

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD?

INTRO

The world is changing faster than we can perceive. Globalization is making everyone closer together with advancements in technology, transportation, communication, and more. This combined with other factors has created ripe ground for faith-based influences throughout the world. This course will examine some of the current global trends that are shaping how the world is changing.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand current trends and events in the world that are causing current growth or may influence future growth of Christianity.
- Gain insight on how Christianity is growing and declining in parts of the world.

TRENDS IN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

Growth in the Global South

Many countries in the Global South, particularly in Africa and Latin America, have seen significant growth in their Christian populations in recent years. This growth has been fueled by both conversions and high fertility rates.

Region	1900	1970	2000	2023	2025	2050
Africa	9.64	138	384.3	718.1	756	1,286.1
Asia	22	97.4	281.1	406.6	424.4	595.1
Latin America	62	270.2	483	611.1	619.3	678.8
Oceania	4.8	18	24.4	30.1	30.3	31.9
Global South Total	98.5	523.3	1,172.7	1,766.1	1,830.1	2,591.8

Table 1 - Trend of Christianity in the Global South: 1900-2050 (In Millions)

The distribution of global Christians lies heavily in the global South, particularly in Africa, and has for several decades.

Latin America surpassed Europe as the continent with the most Christians in 2014, and Africa passed Latin America in 2018.

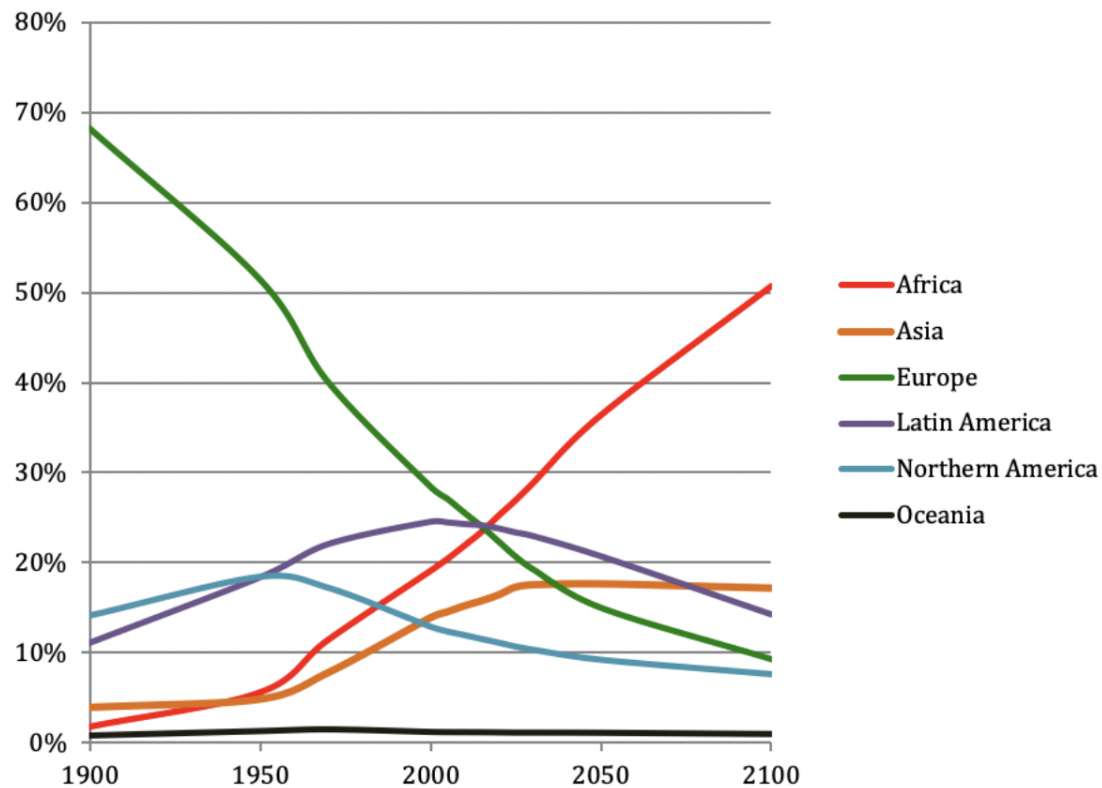


Figure 1: Percent of World's Christians by Continent

Decline in the Global North

At the same time, many countries in the Global North, particularly in Europe, have seen a decline in their Christian populations. This decline has been driven by a combination of factors, including low fertility rates, secularization, and migration.

Region	1900	1970	2000	2023	2025	2050
Europe	380.6	490.5	561.9	566.4	561.8	494.5
North America	79.3	202.4	254.2	271.9	271.1	256.6
Global North Total	459.9	692.9	816.1	838.3	832.9	751.1

Table 2 - Trend of Christianity in the Global North: 1900-2050 (In Millions)

Growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity

There has been a significant increase in the number of people who identify with Pentecostal or Charismatic forms of Christianity in recent years. These movements, which are characterized by an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts, have seen particularly strong growth in the Global South.

1900	1970	2000	2023	2025	2050
.981	57.6	442.6	679.1	703.6	1,031.5

Table 3 - Trend of Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Population: 1900-2050 (In Millions)

Political Engagement

Christianity has played a significant role in shaping political debates and policy decisions in many countries around the world. In some cases, this has led to tension between different Christian groups and with other religious communities.

