

THE FUTURE OF MISSIOLOGY IS GLOBAL

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The most significant trend in missiology today and, into the foreseeable future, is the ongoing shift of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South.¹ Table 1 below shows that in 1900, 82% of all Christians were in the Global North, by 2025 it had fallen to 31% and, our first ever estimates for 2075² show it will be only 17%. From the standpoint of the Global South, the corresponding figures are 18% (1900), 69% (2025) and 83% (2075). This means that, by 2075, there will be an almost complete upending of European dominance in global Christianity.

Today, in 2025, Africa has 754 million Christians, by far, the most of any continent. By 2075, nearly half of all Christians will be Africans (1.8 billion). In that same year, Asia and Latin America will both have more Christians than Europe. Meanwhile, Christians in the Global North are projected to shrink, in raw numbers, from 824 million in 2025 to 636 million in 2075. And yet, most missiology is still firmly based in the Global North. The simplest reading of the shift's implications for missiology would be to move from a Global North missiology to a Global South missiology but I'd like to make the case for global missiology (which should have been the case even in 1900). The Global South is not monolithic in the same sense that the Global North was.

Therefore, global missiology values diversity, taking into account the perspectives of all peoples, giving equal voice to all. This, as we will see, requires the decentering of Western or Global North missiology.³

Table 1. Christians by Continent, 1900, 2025, and 2075

	Christians 1900	1900%	% all Xns	Christians 2025	2025%	% all Xns	Christians 2075	2075%	% all Xns
Global North	459,901,000	95.0	82.4	823,714,000	73.3	31.1	635,923,000	59.1	16.9
Europe	380,647,000	94.5	68.2	551,934,000	74.5	20.9	393,283,000	61.9	10.5
North America	79,254,000	97.1	14.2	271,779,000	70.9	10.3	242,640,000	55.2	6.5
Global South	98,445,000	8.7	17.6	1,821,603,000	25.8	68.9	3,125,664,000	33.6	83.1
Africa	9,640,000	8.9	1.7	754,229,000	49.3	28.5	1,796,331,000	53.4	47.8
Asia	21,966,000	2.3	3.9	416,786,000	8.7	15.8	647,287,000	12.6	17.2
Latin America	62,002,000	95.2	11.1	620,116,000	91.9	23.4	648,698,000	89.1	17.2
Oceania	4,837,000	77.4	0.9	30,472,000	65.3	1.2	33,348,000	51.3	0.9
Global total	558,346,000	34.5	100.0	2,645,317,000	32.3	100.0	3,761,587,000	36.3	100.0

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed August 2024).

¹ Global North is defined in a geopolitical sense by five current United Nations regions (53 countries): Eastern Europe (including Russia), Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Western Europe and Northern America. Global South is defined as the remaining 16 current UN regions (185 countries): Eastern Africa, Middle Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Western Africa, Eastern Asia, South-central Asia, South-eastern Asia, Western Asia, Caribbean, Central America, South America, Australia/New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

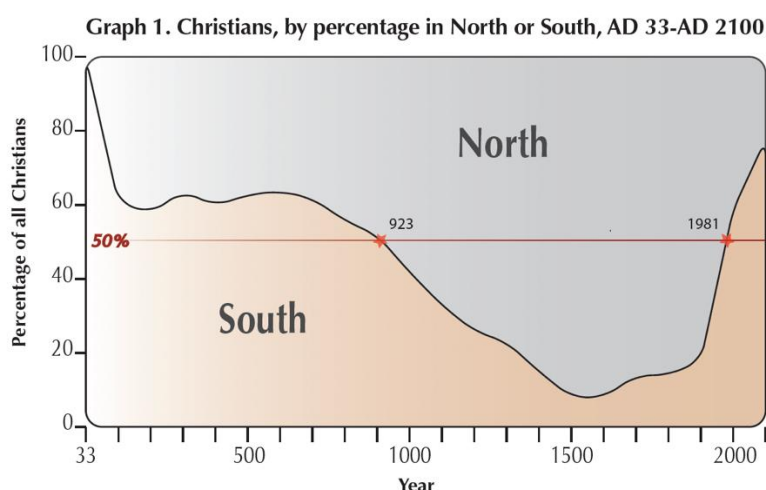
² 2075 projections will be published in Kenneth R. Ross, Gina A. Zurlo, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Compact Atlas of Global Christianity*, Vol. 10 in the *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity* series, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.

