

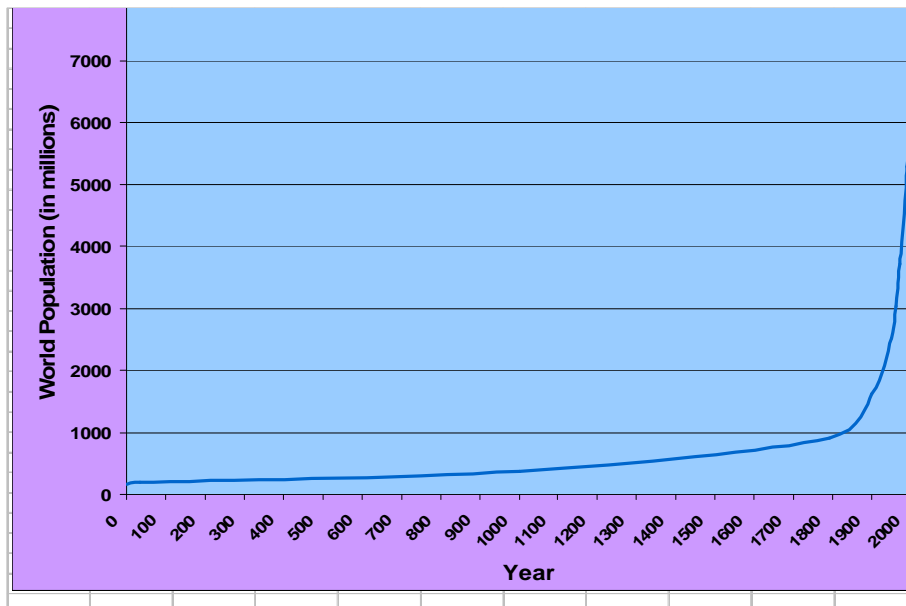
The Challenge of Today's World (Stephen McQuoid)

One of the most sobering things that the church needs to come to grips with is that the world we now live in is a hostile and challenging place. In a real sense September 11, 2001 defined what the 21st century would look like. A clash of civilisations and world view, and increasing insecurity. Every generation of Christians have faced problems, but never on the scale of today.

This paper is an attempt to outline some of these challenges and was originally part of a mission book written by the author and Ian Burness. The book can be found on the web site. So what are the challenges?

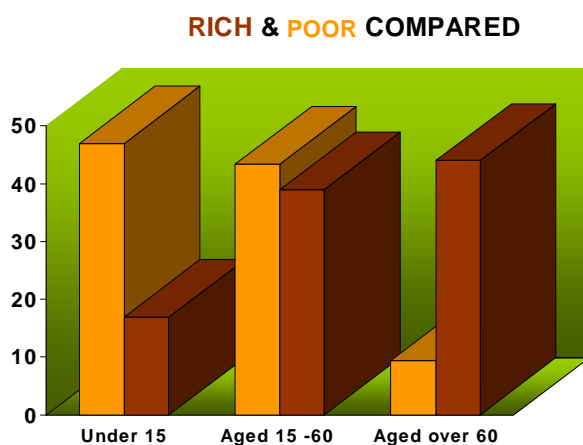
1. A Growing World.

More people now inhabit this planet than ever before and the population continues to grow. Indeed the rate of growth itself is increasing. The fastest growth rate is among the poorest people and therefore the people least able to cope. The world's population has quadrupled in the past 100 years and the major growth has taken place in the last 50 years. There is a veritable population explosion'.



Statisticians predict that the world's population will stabilise by 2050. However, the United Nations estimates that there will be a population of 8 billion by the year 2028.

In general the developing world is a young world (high proportion under 16). The developed world is an ageing world and this will increasingly be the case because of long life expectancy. The following chart contrasts the four poorest and the four richest countries in the world to demonstrate the age disparity.



In such circumstances outreach to the young people is even more vital.

2. Urbanisation

The world is full of cities as more people leave rural areas to live in the sprawling metropolises of the world. They go with the expectation of employment, prosperity and a better life. The reality is that they end up in shanty towns and suffering deprivation.

At the end of the 20th century just under half of the world's peoples lived in cities. The UN estimates that in the next few years almost all population growth will be concentrated in the urban areas of the world. By the year 2000

- 410 cities had more than 1 million inhabitants (20 in 1900)
- there were 2 billion urban poor
- 19 world cities will exist with more than 10 million inhabitants
- in the next 10 years this figure will rise to 23

Before World War 2, mega cities were a phenomenon of industrialised countries, today the greatest number are in developing countries. Estimates for 2015.