The Role of Technology

Technology has also played a role in the spread of Christianity, with the use of social media, online streaming, and other digital platforms to share the Gospel and connect with believers around the world.

Ecumenism

There has been a trend towards greater ecumenism, or cooperation, among different Christian denominations and traditions in recent years. This has included efforts to overcome divisions and work together on issues of common concern.

Interfaith Dialogue

There has also been an increased focus on interfaith dialogue and cooperation among different religious traditions, including Christianity. This has included efforts to build relationships and understanding between Christians and members of other faiths.

GLOBAL CHRISTIAN WORKER TRENDS

Countries with the most Christians receive the largest number of missionaries. This is likely due to longstanding ministry partnerships churches and organizations have in these countries. Consider the following statistics¹:

- There are approximately 435,000 foreign missionaries in the world.
- Of the 435,000, it is estimated that 337,000 foreign missionaries (77.3%) serve in the *Reached World*, that is, the part of the world that is unevangelized and unreached.
- Only about 2.7% of missionaries serve in unreached places.
- For example, Brazil and Bangladesh are about the same size but Brazil which is mostly Christian received about 20,000 missionaries whereas Bangladesh which is mostly Muslim receives about 1,000.²

The Global South is increasing in their sending of missionaries while the Global North is decreasing.³

- As of 2021, 203,000 (47 percent of the total) missionaries were from the Global South, up from 31,000 (12 percent of the total) in 1970.
- As of 2021, 227,000 (53 percent of the total) missionaries were from the Global North, down from 88 percent of the total in 1970.

Opportunity:

One thing the statistics above do not capture are Christians serving the unreached in their own country, or in easily accessible countries. Because of global migration patterns and increasing urban populations, Christians can now meet and build relationships with people groups they may have not been able to before.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Global migration has created ripe ground for Christianity to grow. Never before has the world seen the scale of people on the move as it does now. This has created opportunities for the influence of Christianity that has not previously existed including unreached and underserved people groups moving to places with easier access, people being more open to the message of Christ because they are looking for something new and different, and stories of divine intervention in migrant's lives that are leading them to Christ. Consider the following statistics that show the scale of global migration and how it all fits into the global Christian movement.

- There are approximately 281 million international migrants globally which is about 3.6% of the world's total population.⁴
- There are about 103 million forcibly displaced people around the world. And about 53.2 million of those are refugees, meaning people who have fled to another country outside their home country.⁵
- 72% of refugees originate from just five countries:⁶
 - Syrian Arab Republic: 6.8 million
 - Venezuela: 5.6 million
 - Ukraine: 5.4 million
 - Afghanistan: 2.8 million
 - South Sudan: 2.4 million
- Christians make up about half of all international migrants. Muslims make up about 27%.⁷

Ways to Engage With Global Migration

- Domestic Cross-Cultural Ministry

Refugees and other types of immigrants present an opportunity to develop relationships and minister to them without leaving the country. This can involve your church partnering with a local refugee resettlement organization or setting up services of your own to build relationships such as ESL classes.

- Global Partnerships

The scale of migration creates opportunities for churches to collaborate and partner with churches and organizations around the world. This can lead to a more interconnected global church that is better equipped to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by migration.

- Church Planting in Diaspora Communities

Previously unreachable people have now moved to areas that are accessible. Many of these migrants are in search of meaning and purpose. Planting churches among diaspora communities is a great way to minister to and build relationships with migrants from around the world.

THE RISE OF CITIES

The future of Christianity is probably in the city. Cities have seen accelerated growth in recent years around the world.

- In 2000 there were 317 cities with over 1 million inhabitants; this increased to 593 in 2021. This same period saw a doubling of urban poor and slum dwellers.⁸
- Currently, about 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas. This number is expected to increase to 68% by 2050.⁹
- About 90% of this increase is taking place in Asia and Africa where Christianity is growing exponentially already.¹⁰
- According to the United Nations, as of 2018 there were 33 megacities worldwide—cities with populations over 10 million. It is projected that by 2030 there will be 43 megacities worldwide.¹¹

Ways to Engage With the Rise of Cities

- Understanding Urban Culture

As cities continue to grow, so do the unique cultural, social, and economic dynamics that define urban life. Churches who hope to minister effectively in urban contexts must develop a deep understanding of the values, norms, and worldviews that shape these communities.

- Multi-Ethnic Ministry

Urban areas are often characterized by high levels of diversity, including a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. Churches can form and partner with other local churches to organize multi-ethnic ministries to meet the needs of growing cities.

- Church Planting and Discipleship

As cities continue to grow, the need for new churches and discipleship programs becomes increasingly important. Christians can help meet this need by planting new churches and investing in the development of new leaders and disciple-making strategies.

CHRISTIAN WEALTH

The wealth of Christians is on the rise. Consider the statistics below to imagine the capabilities of Christian giving:

- The personal income of all Christians in the U.S. is about \$56 trillion.¹²
- Christians give about \$945 billion 1.68% of that to Christian causes.¹³
- Of that \$945 billion, about \$55 billion goes to foreign missions.¹⁴
- Christians in the Global South only hold about 21% of Christian wealth.¹⁵

DISCUSSION

- How does the information presented in this course help you better understand what God is doing throughout the world?

Sources

Tables 1-3:

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