³ This essay builds on two of my earlier publications, "Evangelical Mission in an Age of Global Christianity" in Kenneth Nehrbass, Aminta Arrington, & Narry Santos, editors, *Advancing Models of Mission: Evaluating the Past and Looking to the Future* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2021), 189-202, and "Evangelicals Shift to the South, 1900-2020: Decentering Western Perspectives and Building Global Equality" in *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, November 2023.

The Long View: 2000 Years

When we take a long view of Christian history, considering 2,000 years of Christian growth and decline, the changing demographics of Christians are striking. Utilizing clues from historical records, we can track the numbers of Christians in every continent of the world across the entire history of Christianity.⁴ Thus, the percentage of Christians by today's Global North and Global South can be estimated for each century. For at least the first 900 years (until about 923 CE), Christians in the Global South (Africa and Asia) outnumbered those in the Global North (Europe). Then Christianity in the Global South gradually declined until 1500 when fully 92% of all Christians were Northerners. This percentage fell slightly until 1900, when it was 83%.

After 1900 the percentage declined precipitously (or from the Southern point of view rose meteorically). By 1981, Christians in the Global South outnumbered Christians in the Global North for the first time in over 1,000 years. This represents a return to the demographic makeup of Christianity in the early church (predominantly Southern) but also today's vast extension of Christianity into all countries as well as thousands of peoples, languages, and cultures. The shifts are shown in Graph 1, "Christians by Percentage in the North or South, 33- 2100 CE."



The Global View

Most of us realize that belonging to a worldwide Christian family requires the decentering of Western perspectives (long considered as the standard) while giving equal status to viewpoints from all cultures, peoples, and languages. While this is more obvious in areas of scripture translation, worship, spirituality and discipleship, it is less so in theology and missiology. In fact, most of the time "global theology" refers to Western theology taught around the world. While Western theology texts, translated and distributed abroad, offer helpful information, they cannot represent a truly *global* theology. In fact, global theology experts reveal liabilities of Western concepts, with respect to a world that is inclusive, multidirectional, interlinked, and complex.

World Christianity scholar Jahu Hanciles illustrates this well when he writes, "The truth of the matter is that our captivity to the Western intellectual tradition is debilitating and suffocating. Western theological education has great value and can be adapted to the needs of Christian communities globally. But Western "systematic" theology, like any other body of theological discourse, is heavily contextual and ethnocentric. It is designed to promote knowledge of (and

⁴ A detailed analysis can be found in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 212-213.

expertise in) issues or topics pertaining to the Western world — along with the language requirements.”⁵

Western theology, seeing these wider realities as an inconvenience, tend to underscore similarities while underestimating differences. For instance, this mindset is manifested in questions such as: “Aren’t we all basically the same?” “Aren’t others becoming more like us?” “Isn’t the world converging toward common standards?”⁶ In other words, most Western theologians assume—either directly or by default—that creating theology is not a contextual undertaking. What they don’t realize is that Western positions are not neutral in a global context. They can actually cause harm.⁷

Allow me to illustrate this further. I was at an evangelical conference in Wittenberg in 2017 to celebrate 500 years of the Protestant Reformation. I presented our research showing that over 40% of all Protestants were Africans. Out of the 100 people at the meeting only a few were Africans. I was sitting next to a leader from Ghana when someone from the stage said that Africans were welcome at the table in this evangelical movement. My colleague quietly recounted a Ghanaian proverb to us. “It is good if you invite me to your table, but it is far better if you invite me into the kitchen.” What would it mean to have Africans in the kitchen? Why are Christians from the Global South invited to a Global North table when they should be found with everyone else in the kitchen? Unfortunately, our own global assessment shows Global North dominance in theology, mission, music, and many other aspects of the Christian life. Needless to say, the shift of Christianity to the South should be accompanied by a shift in vision and leadership as well as in theology and missiology.