Mega City	Population (millions)	Country
Tokyo	27.1	Japan
Dhaka	22.7	Bangladesh
Mumbai (Bombay)	22.5	India
Sao Paulo	21.2	Brazil
Delhi	20.8	India
Mexico City	20.4	Mexico
New York	17.9	USA
Jakarta	17.2	Indonesia
Calcutta	16.7	India
Karachi	16.1	Pakistan

The common characteristics of mega cities:

- high population concentration
- uncontrolled expansion
- high traffic levels
- in some cases severe defects in infrastructure
- signs of ecological strain
- insufficient housing and social polarisation
- deprivation and social problems

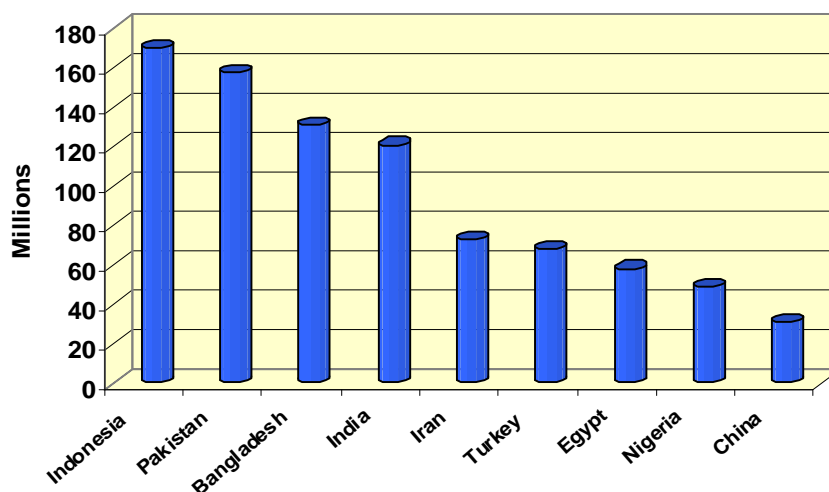
Cities are the most neglected mission field and perhaps the hardest. Christians have retreated from them. So much traditional missionary work is in a rural setting. While we should not neglect rural areas, we must remember they have static populations, they should not receive the bulk of resources. Most unchurched people live in cities. Major attention should be given to this area of need.

3. Resurgent World Religions

In the 20th Century there was a surge religious belief despite what secularists predicted. Greater numbers became Christians, but also joined other faiths in huge numbers. This has led to tension and even violence as September 11th demonstrated. The range of beliefs and religions grows by the year and new belief systems are added to many ancient religions.

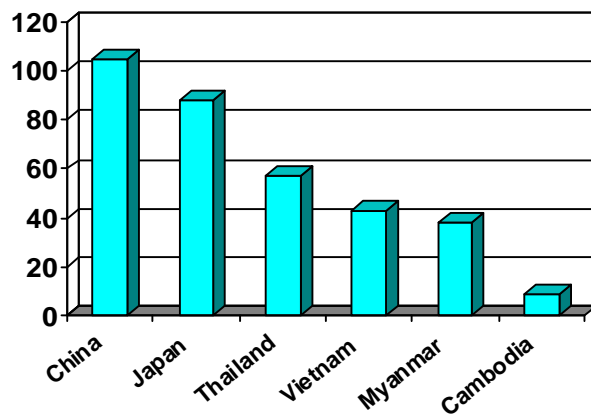
There has also been a backlash from the non-western world against modernity and Christianity is often equated with modernity. In the West tolerance is a virtue and discrimination is frowned upon. It is not the same in much of the world. Stan Guthrie states ‘Islamists control the rules of debate in Indonesia and the Arab world, radical Buddhists are cracking down on Christians in Sri Lanka; and right-wing Hindus are terrorising Christians in India’. The religious world has become complex and dangerous.

The largest non-Christian block is the Muslim world with 1.27 billion adherents – 1 in 5 of the world’s population. The proportion has grown in recent decades due to higher birth rates. The Islamic block extends from North Africa, through the Middle East to the far reaches of Indonesia. Significant numbers of Muslims are now found in Western nations, and their rapid growth in some of our cities presents a huge challenge for Christians in the West to develop evangelistic strategies to reach them. This chart shows where most Muslims can be found.



Hindus are the second largest non-Christian religion. Most live in India where there are some 780 million. But it is also growing in Europe and North America. In recent years there has been a rise in Hindu militancy. Political parties, such as the BJP, pursued an active anti-Christians policy. Some Indian states have laws prohibiting conversion to other faiths. Violence and martyrdom have occurred such as the murder of (Graham Staines and his sons). This has serious repercussions for evangelism.

The Buddhist world centres on several nations in South East and East Asia, some of these have shown a more aggressive anti-Christian stance in recent times.



