26; Acts 17:16-34).
- **Long-term effects.** We must continue to evaluate our attempts at contextualization in light of its direction and long-term ramifications (2 Peter 1:3-9).

Contextualization should be considered in three areas:

1. **Contextualization of the message.** There is nothing about the gospel message that can be compromised. We cannot and will not remove the offense of the cross. However, we must seek creative ways to make the message clear through the lens of understanding of the receiving audience (1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:2).
2. **Contextualization of the messenger.** To the best of our abilities, we must communicate in the heart language of the people. Our lifestyle and standard of living should be within scriptural norms and socially acceptable limits for the people to whom we minister. We must make our actions in the host culture compatible with our message in order to have a credible witness. We should not go beyond the limits of conscience in our contextualization forms (1 Corinthians 10:23-30; 1 Timothy 1:5).

3. **Contextualization of the church.** The local church, led by their own godly spiritual leaders, should be allowed the freedom to decide on the symbols and the practices of the church. Every effort should be made to evoke heartfelt worship in the particular culture. Style and method of teaching of the Word should facilitate clear understanding of the truth, motivating them to spiritual acts of service (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10).

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Integrating the Gospel with Culture Responsibly

By Adrian de Visser

I am deeply appreciative of the work that was done by true and genuine missionaries who worked for the good of the Sri Lankan people, above all with a sincere motivation of saving the lost and building God's kingdom. My appreciation, however, does not stand in the way of highlighting some of the errors they made. This I do, not so much to sit on judgment on them, but to identify barriers resulting from those errors and even at this stage to overcome the barriers so that we could reap a better harvest for God's kingdom.

When the missionaries, who were raised in the Western cultures, encountered the Sri Lankan culture, they concluded that it was evil and to be avoided. They not only avoided it, they condemned it, and in AD 1711 passed a law that stated, "*Christians participating in the ceremonies of heathenism would be liable to a public whipping and imprisonment in irons for one year.*"

This brought about a deep alienation of all new Christian converts from their culture and families. The converts, desiring modernization and identification with the colonial rulers, assimilated to the new culture. The Sinhala Buddhist, on the other hand, resented the anglicized lifestyle of the Christians—a resentment born both of class opportunities as well as a difference in culture. The Sinhala literature of the nineteenth century reflects this resentment. The alienation from the local culture took place because of four basic influences:

1. The missionaries, fearing syncretism, steered Christians away from the local culture.
2. There was ignorance and a lack of any other model of ministry. When the missionaries concluded that the local culture was evil, they had to preach the gospel in their cultural forms. This influence continues today.
3. The modern scientific and technological advances of the West impressed the people in the Third World in the early nineteenth century. This prompted them to believe and accept an alien Western culture.
4. Many key leaders who received theological education in Western seminaries have introduced concepts and practices in sharp contrast with the local cultural norms.

Present-day Battles on Culture and the Gospel

The attempt to use the local culture as a vehicle to communicate the gospel to non-Christians has attracted two opposite reactions from the Christian community.

One group has concluded such an attempt to be a compromise and a betrayal of the trust that has been placed upon the Church. They have further argued that this attempt would lead to syncretism. The **1966 Wheaton**

Declaration states that syncretism is “the attempt to unite or reconcile biblically revealed Christian truth with diverse or opposing tenets and practices of non-Christian religions or other systems of thought that deny it.”

The second group advocates the use of culture as an imperative for communicating the gospel. They conclude “truth cannot be communicated in a vacuum; it must be couched in a human culture if it is to be understood.” In this context, they say that when we avoid the use of local culture, it automatically results in the use of another cultural form to communicate. They conclude that we have avoided using the local culture because of the fear of syncretism, but have used a foreign culture and cultural forms to communicate truth.

They further conclude that although the gospel has been preached, to the target audience it is still incomprehensible because truth has been couched in cultural and thought forms which are alien to the listener. According to Ranjith de Silva,

“The continual use of foreign forms of church services, evangelism, church architecture and hymns, thirty years after Sri Lanka received independence, has been a hindrance to the non-Christians from even considering the claims of Christ. The foreignness of the Christian message, its mode of presentation couched in the vernacular of Western conceptual thought, has kept the non-Christian away from the church.”¹

To be relevant, then, involves contextualization:

“Contextualization is the effort to understand and take seriously the specific context of each human group and person on its own terms and in all its dimensions—cultural, religious, social, political, economic and to discern what the gospel says to people in that context. This requires a profound empirical analysis of the context in place of flip or a priori judgments. Contextualization tries to discover in the scriptures what God is saying to these people. In other words, contextualization takes very seriously the example of Jesus in the sensitive and careful way he offered each person a gospel tailored to his own context.”²

Hence, by adapting the message to the cultural patterns and the worldview of the target audience, the communicator can effectively communicate the gospel. What is actually involved in contextualization is not the altering of the essential content of the biblical message, but the enclosing of the message in culturally relevant verbal and thought forms. According to J. T. Seamands,

“This concept can be further explained in the following illustration: Milk can be delivered in a variety of containers. It may be in a tin can, a glass bottle, a cardboard carton or a plastic bottle. The type of the container is not important, as long as the milk is pure, not watered down. The only condition in which the container might become an important item is when the buyer has a strong personal preference for a particular type of container. He may refuse to buy milk in a tin can, but be most willing to purchase it in a cardboard carton. In the same way, the Christian messenger has no right to water down the content of the gospel—it must be the truth—but we certainly must present it in such a form that will be meaningful to the listener.”³

Since the subject has been a cause for controversy in the Church, it is prudent for us to work toward defining the word “culture.” The **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization** has offered the following definition:

“Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or the ultimate meaning); of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative); of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.) and institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts temples, family, schools, hospitals, factories, churches, family, schools, hospitals, shops, unions, clubs, etc.) which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.”⁴

This means that an accepted culture covers everything in human life. At the center of any culture is a worldview. Charles Kraft defines worldview as:

*“Perceptions of reality are patterned by societies into conceptualizations of what reality can or should be, and what is to be regarded as actual, probable and impossible. The conceptualizations form what is termed the worldview of the culture.”*⁵

The worldview, then, according to this model, is the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of society assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the very heart of a culture, touching, interacting with and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture. Each society looks at the world in its own way, and that way is encoded in its language and culture; no language is unbiased, no culture theologically neutral.

If culture is so defined, I do not see how any person could avoid contact with it, if he or she is seriously concerned with communicating an important message that must be understood by the receiver. In the process of ministry we are involved directly or indirectly in human culture, but many still attempt to stay above the culture line and deal only with matters of the soul. But that effort is hopeless, as is the effort of the social scientist who eliminates God from this world and tries to explain Christianity in cultural terms only.⁶

The minister of the gospel cannot communicate without concerning him or herself with culture, because communication is inextricable from culture. Just as Christ became flesh and dwelt among humanity, so propositional truth must have cultural incarnations to be meaningful.

Biblical Basis for the Use of Culture in Ministry

No matter how sound our argument may be, it is imperative we seek the scripture and let God’s word guide our thinking. Below are four points to consider.

1. God established human culture and revealed himself. As recorded in Genesis 1:26-31, God created man capable of governing the world. We see God's tender care and love for the well-being of this masterpiece of his workmanship, in creating the world previously to the creation of man. Adam Clarke sums this up well: *“[God] prepared everything for his subsistence, convenience and pleasure, before he brought [man] into being; so that, comparing little with great things, the house was built; furnished and amply stored by the time the destined tenant was ready to occupy it.”*⁷

God created humanity, male and female, in his own likeness by gifting them with distinctive human faculties—rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual. He also told them to have children, to fill the earth and to subdue it (Genesis 1:26-28).