Having established the demographic landscape of global Christianity and the need for global thinking there are at least seven facets of the global future of missiology.

1. The Future of Missiology is Post-Western

As discussed above, Evangelicalism is considered by many as a Western faith. For a long time, Western perspectives have been considered as the standard form of Christianity in theology, ecclesiology, and missiology. Most theological training today is squarely based in the Western way of thinking; it is ironic that Global South pastors are now being trained in a highly individualistic Western mindset. New Testament professor Esau McCaulley writes, “Socially located biblical interpretation is nothing less than the record of the Spirit’s work through scriptural engagement among the different ethnicities and cultures of the world. Unfortunately, too often, the sanctification of culture has been confused with the *Westernization* of culture. That lie has done tremendous damage to the church. God’s transfiguring work is not done in comparison with the West. Ethnicities do not become more holy as they approach likeness to Europe but to God.”⁸

Fortunately, Western perspectives can be both acknowledged and decentered while global voices increasingly represent who we are. Since all biblical, theological and missiological studies are contextual, our understanding of scripture will be greatly enriched by the hundreds of new

⁵ Jehu Hanciles, “African Theological Education: Retrospect and Prospect—An Anglophone Perspective” in *African Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2024, p. 40.

⁶ Insights from leadership studies applied to theology are drawn from Ernest Gundling, Terry Hogan, and Karen Cvitkovich. *What is Global Leadership? 10 Key Behaviors that Define Great Global Leaders* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2011), 33.

⁷ Angel Cabrera and Gregory Unruh. *Being Global: How to Think, Act, and Lead in a Transformed World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 3-4.

⁸ Esau McCaulley, “How to Read the Bible in Color” *Christianity Today*, August 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/august-web-only/esau-mccaulley-new-testament-color-multi-ethniccommentary.html>

cultural perspectives Evangelicals represent. In fact, our global diversity strongly encourages new missiological reflection. In his recent book *Why Evangelical Theology Needs the Global Church*, theologian Stephen Pardue writes, “The church’s diversity is part of her God-given glory, for only there do we meet a creature designed by God to showcase the compatibility of the once-for-all redemptive work of Jesus and the remarkable diversity it creates and redeems.

Moreover, because God designs his church to be one and catholic, theologians must serve the church with the local context in mind while also attending to the whole people of God scattered abroad, as well as to the witness of the saints who have gone ahead of us.”⁹ Pardue offers encouragement to Christians around the world that the diverse global church will bring fresh perspectives on faith, discipleship, evangelism and missions. The true test of a global Evangelical community is how diverse cultural perspectives will be received, considered, and encouraged.

Western missiology will take its place as just one of many contextual forms. Global South perspectives will open up new possibilities for the life and health of Evangelicalism around the world. Evangelicals risk losing the sense of “good news” if its shift to the Global South is not accompanied by missiological reflection from fresh cultural perspectives. Christians of the Global South will lead in biblical, theological and missiological reflection.

2. The Future of Missiology is Female

Throughout Christian history women have always been a majority of Christians and the most active members in churches and missions. Today women are thought leaders in global Christianity and will be the major producers of missiological reflection in the future. Fittingly, mission historian Dana Robert called World Christianity a “women’s movement.”¹⁰ Women play a vital role in churches around the world, ranging from ordained pastoral leadership to healthcare and education. Bible women were preachers in their own right and key to the 20th-century spread of Christianity in the Global South. Women were at the forefront of Pentecostal revivals in India, Chile and served as apostles at the Azusa Street Revival, helping the early spread of Pentecostalism. It is estimated that the majority of missionaries today and those who actively support them are women. Despite these facts, religious demographer Gina Zurlo offers convincing evidence that “placing women at the center of historical, social scientific, and theological investigation demands new frameworks.”¹¹

The voices of women are crucial for the future of missiology. There is strong evidence that the COVID pandemic was better navigated by women leaders than men.¹² Some believe this is because societies that are comfortable electing women to top positions are also more likely to listen to varying points of view. Yet, despite this reality, the vast majority of leaders in Evangelical mission are men. Understanding the global Christian context means overcoming this limitation and favoring the voices of women to truly represent what is happening in our communities. By representing the world’s cultures, especially those of the Global South, and highlighting the contributions of women, we can begin to build a truly global Christian missiology.