There are still significant numbers of people who follow either ancient or modern new religions (14 million people are classified as Spiritists and 1 million are neo-pagans.)

4. Poverty and its effects

‘The rich get richer and the poor get poorer’. This is a cliché but it is also true. Most of the globe has experienced a rise in living standards over the past 50 years, but at least 20% of the world’s people are living in grinding poverty. 1 billion people exist on less than £65 per annum, many of these on much less than that! If the wealth of the 200 richest people in the world were added up it would equal the total income of the people in the 43 least developed countries in the world.

Sub-Saharan Africa has 30 of the world’s poorest 50 countries. 55% of these people have only poor water and sanitation. These countries carry a £1.4 trillion debt they cannot service and it is crippling them. Malawi, Tanzania and Honduras spent 20-50% of the national budget on the debt burden. Tanzania pays 6 times more on debt repayment than on education.

- There are 35 million poverty induced deaths a year
- 1 in 4 have no access to health care (1.5 billion people)
- 1 in 4 are without safe water to drink

The Effect on Children.

1 in 3 of the present world are under the age of 15 (2 billion young people). 30,000 die daily of preventable causes (malnutrition, diarrhoeal and illnesses). Poverty and AIDS are linked. In some African countries 1 child in 3 has lost a parent and 1 in 6 has lost both parents from this disease.

Children are widely exploited with 300 million children working world wide (90% in Asia and Africa). UNICEF estimate that **57,000** children died in 2000 due to child abuse.

Sexual exploitation of children is very common. 10 million of the world's children are reported to be involved in prostitution with 31% of prostitutes in Cambodia said to be children. 1 million children a year are recruited into the sex trade with 10,000 imported from Burma and Thailand annually.

War and its result

The continuing wars of our world also affect the poor and vulnerable. In the last decade war forced 50 million people to flee their homes. Civil war alone killed 5 million people. UNICEF reported that between 1990 - 1999, 6 million children were seriously injured or disabled by war, 12 million children were left homeless, 1 million children were orphaned 2 million children were killed.

There are 25 million refugees, 80% are women and children. Children in refugee camps often go without schooling. Children also fight. UNICEF estimated there are 300,000 child soldiers (under 16), both boys and girls.

DISEASE

People in the West suffer from diseases related to lifestyle and affluence, the poor of the world die from infections because there is no available or affordable medication. A good indicator is child mortality.

This figure is the total number of deaths per thousand children under the age of 5 in some poor and some wealthy countries.

Country	Under Five Mortality /1000	Country	Under Five Mortality /1000
Sierra Leone	316	Singapore	4
Angola	295	Norway	4
Niger	275	Sweden	4
Afghanistan	257	Switzerland	4

The number one global scourge is HIV/AIDS, which has reached frightening proportions. It has deeply affected Africa countries, but is also biting deeply in Asia. There were 5 million new cases 2002, and this growth rate is accelerating. There are growing numbers of HIV orphans throughout Africa.

LITERACY

Literacy is vital if people are to escape the poverty trap. Illiteracy also means they cannot read the Bible. Over 1 billion people (2/3 are women) entered the 21st Century unable to read. 130 million children have no access to basic education.

5. SECULARISATION IN THE WEST

In the West, especially in Europe, the church is in steady decline as societies become increasingly secular. The lands that were at the heart of Christendom in the middle ages are now a spiritual desert. Britain was at the heart of the modern missionary movement but now is in desperate need of revival. A major shift in the thinking of many people has been caused by the emergence of pluralism.

Linked with secularisation, globalisation has occurred. Rapid travel, communications and migrations have shrunk the world which has become ‘a global village’. The major unifying force is economics, not politics or ideology. Multinational corporations based in the West, manufacture in Asia and export to a global market. The transforming affect has been witnessed in every part of the world, as the poorest communities spout satellite dishes outside their homes, sports stars are marketed to a global audience, Coca Cola can be found in the remotest corners, everyone is chasing the ‘Western (or American) dream’. As Deng Xiaoping of China has said: “to get rich is glorious”.

Missionaries are greatly helped by technology. But as western materialistic values permeate more societies, hearts are drawn away from spiritual priorities. Materialism has drained spiritual fervour and evangelistic thrust from the Western church. While we pray for our own revival, we must also pray that Christians in countries which have experienced dramatic church growth amidst the adversity and suffering they have seen, will not lose their zeal as prosperity arrives.

Global Church Growth

On the bright side there has been remarkable growth in the church of Jesus Christ in the last 50 years. It is largely a Southern phenomenon - Asia, Latin America and Africa. The most dramatic growth is in China. Amidst much suffering analysts suggest that at a lowest estimate there are 60 million Christians, with the optimists placing the number above 100 million.