These divine commands are the origin of human culture. Having established human culture, God revealed himself to Adam and Eve, to Cain and Abel, to Moses and Abraham. He took the common practices of the then-known human world to communicate his covenant love. During early human civilization, agreement between two people or two groups was sealed with a covenant. God took on this human culture to communicate his love for the people. By making a covenant with Abraham, God promised to bless his descendants and to make them his special people. Abraham, in return, was to remain faithful to God and to serve as a channel through which God’s blessings could flow to the rest of the world (Genesis 12:1-3).

2. Jesus identified with human culture. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-8 that when Jesus took on the form of a human being he (1) identified with humanity, (2) entered human culture and (3) lived and ministered within human culture. Having lived among us, he now commissions us: *“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’”* (John 20:21). This verse simply says, “As I was sent to

proclaim the truth of the Most High, and to convert sinners to God, I send you for the very same purpose, clothed with the very same authority and influenced by the very same Spirit.”

Jesus ministered within the confines of a Jewish culture and worldview. A careful analysis of his ministry on earth reveals the depth of his willingness to identify with people, to understand their worldview and to communicate within a cultural context of the audience. The range of his parables and teachings is a good guide to show how he carefully watched people and used his observations to make his teaching relevant. Jesus entered their frame of reference and communicated truth. He used common and daily experiences of life to introduce them to the unknown love and grace of God.

Tom Houston comments on the question raised by the disciples about Jesus’ use of parables (Matthew 13:10-11) and suggests that “*the disciples were learning that Jesus took different approaches to different audiences. His preaching was not an instrument with only one string.*”⁸

If God had not entered into human culture and communicated within the cultural context of humanity, communication would have been almost impossible.

3. The Apostle Paul identified with all people. The principle that Paul espoused in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 was “mobility in methods, not mobility in morals.” In discussing his self-sacrificing concern in verses 19-23, he mentions three groups of people: the Jews, the Gentiles and the weak. The purpose of his identification with the people is “*so that by all possible means I might save some*” (9:22).

Paul identified with the culture of the people so that he could relate to them and communicate the gospel in understandable terms. To confirm this, let us explore the communication methods of the apostles.

4. The apostles identified with the culture and based their communication according to their cultures. Peter and Paul’s sermons to the Jews and to the Gentiles highlight their sensitivity to the audience and their willingness to work within the confines of the target audience.

a. Peter’s sermons to the Jews. The sermon recorded in Acts 2:14-36 was addressed to the Jews who had a better understanding of God and the Old Testament. Peter, in his sermon, appeals to this knowledge and cites the Old Testament to reinforce his arguments. On a festival day such as Pentecost, a Jew would not break his or her fast until at least 10 a.m. So it was extremely unlikely that a group of people would be drunk at such an early hour. Peter defends the accusation by a logical appeal to the customs and traditions of the Jews.

In a positive manner, Peter then explains the phenomena taking place among the apostles as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. In Acts 2:28-32, Peter quotes from Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1 in support of what he said about Jesus. Peter argues his point within the cultural context of the Jewish community and constantly refers to the Old Testament to support his arguments. The Jews were the chosen people who had God’s revelation; hence, Peter uses that knowledge to communicate the gospel. He moves from the known to the unknown.

b. Peter’s sermon to the Gentiles. Although they knew something about Jesus of Nazareth from living in Palestine, the Gentile audience would require more details of Jesus’ life and work than a Palestinian-Jewish audience would. In this context, Peter begins his sermon recorded in Acts 10:34-48 from John’s baptism and continues to the resurrection of Jesus. Peter’s more lengthy account of Jesus’ ministry here must, therefore, be thought particularly appropriate considering his audience.

c. Paul’s sermons to the Jews. Paul’s exhortation in Acts 13:16-41 begins with a resume of Israel’s history that emphasizes the pattern of God’s redemptive activity from Abraham to David. It is an approach in line with

Jewish interests and practices. Highlighted in this resume is a four-point confessional summary that, for the Jews, epitomized the essence of their faith:

1. God is the God of the people of Israel.
2. He chose the patriarchs for himself.
3. He redeemed his people from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness.
4. He gave them the land of Palestine as an inheritance.⁹

To such a confessional recital, Jews often added God's choice of David to be king and the promise made to him and his descendants (Psalm 78:67-72, 89:3-4, 19:37). Paul proclaims these great confessional truths of Israel's faith, which speak of God's redemptive concern for his people and underline the Christian message.¹⁰ Paul refers to the truths held by the Jews and builds a bridge to communicate the gospel to the Jews.

By anchoring Israel's *kerygma* (good news) in the Messianically-relevant "Son" passage of 2 Samuel 7, Paul begins to build a textual bridge for the Christian *kerygma*—a *kerygma* which he will root in the Messianic "Son" passage of Psalm 2:7. By drawing these two passages together, Israel's confession and the Church's confession, he demonstrates both the continuity and the fulfillment of the passages.¹¹

d. Paul's sermon to the Gentiles. In Acts 17:22, Paul does not begin his address by referring to Jewish history or by quoting the Jewish scriptures as he did in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41). He knows that it would be futile to refer to a history no one knew or to argue from the fulfillment of a prophecy no one was interested in. Neither would it help to quote from a book no one had read or accepted as authoritative. It would also be futile to develop his arguments about the God who gives rain and crops in their season and provides food for the stomach and joy for the heart, as he does in Acts 14:15-17. Instead, he looks for points of contact with the council. After he sees in the city the inscription "To an unknown God," he uses these words to introduce his call to repentance.

The substance of his sermon concerns the nature of God and the responsibility of humanity to God. Contrary to all pantheistic and polytheistic notions, Paul says that God is the one who has created the world and everything in it and that he is also the Lord of heaven and earth.

Furthermore, Paul supports his teachings guided by two maxims from the Greek poets. The first comes from a quatrain attributed to the poet Epimenides (600 BC); the second comes from the Cilician poet Aratus (315-240 BC). Paul finally reaches the climax of his argument by unfolding the divine message of redemption and calling for repentance.

I am not suggesting that we go to extremes in order to be relevant, but it is imperative to integrate the gospel with culture in a responsible manner. Integration must be done within the context of a community who are mature in their faith and knowledge of the scripture. It must never be the attempt of a lone ranger.

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Complications of Communicating the Gospel: Why We Should Take the Culture of the People Seriously

By Adrian de Visser

Aristotle viewed communication in relationship to three points of reference: speaker, speech and audience.¹ Based on his view, a simple hypothetical assumption about communication can be developed:

SPEAKER →→→ SPEECH →→→ AUDIENCE

In reality, communication is a more complex process because the truth communicated does not travel in a vacuum before the audience encodes the message; rather, it travels through an already programmed mind, which has a distinct worldview and culture. The figure below illustrates this reality:

Culture X		Culture Y
	Worldviews/Ways of perceiving the world	
S M	Cognitive process/Ways of thinking	M R
E E		E D E
O E	Linguistic forms/Ways of expressing ideas	S E
U N S		P S O

C S		
R O	Behavioral patterns/Ways of acting	S C N
C D		D A O
E A		D E

When the source in "Culture X" encodes a message, that message passes through a cultural grid or screen, which largely determines the way in which that message will be decoded by the respondent in "Culture Y." This grid or screen has seven dimensions, which collectively influence the message and the way in which the respondent will decode the message.²

Communicating to the Buddhist Community

Communicating the gospel to the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka could be illustrated by the figure below:

	Buddhist ascetic worldview	
C P E G	Sinhala Buddhist culture	M D B
H R N O		E E U B
R E C S	Sinhala linguistic forms	S C D E
I A O P		S O D L
S C D E	Sinhala Buddhist behavioral patterns	A D H I
T H E L		G E I E
I E	Buddhist Sinhala social structure	E D S V
A R		T E
N	Media motivational resources	R

In the above context, the message communicated will be decoded from a perspective of the Buddhist worldview and culture. This is a major barrier in communicating the gospel to the Buddhist community.