⁹ Stephen T. Pardue, *Why Evangelical Theology needs the Global Church*, Baker Academic, 2023, p. 170.

¹⁰ Dana Robert, “World Christianity as a Women’s Movement” in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 30, No. 4, October 2006, pp. 180-188.

¹¹ Gina A. Zurlo, *Women in World Christianity: Building and Sustaining a Global Movement*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2023, p 13.

¹² Amanda Taub, “Why Are Women-Led Nations Doing Better with Covid-19?” *New York Times*, May 15, 2020.

3. The Future of Missiology is Indigenous

In his posthumously published book, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, the late Native American theologian Richard Twiss (1954–2013) wrote, “When the first European Christians arrived in North America, the Christianity they introduced had the devastating effect of a hostile pandemic-like religion—an aberrant representation of Jesus and a gross misrepresentation of the gospel. It was a Christianity so thoroughly contextualized to European civilization that the mixture of the values of the cultural with the values of Christianity made it aberrant in terms of its net impact on the tribes here.”¹³ One of the cardinal values of the study of missiology is the indigeneity of the Christian message; that is, the unique ways people around the world express their dedication to Jesus in their respective cultures. The incarnation of Christ, translated into one culture after another, has created a beautiful, global diversity. However, Twiss recognized that the European mission to Native Americans violated the incarnational principle. Instead of celebrating indigenous cultures, the European mission tried to erase them.¹⁴

Picking up on these themes, Kaitlin B. Curtice, an enrolled citizen of the Potawatomi nation, writes on the intersections of spirituality and identity and how each shift throughout our lives. Her work echoes that of Richard Twiss’ in exploring what it means to be a Christian in light of settler colonial Christianity operating under the influence of empire. In *Native*, she reflected on the diluted, whitewashed version of Christianity brought via the European mission and the erasure of indigenous identities and voices. She states, “Settler colonial Christianity is a religion that takes, that demeans the earth and the oppressed, and that holds people in these systems without regard for how Jesus treated people.”¹⁵ Building off this historical work, Curtice furthers the conversation in *Living Resistance* by reflecting on faithful deconstruction and decolonization.

She encourages readers to think more critically about the core Christian value of recognizing the humanity of all people, created in the image of God, and to dream and fight together for a more just way forward. To do so, however, requires, as she states, “white folks [to] step back and learn how to listen to those who have been marginalized by our society at every level.”¹⁶ The scholarship and advocacy of indigenous authors like Twiss and Curtice are desperately needed to break cycles of colonization and assimilation. If the past has been missing their insights, the future is open to new and fresh ways of understanding God’s mission through the eyes of indigenous peoples. Global missiology must value indigenous perspectives, as opposed to parroting those of the Global North (a minority of Evangelicals) which still speaks with the loudest voice. At the same time, Evangelicals of the Global South (the majority) and, especially indigenous Christians, are producing new and exciting perspectives on theology and missiology, delving into different cultures and connecting them to address the world’s most pressing issues.

4. The Future of Missiology is Integral

Latin American theologian Rene Padilla gave a seminal talk at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, where more than 2,400 Evangelical leaders from 150 countries met to discuss world evangelization. Padilla argued that social action and evangelism were essential, indivisible components, like “two wings of a plane.” This is *misión integral* or integral mission, defined as

¹³ Richard Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way*, InterVarsity Press, 2015, p. 78.

