

World Christianity (Stephen McQuoid)

This paper examines the current trends within world Christianity and draws some tentative conclusion on the issue.

The shrinking significance of the Old World

The entire western world is beginning to undergo a huge change. Of course it always has, but this particular change is due to the simple fact that people in the west are not producing enough babies. The sustainability of a population is dependant on either children being born, or immigration. There needs to be a birth rate of 2.1 children for every woman to sustain population levels. This, however, is not being sustained thus putting huge demographic pressures on western countries. The areas where this decline is apparent are North America, Australasia, Japan and Europe [though the trend does not exist in Albania which is Muslim].

Reasons for ‘demographic meltdown’ appear to be linked with western cultural values.

- The separation of sexual activity from childbearing.
- The widespread use of contraception and its acceptability.
- The phenomenon of career women either to fulfil feminist expectations or to enable couples to enjoy a higher standard of living.
- Prolonged educational experience which means that couples get married later in life.
- Cultural pressure to marry later in life.
- The widespread use of abortion [if the abortion act of 1973 had not been passed in the USA, its population would be 40 million more than it is now].

Another problem is that as people in western countries are living for longer and consequently the ratio of people of working age is decreasing. For example when Bismarck introduced a retirement age of 65 into Germany, the life expectancy at the time was 45. Clearly things are very different now, and this difference puts huge pressure on western economies. Ultimately this situation is unsustainable and western nations will not be able to support their pensioners without radical change.

The problem can best be understood when looking at individual nations:

- Germany has a birth rate of only 1.4 children per woman. This gives them just a 60% population replenishment rate. This means that if they did not let in any more immigrants their present population of 82 million will fall to 38.5 million by 2100.
- In the UK the birthrate is 1.69 births per woman. This means that without immigration the population will fall from 60 million to 30 million over the next 150 years.
- Italy has a birth rate of only 1.19 births per woman, and Spain of only 1.07 births per woman. The crisis in these countries is even worse.
- An EU report in 2002 stated that in order for Europe to maintain its present population, it would need to import 1.58 million immigrants per year until 2050 (a total of 75 million immigrants).
- If the former Soviet Union were to be included in Europe it would have a population of 728 million. At present levels of decline, with no immigration the population would fall to 207 million by 2100.

Interestingly within the West the USA is unique in that it has a birth rate of 2.1 births per woman. This is because the USA still maintains traditional values due to its strong religious heritage. However, even here the variation can be seen. In Vermont which is predominantly white, middle class, liberal and secular there are 1.57 births per woman. In Utah which is deeply religious there is a healthy 2.71 births per woman.

Of course this stark decline will not be allowed to happen. Economically it is suicidal, not to mention the fact that it is socially, politically and militarily weakening. But as the birth rate in the west is unlikely to grow without a seismic change in its social ethic, the only way to replenish the population will be through mass immigration.

Assuming that Europe does allow a significant number of immigrants to enter and become ‘Europeans’, we then need to ask who these immigrants will be. If present immigration trends continue, most of these ‘new Europeans’ will come from the developed world and will come from another religious background, mostly Islamic.

If the above scenario occurs, it is highly possible that by 2100, the Muslim population in some European countries could be 40% and above¹. Muslims could become the largest and most powerful interest group in Europe. That is not to say that the Muslim population will be unified. Today's European Muslims come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.

- British Muslims are Bangladeshi or Pakistani
- French Muslims are North African
- Germany's Muslims come from Turkey
- Holland's Muslims from Indonesia

Another point that needs to be made is that the locus of Global Christianity is changing. Europe can no longer be considered Christian in any meaningful way. That title can still be used of the USA, though its influence in the world has arguably peaked. One positive is that evangelicalism has continued to grow as Christianity as a whole has declined.

There are now several centres of Global Christianity but these are primarily in the developing world in places such as Africa, Latin America and the Far East. This will mean that in the future the bulk of the world's missionaries will come from these emerging nations. If western Christianity is to have a swansong, it will be in the extent to which we have adjusted ourselves to the changing global scene and supported the maturing of 'developing world' Christianity.

Growth in these areas is staggering. It is often claimed that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. This is not true. Percentages of growth in the Islamic world are high because of the large birth rate. However 90-95% of Muslim growth is because of the high birth-rate. Christianity as a total is growing more slowly than Islam, but evangelical Christianity is growing faster.

YEAR	EVANGELICALS	GROWTH	ISLAM	GROWTH
1960	81 mill	n.a.	464 mill	n.a.
1970	114 mill	3.5%	608 mill	2.7%
1980	180 mill	4.7%	788 mill	2.6%
1990	303 mill	5.3%	1034 mill	2.8%

¹ Already there are 3 million Muslims in Germany, 2 million in France, 1 million in the UK and perhaps 750,000 in Italy (Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, Oxford, p.97).

2000	480 mill	4.7%	1340 mill	2.6%
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It must be stated that a high proportion of this evangelical growth is due to Pentecostals.

THREE LESSONS TO LEARN

1. There is a sea change in the balance of power within the church. This can be seen by looking at both population changes and Christian population changes.

Population growth by nation

NATION	1975	2000	2025	2050
India	622	1014	1377	1620
China	918	1262	1464	1471
USA	216	276	338	404
Nigeria	59	123	205	304
Ethiopia	33	64	115	188
Iran	33	66	88	100
Turkey	41	66	82	87

In the top twenty most populous nations in the world in 2050, the only western nation will be the USA.

Christian growth by nation

NATION	2000	2025	2050
USA	225	270	330
Brazil	164	190	195
Philippines	77	116	145
Congo	34	70	121
Ethiopia	36	65	79
China	50	60	60

If these trends continue the time will come when Ethiopia and Brazil will have more Christians than Europe and the majority of them will be evangelical. Here is where the world's new mission force will come from.

2. There will be another crusade

The dominant opponent for global spiritual supremacy in the future will be the Islamic world. There is also a significant threat from secularism, but no other threat poses such a problem for the church.

3. The West needs to find a Swansong

Given that the bulk of mission personnel in the future will come from the non-western world, churches in the west need to this strategically about their contribution. We have many advantages. We have 400 years of theological reflection behind us as well as an unparalleled infrastructure and finance. We need to find ways of using this wisely as we fact the future and ensure that what we do is strategic.