If communication is so complicated, how can we communicate effectively without taking the culture of the people into consideration? For effective communication we must take into account not only the culture of the people, but also the following:

1. The culture and worldview
2. Their understanding of the scriptures or their prejudice
3. Their cognitive knowledge (i.e., Am I speaking the language they understand?)
4. Their felt needs (i.e., Do I know their real needs?)

Most Asian countries which were colonized by colonial rulers have spent their post-independence years striving for a national identity. An integral part of the national identity is perceived as being anti-Christian. In Sri Lanka,

the Buddhist clergy seem to be developing a term called the “Sinhala Buddhist,” referring to the fact that if you are a Sinhalese, you also have to be a Buddhist. To become a Christian is to become a traitor, turning your back on your family, community and country.

Ralph Winter and Bruce Koch comment,

“The church does not really grow within peoples where relevant churches do not exist. While there are tens of millions who have never heard the name of Jesus at all there are hundreds of millions who may have heard of Jesus and may even have high regard for him, but who cannot see a way of becoming his disciples. Standing before them are barriers ranging from the relatively trivial to the seemingly insurmountable, many of them beyond the demands of the gospel.”³

Cultural distance from our people is a barrier to communicating the gospel.

Contextualization Is Imperative to Reaching the Unreached

If we want the message of Christ to be culturally relevant we need to:

1. Seriously consider using more **indigenous forms of music**.
2. Rethink and develop **culturally relevant forms of worship**.
3. Rethink and develop **culturally relevant forms of celebrating Christmas, Easter and other important occasions**.
4. Rethink and develop **architectural models in keeping with the culture**.
5. Discover and develop **indigenous public preaching styles**.
6. Incorporate **local art forms** of communication.
7. Take advantage of the **community life** we enjoy and use it **as a means for evangelism**. (Individualism and a disconnected verbal approach are not acceptable to our people.)
8. Seriously consider adopting an **incarnational approach to ministry**.
9. Rethink and use a **holistic approach to ministry**, because we minister in a context of poverty.
10. Seriously consider our **involvement in community life**. We are too detached. We remain detached because of a faulty theological perspective (“We are not of the world”) and a minority mindset.
11. Seriously reconsider our **lifestyle**. (i.e., Is our lifestyle in keeping with our people?)
12. Pay attention and develop **relevant national and Asian theology**.
13. Research and develop **relevant teaching models**.
14. Develop **relevant models to developing leaders** and leadership styles.
15. Build **relevant reproducible church models**.

16. Identify and celebrate **healthy, wholesome cultural practices within the community** that is not in conflict with biblical teaching.

Paul Hiebert provides guidelines for responsible contextualization:

1. The Bible is the final and definite authority for Christian belief and practices. Every one therefore must begin at the same place.
2. The priesthood of all believers is accepted as scriptural teaching. The priesthood of believers assumes that all the faithful have the Holy Spirit to guide them in the understanding and application of the scripture to their own lives.
3. C. Norman Craus points out that the contextualization of the gospel is ultimately not the task of individuals or individual leaders, but of the church as a discerning community; *“within that community, individuals contribute with their gifts and abilities.”*⁴

Culturally dislocated models or Western models might work in the cities, but if the Church is to impact a country, culturally relevant models will be more relevant. Our attempt to use local culture does not mean we will overlook cultural beliefs and practices that are in conflict with biblical truths; on the contrary, we will sit in judgment on such that are inconsistent with biblical teaching.

The truths that are central to biblical teaching or at the core of the gospel cannot be changed or altered to suit any culture. This will be a violation of the trust that God has entrusted to us. These unchangeable truths are considered as “Supra Culture,” that is above all culture.

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PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

A Focus on Central and South America: Ninety-nine Least-Reached People Groups Remain

Overview

“God, gold and glory” was the rallying cry of the Spaniards who went to the new world. God was the motivator for many Jesuit missionaries, and that put them in conflict with those who came to take the gold and enslave those who needed God. The original inhabitants were decimated by European conquests and diseases in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1900, almost the entire Spanish-speaking population was considered

Catholic; since then, however, changes have been dramatic—from narrow traditionalism with strong opposition to Protestant activity to freedom of religion and a rapid growth of evangelicals. Spiritism has grown rapidly in influence in many countries. The divinely ordered convergence in Latin America of greater freedom of religion, more open and accountable democracy and a series of military, natural and economic disasters which loosened the hold of traditional structures enabled many to come to Christ.

Today there has been a rapid growth and maturation of missions vision which has sparked numerous initiatives to the unreached. Among the twenty-one countries in Central and South America, ninety-nine least-reached peoples remain, from the 50.9% of the population of Guyana in five least-reached groups to the 15.4% of Brazil's population in forty-six different people groups to the more than 600,000 Jews in Argentina, their remaining least-reached people.

Prayer Points

- **Cooperation, not competition.** Request that God removes competition and imparts a sense of cooperation in every believer. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 3:8-9: *“The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.”*
- **Releasing new leaders.** Ask God that every new believer would exercise the gifts he has given him or her to encourage other believers and to share the gospel with others who have not yet heard. Reflect on Ephesians 4:16: *“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*
- **The Word in their own language.** Request that God speed the Word to every least-reached people in their own language so they can grow. Reflect on Psalm 119:105: *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”*
- **Disciple-makers.** Pray that every new believer immediately shares with those around him or her the hope in Jesus. Reflect on Proverbs 11:30: *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.”*
- **Kings, leaders and all those in authority.** Pray for God to place righteous leaders in power who rule justly and that God gives favor to believers trying to minister. Pray these believers may live quiet lives in all godliness and see his kingdom coming on earth.

Links

- [Resources](#) to pray, to mobilize prayer and do outreach.
- [Discover](#) Central and South America's ninety-nine least-reached peoples.
- [Pray](#) for the peoples of the Central and South America region.
- Obtain [daily prayer guides](#) for peoples of this region.

Background

Latin America's Gospel Potential

(by Wesley Kawato)

What do you think of when you hear the year 1492? Columbus sailed the ocean blue, right? But before that could happen, Spain, which would soon become a colonial power, had to shake off their own colonizers, the Moors. These North African Muslims had ruled all or part of the Iberian Peninsula (i.e., Spain and Portugal) since AD 711. The fight to eject the Moors from Iberia had religious overtones; after all, the Moors were Muslims and the Iberian peoples were Roman Catholic. Spain and Portugal charged their explorers to not only conquer Latin America politically, but to also conquer these new lands spiritually. Catholic priests often accompanied the explorers who colonized Latin America.