¹⁴ Especially troubling is the 2021 discovery of the bodies of over 200 indigenous children found in unmarked graves outside a residential school in Kamloops. According to the *New York Times*, “Indigenous children in many parts of Canada were forced to attend residential schools, often far from their communities. Most were operated by churches, and all of them banned the use of Indigenous languages and Indigenous cultural practices, often through violence. Disease as well as sexual, physical and emotional abuse were widespread.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html>

¹⁵ Kaitlin Curtice, *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*, Brazos, 2020, p. 35.

¹⁶ Kaitlin Curtice, *Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day*, Brazos, 2023, p. 27.

“the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility in bringing Christ’s peace to the poor and oppressed.”¹⁷ Moreover, Christians of the Global South are leading the way in integral outreach to all of the world’s peoples. The future of missiology will reflect this.

Last semester I taught a course on NGOs and Development in Mission. My students were from many countries around the world, some in the classroom and some via Zoom. One of the main themes of the class is that good global development cannot be a continuation of the Western colonial project. This is a direct parallel with global Christianity, which is not merely an extension of Western Christianity around the world. With this in mind, it can be difficult to find good texts for my course. Western authors often get caught up in the tension between proclamation and demonstration, and generally do not articulate the ‘integrated’ nature of evangelism and social action. Thus, a few years ago, I was thrilled to come across *Relentless Love: Living Out Integral Mission to Combat Poverty, Injustice, and Conflict* edited by Graham Joseph Hill.¹⁸ Through 32 articles gathered from presentations at the 7th Micah Global Consultation in the Philippines in 2018, the collection illustrates how social justice and proclamation are completely complementary, integrated, and inseparable.

Evangelicals may diverge in opinion on the place of social activism but the Scriptures are clear that concern for the poor, the refugee, or the stranger is not optional. Social concern recognizes the inherent value of all humanity based on the concept of all being created in the image of God. As image bearers and vicarious representatives of God, the actions of Christians toward others are then to be viewed as actions on behalf of God Himself. Multi-dimensional and holistic justice is pervasive in Scripture. Integral missiology will smooth out some of the rough places in Global North missiology.

5. The Future of Missiology is Hospitable

The world is becoming more religiously diverse, especially when measured at the national level. This is especially true in Asia—which has always been the most religiously diverse continent¹⁹—and beyond, where immigration has transformed previously homogeneous societies into more diverse communities. Where do we find biblical principles of robust interaction between people of different faiths? Christian hospitality is a good place to start. Hospitality was an ancient Christian practice seen as normative among the people of God. The Greek word for hospitality in the New Testament is *philoxenia*, meaning “love of strangers.” Jewish law included hospitality toward one another and toward the “strangers,” or resident aliens, living among the Jews (Ex. 22:21, Lev. 19:34).²⁰ With the exception of the command to worship God and God alone, “welcome the stranger” is the most oft-repeated commandment in the Hebrew Scriptures, declared 36 times (compared with love of neighbor, mentioned only once).²¹ Hospitality to strangers was commanded by God to reflect his generous and inclusive love and mercy. Jesus’ interactions with religious outcasts sought to bridge the gap between Gentiles and God, and in doing so he made a statement to the Jews about the inclusion of Gentiles into God’s Kingdom. Practicing hospitality is exercising our faith. It is embracing our identity as the covenantal people of a generous, loving God as we obey biblical commands to hospitality.

¹⁷ Lausanne Issue Networks, Integral Mission, <https://lausanne.org/network/integral-mission>

¹⁸ Graham Joseph Hill, editor, *Relentless Love: Living Out Integral Mission to Combat Poverty, Injustice, and Conflict*, Langham Global Library, 2020.

¹⁹ See Chapter 3, Religious Diversity in Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World’s Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 93-110.

²⁰ The NIV Bible translates the Hebrew word for resident alien, *ger*, as “foreigner.” We are adopting the ESV Bible usage of the word “stranger.”

²¹ Leviticus 19:18. See Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 82.