Christopher Columbus had a deep faith in God and we know from his extensive diary that he considered his voyages of exploration to be divine missions. He believed that the new lands he discovered would one day be used by God to bless all of humanity. Columbus was sponsored by Spain. Not to be outdone, Portugal also commissioned expeditions to the new world. In 1500, Cabral “discovered” Brazil and claimed the new land for Portugal. Soon, the Pope had to draw an arbitrary “Line of Demarcation” to keep the two Catholic powers from fighting one another in South America over their conquests. Portugal received a small toehold on South America, which later grew to become Brazil. The Spaniards put more of their efforts toward conquering powerful empires possessing gold. The Spaniards found that they could either take God to the conquered peoples, or take gold from them.

God and Gold On a Collision Course

Thousands of Spanish and Portuguese colonists poured into Latin America during the early 1500s, and with the exceptions of the Incan and Aztec Empires, they easily conquered the new world. Gold poured into Spain’s treasury. The governors sent by Spain and Portugal to rule their new colonies cared only about making a profit for the European rulers. White settlers enslaved many tribal peoples to work in mines and on plantations. Hard work and inadequate food led to disease and death for the Indians. The population of this vast region was drastically reduced. The harsh conditions of slavery sometimes led to revolts, which were brutally crushed. Within a century, many parts of Latin America had no large concentrations of Native Americans at all.

Attempts to take the gospel to the native peoples were dismal. Missionaries “converted” the conquered peoples en masse. But many of these conversions were superficial, because there were never enough missionaries to adequately disciple the tens of thousands of Native Americans being conquered each year. Often, pagan gods were given the names of Catholic saints, and the old religions continued.

In 1502, Father Bartolome de Las Casas arrived in Latin America and tried to make a difference for the gospel. He not only taught about Christ, but argued for the fair treatment of the various tribal groups. Few listened. Some missionaries were even martyred by the Iberians. Most Catholic priests only ministered to the white colonists. In 1542, Las Casas convinced Charles V, the King of Spain, to ban the enslavement of Native Americans in the new world. But these new laws were not always enforced, and the high death rates continued.

Las Casas inspired a new generation of Catholic missionaries to reach out to the tribal groups of Latin America. The most successful efforts involved gathering Native Americans into protected villages, where they were taught the gospel along with the Spanish or Portuguese languages. Some of these missionaries learned various Native American languages and began the work of Bible translation. One successful use of the protected village method of outreach was in Paraguay among the Guarani people group. This effort, led by the Jesuit monastic order, lasted from 1610 to 1773.

In 1773, the Pope disbanded the Jesuits and the Indians were either disbanded or killed. By 1773, ninety percent of all Latin American tribal peoples had been wiped out by European diseases or guns. Those who survived the devastation often intermarried with white settlers. This is why many Latin American countries have large mixed race populations today.

That same decade, a Jesuit missionary in Baja, California, wrote a book entitled *Observations on Baja California*, where he stated that the Protestants were not the true Church, because they had no desire to convert people. That situation would soon change.

Here Come the Protestants

The Spanish and Portuguese colonial powers kept out Protestant missionaries until after the countries of Latin America began gaining independence in 1815. Many of these new countries did not have a state religion during the early years of independence. Latin America's first Protestant missionary was a former British naval officer named Allen Gardiner. In 1850, he led six coworkers to Tierra Del Fuego, an island near the southern tip of South America. The party of seven starved to death when a supply ship failed to arrive. Gardiner led no one to Christ, but his sacrifice inspired Protestants to reach out to the people groups of Latin America.

One of the people inspired by Gardiner was an American doctor named Robert Kelly, who began a work among the Catholics in Brazil in 1855. In 1856, American James Thompson became the first Protestant missionary in Colombia. Later, British Anglicans began working with the various tribal groups of Chile and Paraguay. By 1914, there were Protestant missionaries in every country of Latin America, and they had won half a million people to the Lord.

Pentecostalism Makes Inroads

Spiritual decay within the Catholic Church opened the door for further Protestant expansion. After 1914, American Pentecostal denominations became a dominant force among the missionaries working in Latin America. Meanwhile, liberation theology began making serious inroads into the Catholic Church of Latin America. Many priests blended Marxist thought with Roman Catholicism. Nicaragua was a prime example. During the 1980s, the pro-communist Sandinista ruling council counted three priests among its members. The Catholic abandonment of the gospel created a spiritual vacuum that the Pentecostals were all too happy to fill. Today, twenty to thirty percent of the Nicaraguans are evangelical.

Growth among Latin America's Pentecostals exploded after 1960, when newly formed Latin American denominations learned how to conduct large-scale evangelistic crusades, a method that worked well in their cultures. Often, the evangelists were Latin Americans like Luis Palau, who conducted numerous crusades during the 1970s. By 1997, there were sixty-four million Protestants in Latin America, the majority belonging to the various Pentecostal denominations. Protestants have become a significant social force in Latin America. They make up eighteen percent of Guatemala's population and nearly twenty percent of Haiti's population. Brazil elected a Protestant president in 1974. However, this growth has been uneven. Evangelical Christians make up less than five percent of the populations of Colombia, Cuba, Uruguay and French Guiana.

During the last thirty years, Latin American Protestants have emerged as a mission sending force. There are Brazilian missionaries in southern Africa, and Spanish-speaking missionaries in northern Africa. Mission groups like **COMIBAM** and **COMIMEX** are mobilizing and sending Latinos to the unreached. Latinos are some of the world's key intercessors. For example, more people are using the "Global Prayer Digest" in Spanish than in English, Korean or Chinese.

Let Us Pray!

Pray that God will multiply his efforts through Latin American missionaries to the unreached people groups during the twenty-first century. Pray that God will soon break the hold occult practices have in some parts of Latin America. Although there have been strong movements to Christ in Haiti and Brazil, Spiritism, Santeria and Voodoo still have a destructive hold on many. Ask God for a revival within the Catholic Church that will bring them to biblical truth.

An Overview of Central and South America

By Justin Long

Central America

The eight countries on the land bridge between North and South America sit on a strategic trade route between the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. The region has many resources, including water, timber, oil and metals. However, it is also prone to natural disasters. It lies directly in the path of many hurricanes and tropical storms. Hurricane Mitch, for example, devastated both Honduras and Nicaragua, destroying much of their infrastructure. It also sits on top of the Caribbean Plate and is geologically active, with periodic earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Earthquakes in 1931 and 1972 heavily damaged Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua, and earthquakes in 2001 devastated El Salvador.

From 135 million people in 2000, the population is projected to grow to 186 million by 2025. The population is moderately urban, found in five megacities and several moderately large towns. There are dozens of large minority groups that are for the most part unreached, including Arabs, Indians and Chinese as well as indigenous tribal groups. However, because there has been significant racial intermingling, distinguishing specific ethnic groups is problematic.

Attempts to unite the region politically during the nineteenth century were all unsuccessful. During the 1980s and 1990s, the region was politically unstable (note particularly the civil war in El Salvador, Guatemala and the conflicts in Nicaragua and Panama). Today, it is largely at peace and is likely to remain so. Governments are democratic in name but have some authoritarian tendencies.

The economies of the region are mixed. Some of the countries (such as Costa Rica and Mexico) have increasingly strong, diversified economies, while others (like Nicaragua and Guatemala) are very poor. All have wide gaps between the rich and the poor and poverty is widespread. Still, Central America produces twenty-two percent of Latin America's total GNP.

Belize and Guatemala are both dealing with small-scale AIDS epidemics. The drug trade and illegal immigration both continue to be problems.

Christianity in Central America

The nations of Central America are strongly Roman Catholic, but Protestant and particularly evangelical growth has been rapid. There are hundreds of ministries focused on mission to Central America and large international mission networks that are part of COMIBAM (such as COMIMEX). Syncretism and Christopaganism are challenges, but the growing mission movement in Central America is already making a substantial impact abroad. For example, a significant project arising out of COMIMEX is aiming to provide profiles of all the world's people groups via the Internet, and missionaries from the region are already at work in the Muslim world. No longer is missionary research and action limited to the West alone.

Statistics for the Eight Countries of Central America

Name	P'00	P'25	C'00	%	C '25	%	75-00	00-25	Issues affecting the future
Belize	0.2	0.4	0.2	91%	0.3	90%	+-	+-	Hurricanes, AIDS, debt, unemployment, poverty
Costa Rica	3.9	5.5	3.8	96%	5.3	95%	+-	+-	Political stability, strong economy, stalled churches, mission sending
El Salvador	6.3	9.1	6.1	98%	8.7	97%	+-	+-	Many natural disasters, rich/poor gap, poverty, civil war 1980s

Guatemala	11.2	19.2	10.9	97%	18.5	97%	+-	+-	AIDS, civil war 1990s, poverty, rich/poor gap, Christopaganism
Honduras	6.2	10.2	6.2	97%	9.9	96%	+-	+-	Rich resources, Hurricane Mitch devastation, AIDS, poverty, missions
Mexico	100.1	129.4	96.1	96%	122.1	94%	+-	+-	Vibrant economy, much poverty, COMIMEX mission movement
Nicaragua	5.0	7.7	4.8	96%	7.3	95%	+-	+-	Poverty, massive underemployment, debt, Hurricane Mitch
Panama	3.0	4.3	2.6	88%	3.7	87%	+-	+-	Growing economy, unemployment, poverty, great potential

South America

South America is home two of the world's largest countries: Brazil and Argentina. The Amazon rainforests are a particularly rich ecosystem, containing a large portion of the species on Earth. The continent has large concentrations of resources such as gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and oil. Unfortunately, many of the countries have focused on only one product and have failed to diversify their economies.

The countries of South America have a combined population of 315 million, up from forty million in 1900. The region is the second most heavily urbanized (eighty-eight percent) in the world (after Australia-New Zealand, ninety-six percent); a tenth of the world's city dwellers live in the megacities and large towns of the region.

Historically, South America was home to numerous native civilizations, including the Incas. European colonization in the 1500s introduced both diseases and slavery, both of which decimated the indigenous populations. African slaves were brought to replenish the slave populations. Intermarriage led to significant racial mixing. Today, it is difficult to identify specific people groups in this area. However, there are large numbers of unreached minorities; including, the millions of Chinese, Japanese and Jews. Although the numbers of Arabs and Asian Muslims (particularly Javanese) are smaller, they are rapidly increasing. Poverty is endemic to South America; the per capita GNP of US\$3,600 puts the region in the bottom economic quarter. Nevertheless, this represents an economy worth over \$1.3 trillion (making up most of Latin America's GNP, ahead of all Asian regions except East Asia, twice that of Africa). The two largest economies are Brazil (US\$660 billion) and Argentina (US\$315 billion); the latter is driven primarily by petroleum wealth. International indebtedness became a notable problem, as most recently illustrated by Argentina's recent default.

The region continues to be plagued by many seemingly unstoppable social ills. The drug trade and the related problems of gang warfare, corruption and violence continue to wreak havoc, despite billions of dollars spent to combat them. Political issues related to the indigenous peoples have likewise been particularly thorny for mission agencies. Although HIV/AIDS is not as prevalent in South America as elsewhere, it is present.

During the twentieth century, many of the governments of South America were victims of Cold War politicking. Civil war, unrest, violence and political suppression were all common. With the 1980s and 1990s came a wave of democratization, yet allegations of corruption are frequently still heard. Recently, South American governments have been drifting toward socialism, and there are increasingly overtones of autocratic rule; yet for the most part, free markets remain the norm. Attempts to unify the region politically failed in the nineteenth century; however, with the founding of the South American Community of Nations, South America is starting down the road of economic integration, with plans for European Union-style political integration in the non-distant future.

Christianity in South America

With the exception of Guyana, the countries of South America are strongly Roman Catholic. The Catholic charismatic movement has played a significant role in the region. Further, Protestants (particularly evangelicals)

and Independents have been growing rapidly. South America's contribution to the mission movement has been substantial and is increasing. Since COMIBAM 1987, many new initiatives have been launched to reach the unreached. From research to funding to workers, Latin America is providing significant mission resources.

Statistics for the Thirteen Countries of South America

Name	P'00	P'25	C'00	%	C '25	%	75-00	00-25	Issues affecting the future
Bolivia	8.3	12.4	7.8	94%	11.5	93%	+-	+-	Poverty, unemployment, aid-dependent, drugs, corruption
Brazil	173.9	227.9	159.0	91%	204.8	90%	+-	+-	Wealthy, rich/poor gap, corruption, debt, ecology, poverty, missions
Chile	15.4	19.3	13.7	89%	16.8	87%	+-	+-	Stable, poverty, immigrants, unemployment
Columbia	42.1	57.7	40.8	97%	55.6	96%	+-	+-	Drugs, corruption, continued fighting, poverty, some improvement
Ecuador	12.3	16.8	12.0	97%	16.2	96%	+-	+-	Political instability, poverty, debt, unemployment, economic reforms
Falkland Islands	0.0	0.0	0.0	84%	0.0	76%	+-	--	Relative wealth, political uncertainty
French Guiana	0.2	0.3	0.1	85%	0.2	81%	+-	+-	Unsettled wilderness, unemployment, resources
Guyana	0.7	0.7	0.4	52%	0.3	47%	+-	--	Resources, AIDS, unemployment, debt
Paraguay	5.5	9.1	5.2	96%	8.6	95%	+-	+-	Political stability, debt, corruption, poverty, unemployment
Peru	26.0	36.2	25.1	97%	34.7	96%	+-	+-	Political instability, corruption, poverty, severe crime, war rebuilding
Suriname	0.4	0.5	0.2	51%	0.2	48%	++	+-	Resources, high poverty, unemployment
Uruguay	3.3	3.8	2.2	65%	2.4	63%	+-	+-	Relative wealth but many poor, unemployment, debt, politically stable
Venezuela	24.4	35.4	23.1	95%	33.2	94%	+-	+-	Oil, widespread poverty and unemployment, illegal workers

Key to the above charts:

P'00 - Population, AD 2000

P'25 - Population, AD2025

C'00 - Christianity, AD 2000 (followed by the percentage of the overall population)

C'25 - Christianity, AD2025 projection, World Christian Database (followed by percentage of overall population)

75-00 - Growth rate. The first (+/-) indicates whether Christianity is growing or declining; the second (+/-) indicates whether it is growing faster or slower than the population (thus whether Christianity's influence is growing or declining).

(+) means Christianity is growing, but not as fast as the population, and so is declining as a share of the country.

00-25 - Growth rate projected for AD2000-2025

Issues - A brief encapsulation of the issues affecting the growth of Christianity in the nation

(Note: These articles are also available through Missiopedia, a new open-source reference on global Christianity and Christian mission hosted by Momentum Magazine. Go to: www.momentum-mag.org/wiki/Latin_America.)

Justin Long manages strategicnetwork.org and is senior editor for **Momentum**, a magazine devoted to unreached peoples.