The Churches of the Global South are leading in hospitality toward people from religious communities. They have the advantage of living in multi-religious societies and are less likely to perpetuate a 'Christendom' model of mission. One such place is Singapore where a 2013 study by the Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg found that more than nine in 10 households are comfortable living and working alongside people of different faiths.²² At the same time, Evangelicals in the Global North seem to know very little about other religions.²³ It follows that Evangelicals in religiously diverse places (like Singapore, and more broadly, Asia) might be the best guides for navigating an increasingly diverse religious future.

This becomes even more significant in light of the fact that, broadly speaking, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians, and this has not changed much in the last two decades. An estimated 87% of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims do not personally know a Christian.²⁴ This finding reinforces the fact that Christians are still separated from those furthest from the gospel. In the Global North, increasing diversity often brings increasing cultural isolation. In the Global South, Christians are more likely to interact with their non-Christian neighbors. If non-Christian peoples are to hear of Christ, Evangelicals must be willing to cross cultures, learn languages, build friendships, practice hospitality and become religiously aware.

6. The Future of Missiology is Prophetic and Just

Missiologists can lead prophetically, assisting Christians to embrace the global kingdom of God, including global justice and peace. In his book *Reading While Black*, New Testament professor Esau McCaulley offers a strong biblical rationale for justice for all peoples.²⁵ He opened my eyes to some fresh perspectives on both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and the global gathering of the peoples in Revelation 7:9. Western missiological readings of these texts emphasize God's love for all peoples and, therefore, prioritize mission to peoples previously unfamiliar with the gospel. Rightly so. But as McCaulley points out, these passages also speak of equality and justice for all peoples. He writes, "What do Abraham and David together mean for the Black and Brown bodies spread throughout the globe? It means that the vision of the Hebrew Scriptures is one in which the worldwide rule of the Davidic king brings longed-for justice and righteousness to all people groups."²⁶ Because the biblical view of righteousness is global, wherever the gospel goes, so goes the hope for equity and justice for all peoples. Typical White exegesis, which is generally coming from a place of wealth, privilege, and power, often overlooks these themes woven throughout the Scriptures.

Part of our prophetic role as missiologists is to encourage Christians to embrace the God of all peoples rather than the God who makes one people or nation greater than all the rest. The editor of Christianity Today, Russell Moore, put this well in his recent book *Losing our Religion* when he wrote, "What happens when the motivations of supposedly born-again people seem to be lined up exactly with their tribal boundaries or their base appetites, in a way that would be the same even if Jesus were still dead? Christian nationalisms and civil religions are a kind of Great Commission in reverse, in which the nations seek to make disciples of themselves, using the authority of Jesus to baptize their national identity in the name of the blood and of the soil and of the political order. The gospel is not a means to any end, except for the end of union with the

²² See Abigail Ng Wy, "Building Bridges to Greater Interfaith Understanding," *The Straits Times*, Singapore, April 1, 2017. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/building-bridges-to-greater-interfaith-understanding>.

²³ See Luis Lugo and Alan Cooperman, eds., "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Washington D.C., 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>.

²⁴ Johnson and Zurlo, 2019, 29.

²⁵ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African-American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 105.

²⁶ Ibid.

crucified and resurrected Christ who transcends, and stands in judgment over, every group, every identity, every nationality, every culture.”²⁷ His observation is one that rings true throughout the ages, and, by our vocation as missiologists, we are some of the first people to recognize nationalism when we see it. We also have access to the biblical and cultural tools to dismantle these harmful ideas. Furthermore, we have close relationships with Christians around the world to constantly remind us that we are not greater than others.

7. The Future of Missiology is For and From All Peoples

In 1974, Ralph D. Winter, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, gave a seminal talk at Billy Graham’s gathering of Evangelical leaders in Lausanne, Switzerland. Quite simply, he showed that if every Christian witnessed to their neighbor, then one half of the world’s population would not hear the gospel. This is because most neighbors of Christians were Christians and most non-Christians had no Christian neighbors. To address this shortfall, Ralph and Roberta Winter started the US Center for World Mission to highlight hidden or unreached peoples who were not reached with the gospel. This marked the beginnings of frontier missiology. (I married their youngest daughter Tricia in 1983). Almost 50 years later, our research shows that despite many breakthroughs among new peoples, we live in a world where thousands of peoples and a third of the world’s population is beyond the reach of the gospel. This is likely to be true for the foreseeable future.