Into Their World...The Han Chinese of Cuba

By Laurie Fortunak

As the largest ethnic group in the world—numbering 1.3 billion—the Han Chinese reside in nearly every country in the world. The Diaspora Han Chinese in Cuba are included in this number. After the Mongol Invasion around 1276, many Han Chinese fled to other areas of the world, taking up residence often near larger urban centers which allowed them to work in business and various trades. Many of the Diaspora Han Chinese have maintained portions of their culture and language. They have also continued living by their traditional Chinese customs, especially those involving marriage and family. One reason they continue to hold to these customs is a deep belief in the superiority of their culture.

Family is very important for the Diaspora Han Chinese. Children are indulged (boys even more so than girls), but are also pushed to excel in school and to invest much time in their studies. The Han Chinese are polite people; however, if drawn into a dispute, they will seek to win the debate due to a high value placed on “saving face” and reputation.

In general, the Diaspora Han Chinese have maintained their traditional Chinese religion, which is marked by elements of Buddhist, Confucianism and Taoism. They are also very superstitious, relying on horoscopes in an attempt to promote harmony and bring good luck. Their belief in the spirit world is strong; however, this belief seems to have little impact on their day-to-day lives.

The Diaspora Han Chinese are often mistreated in the lands where they now live. This is often due to jealousy over the successful business ventures they have begun.

Tens of thousands of Han Chinese live in Cuba. They need to hear the gospel and respond appropriately. Pray that in their new land, God would draw them to himself and use them to impact the culture around them.

For more information on the Han Chinese of Cuba, visit:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Chinese

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/oldworld/asia/hanchinese.html>

http://kcm.co.kr/bethany_eng/p_code2/1020.html

(Information compiled from www.joshuaproject.net)

(Note: The website links above are intended to provide you with more information about this people group. Some of the links are to groups that are not religious in nature but who provide information and background that may be helpful in researching this people group. The content of each of the websites linked to is the sole responsibility of the linked-to organization. Views expressed on these websites do not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of the staff or writers of Lausanne World Pulse or those of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Institute of Strategic Evangelism, Evangelism and Missions Information Service or Intercultural Studies Department.)

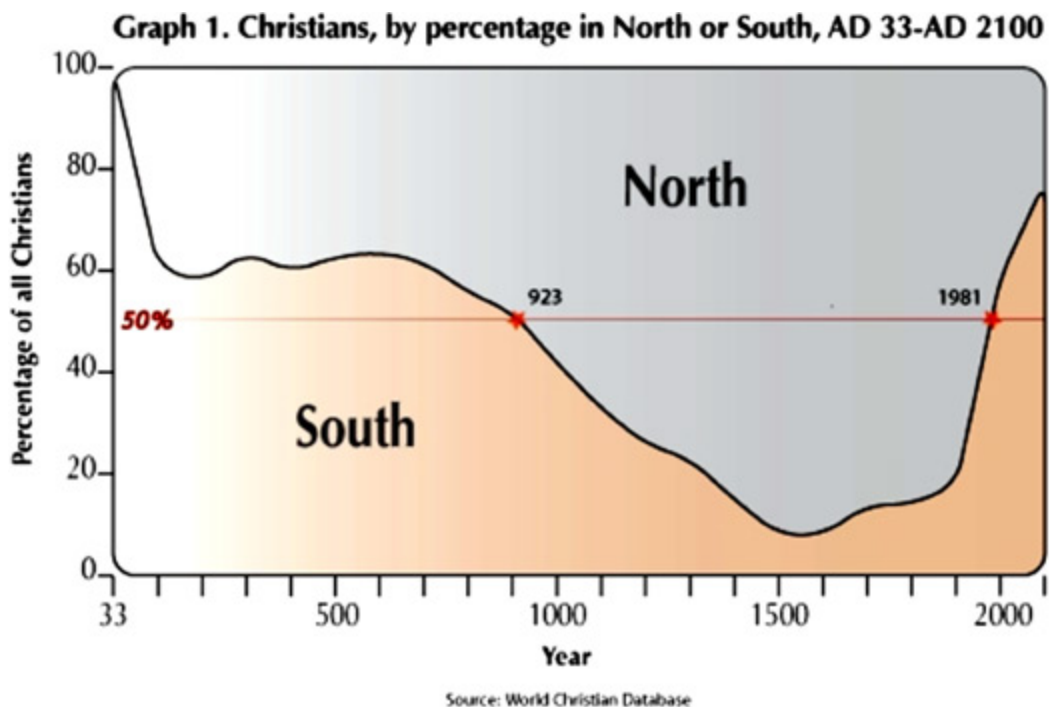
Laurie Fortunak is editorial coordinator of Lausanne World Pulse. She also serves as editorial coordinator for [Evangelism and Missions Information Service](#) (EMIS) and managing editor of [Evangelical Missions Quarterly](#) (EMQ).

STRATEGY, TRENDS & STATISTICS

One Hundred Years of Christian Growth

By Bradley Coon

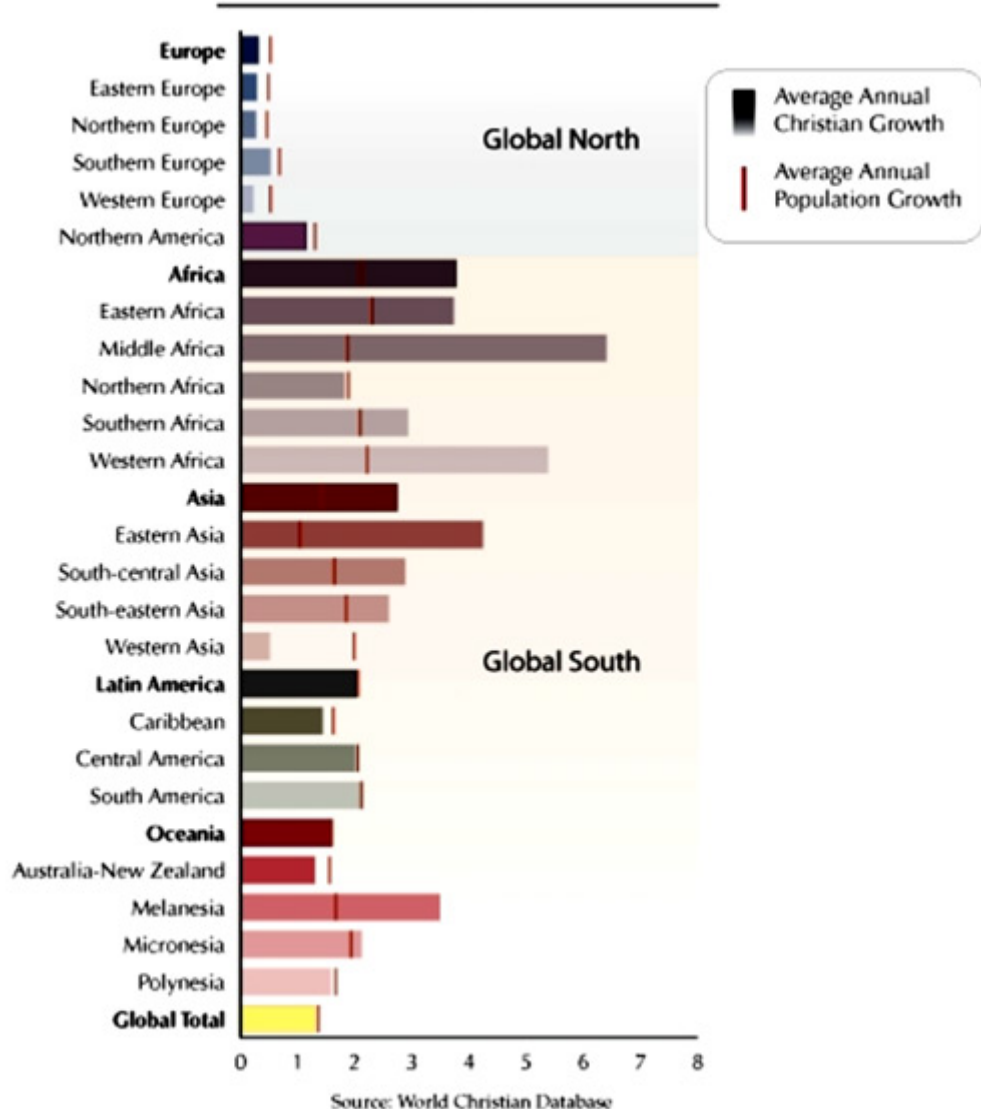
The twentieth century saw a radical shift in the Christian world, with a majority of believers now being found in the global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania) rather than the global North (North America and Europe). This has not been the case since AD 923 (see graph 1 below). The shift has been well documented and presented by scholars over the past decade, most notably Philip Jenkins in his work *The Next Christendom*.¹ However, it often seems that there is a noticeable gap between the scholar and the layperson on this point, with few people being able to picture just how dramatic this decentralization of the Church has been.



As an assistant who attended the 2006 [Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering](#) in Malaysia, I had an opportunity to see a presentation prepared by Jason Mandryk and Justin Long (available online at www.momentum-mag.org/200611/200611-article1.pdf). Mandryk and Long visually presented the shift of Christianity and highlighted the overwhelming missionary force that is now coming from non-western countries. We are living in an increasingly post-literate society—a society which is much more responsive to oral and visual stimuli than to the written word. There is a certain importance and urgency in helping the whole Church to understand the multi-faceted ways that God’s kingdom is moving, especially as we remember Christ’s words that “the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Several facets of this shift can be seen through the visualization of the average annual growth rates of Christians and megablocs² around the world.

Perhaps the first thing to notice about Christian growth rates is that the percentages in and of themselves are of limited usefulness without the numerical data used to calculate the growth rates. It is in the comparison of growth rates, however, that fascinating patterns emerge which give us insights into the major shifts that have occurred in Christianity during the last century. You will notice that graphs 2-4 below illustrate a comparison of growth rates. Graphs 2 and 3 compare the average annual Christian growth rate per United Nations region (represented by the bars), with the average annual population growth for the same region (represented by the red lines). Graph 4 compares the growth rate of Christian megablocs within a continent (bars) by the overall growth rate of Christianity within that same continent (thin black line). There are a few major facts I will highlight; the rest of the exploration is up to you.

Graph 2. Christian Growth vs. Population Growth, AD 1900-2000

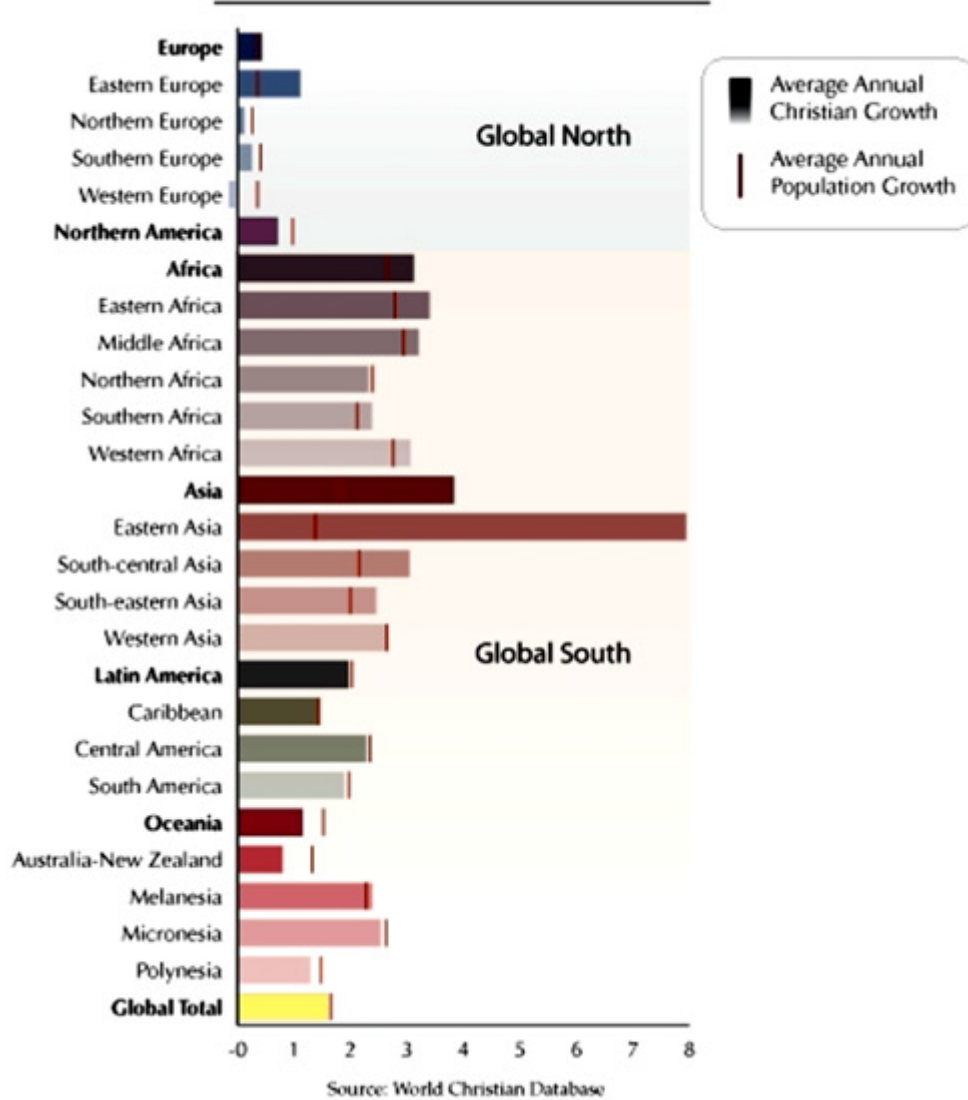


Contrary to the title of this article, graph 2 shows us that during the last century Christianity as a whole has grown at roughly the same average annual rate as the population (1.32% and 1.37% respectively). This means

that in AD 2000 the percentage of Christians in the world was nearly the same as in AD 1900. So what is meant by the phrase “Christian growth”?

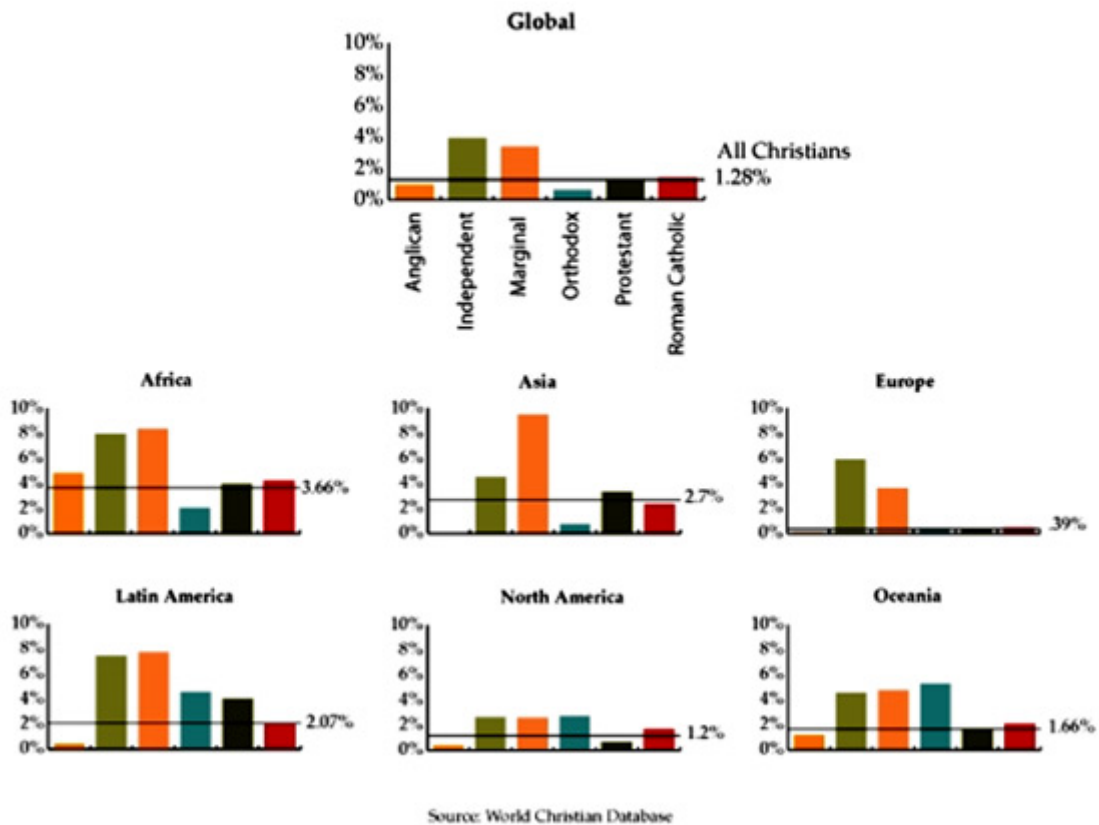
Shift is perhaps a better word to use here since there is certainly no equality in the way Christianity has grown regionally or denominationally. From graph 2 we see that all of the places where Christianity has grown at a faster rate than the population occur on non-western continents (the global South). Europe and North America have experienced declining Christian growth rates, yet all of the African and Asian regions have seen phenomenal Christian growth rates (North Africa and Western Asia are the exceptions due to the dominance of Islam in those regions). While none of these facts are particularly shocking (since the Church has been well aware of these shifts for several decades), visualizing just how dramatic they are paints a compelling picture of the increasingly diversified Church both now and into the future.

Graph 3. Christian Growth vs. Population Growth, AD 1970-2000



Graph 3 takes the data shown in graph 2 a bit further by showing the more recent overall growth of Christians from AD 1970 to AD 2000. While Africa and Asia both led the charge in Christian growth over the last century, Africa did so rapidly during the first part of the century and has since slowed down. Asia, especially eastern Asia, has been responsible for a large portion of the Christian growth over the last few decades. All of these figures can be attributed to a variety of factors: social, political and otherwise. Some, like the impressive growth of Christianity in Eastern Europe during the last thirty years, can be attributed to a single event and its consequences—in this case, the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Table 4. Average Annual Megabloc Growth vs Christian Growth AD 1900 - 2000



Graph 4 is less detailed than graphs 2 and 3, only providing growth data at the continental level. However, some important trends are observed in the growth rates of megablocs that sociologically consider themselves Christians. Independent and marginal Christians are by far the fastest growing denominations in almost every area of the world. We must remember that growth rates are only part of the story. Almost twenty percent (385 million) of the world’s Christians were categorized as independent Christians in 2000, and only slightly over one percent (twenty-six million) were categorized as marginal. From these figures we can see just how significant the high growth rates of independent Christians has been to the whole landscape of Christianity—a fact which should prompt even lay Christians to think about their understanding of Christian unity through a global lens.

The decline of Christianity in certain areas of the world is certainly discouraging for some, and all would be wise to dismiss statistics like these as definitively indicative of who is and is not a part of the true Kingdom of God. We must remember that even Jesus in just a few verses before the often quoted Matthew 24:14 warned his disciples that “you will be hated by all nations for my sake” as well (Matthew 24:9). It is the calling of the Lord, not the state of the world, that drives us to ministry, missions and evangelism. However, with a better understanding of the state of the world, we can more effectively complete the task given to us to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

Endnotes

1. Jenkins, Philip. 2002. *The Next Christendom*. New York: Oxford University Press.

2. Megablocs refer to denominational groupings. For definitions of megabloc groupings see: Johnson, Todd USA “[Evangelicals/Evangelicalism in a Global Context](#)” in Lausanne World Pulse, January 2006; or Barrett, David, George Kurian and Todd Johnson. 2001. *World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.* New York: Oxford University Press.

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LAUSANNE REPORTS

[Radical Incarnational Ecclesiology as Focus of Lausanne Theology Working Group Consultation](#) By **Sandi Kim**

The Lausanne Theology Working Group convened its conference, “Following Jesus in Our Broken World,” 12-17 February 2007 in Limuru, Africa, in partnership with the [World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission](#). This was an agenda setting consultation led by Lausanne Theology Working Group chair Christopher Wright. The gathering was hosted by Esther Mombo and St. Paul’s United Theological College and supported by [Areopagos](#), [Langham Partnership International](#) and the [Overseas Ministries Study Center](#). Nearly thirty participants representing over fifteen countries (sixty percent of the countries were from the global South) were in attendance for the strategic five-day meeting. This was the first of a series of consultations on key theological and missiological challenges facing the Church to be held in the years before the projected Third Lausanne Congress in 2010.

“Following Jesus in Our Broken World” focused on the demands of radical discipleship and the inherently inseparable ethical dimensions of Christian conversion. Participants grappled with the Church’s role and complicity in the brokenness of the world, through our limited and oftentimes very flawed Christian attitudes, behaviors and responses (or non-responses). The group met to discuss theological issues, missiological implications and case studies along six main themes:

1. Following Jesus as unique Lord and Savior in the context of pluralism
2. Following Jesus as his community in the context of ecclesiology and ethnicity
3. Following Jesus in the context of power and violence
4. Following Jesus in a world of suffering and disaster
5. Following Jesus in the globalized marketplace

6. Following Jesus as the truth in the context of postmodernity and relativism.

Each of the six main themes was considered for more attention in full consultations in the coming years. Additionally, there are plans for the resulting plenary papers and case studies for each of these six themes to be published later this year.

As the group wrestled with theological issues and strategic missiological implications from theme to theme, the questions that the group repeatedly found itself asking were: “What would happen if there was a withdrawal of the Christian presence in areas of great need and suffering?” and “What does it mean to have a Christian presence?” What was found lacking and in need of desperate development in the face of our suffering and broken world was a robust theology of incarnational ecclesiology.

As truth is experienced and communicated through proposition, presence and praxis, our ecclesiology must be further developed to more effectively and persuasively be both bearers and communicators of the truth to our suffering world. This is both our challenge and our greatest hope to be the witnesses God has called us to be and thereby further the cause of Christ in world evangelization.

Sandi Kim currently serves as a research associate with the [Center for Study of Global Christianity](#) on the campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. She is also research assistant to Doug Birdsall, executive chair of the [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization](#).

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