How has the shift of Christianity to the Global South impacted frontier missiology? What started as a movement TO all peoples (from the Global North) has become a movement FOR all peoples and ultimately, FROM all peoples. The more cultures who read and reflect on the scriptures, and the more they are listened to, the closer we get to gospel access for all peoples. The scope of the future of the gospel is seen in Revelation 7:9 where all peoples worship the Lamb at the throne—a global vision of the diversity and equality of peoples.

Conclusion

Finally, we can find our way to global missiology through the ethnic food aisle. The ethnic food aisle is a modest section in most American grocery stores, where one can find food items that originate outside of the Western World. This aisle traces back to World War II when US soldiers encountered and brought back food from the various places they served. But does it make sense to have such an aisle today? *New York Times* reporter Priya Krishna points out that while certain foods are considered ethnic, others aren’t. Specifically, “food” belongs to the White community, and “ethnic food” belongs to the non-White community. She concludes “The word “ethnic,” emblazoned on signs over many of these corridors, feels meaningless, as everyone has an ethnicity.”²⁸

As it pertains to missiology, one can find the obvious parallels in the theological library. “Theology” is in the main part of the library while contextual theology or “ethnic theology” is relegated to its own small section. According to Finnish World Christianity scholar Mika Vähäkangas, “All theology is contextual in the sense of it being constructed in a time and a place, and failure to recognise this does not make it universal. Once one has recognised the cultural boundedness of one’s work, there is an opportunity to ponder how to best communicate across

²⁷ Russell Moore, *Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America*, Sentinel, 2023, p. 120.

²⁸ Priya Krishna, “Why Do American Grocery Stores Still Have an Ethnic Aisle?” *New York Times*, August 10, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/10/dining/american-grocery-stores-ethnic-aisle.html>

the disciplinary, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. borders.”²⁹ Like the grocery store, the library considers White or Western contributions to be without context, while assigning non-White contributions an “ethnic” adjective. In so doing, both the library and the grocery store don’t match reality.

Evangelicalism is not a Western movement any more than all food is Western. When the ethnic aisle is dismantled—both at the grocery store and theological library—one will more fully encounter the richness of humanity, a foretaste of the Great Banquet when “people will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29, NIV). Indeed, everyone has an ethnicity, and so to imply that Western or White Evangelicals—by virtue of lacking a cultural bias—produce a theological or missiological standard by which all others are measured is misguided. Instead, as stated in the Cape Town Commitment, “Ethnic diversity is the gift of God in creation and will be preserved in the new creation, when it will be liberated from our fallen divisions and rivalry. Our love for all peoples reflects God’s promise to bless all nations on earth and God’s mission to create for himself a people drawn from every tribe, language, nation and people. We must love all that God has chosen to bless, which includes all cultures.”³⁰ As all peoples are equally valued by God who created them, so must they be equally valued by all of his children. Nigerian theologian Victor Ezigbo captures this well when he writes, “Christianity is not truly global by its mere presence in many countries of the world.

It is truly global when two criteria are met. First, the local communities of the world’s nations are given the freedom to rethink and re-express Christianity’s teaching about God’s relationship with the world through Jesus Christ. And second, the local communities see themselves as equals, conversing and critiquing each other and contributing theologically to Christianity’s long tradition.”³¹ These two criteria are precisely what missiology needs in order to navigate a global future. We need a missiology that is post-Western, female, indigenous, integral, hospitable, prophetic and just, and finally, for and from all peoples. This is the path to global missiology.

²⁹ Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas, eds., *Contextual Theology: Skills and Practices of Liberating Faith* (London: Routledge, 2021), 223.

³⁰ See <https://lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment#capetown>

³¹ Ezigbo, Victor Ifeanyi, and Reggie L. Williams. 2014. “Converting a Colonialist Christ: Toward an African Postcolonial Christology.” In *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis*, edited by Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk, 88–104. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic.