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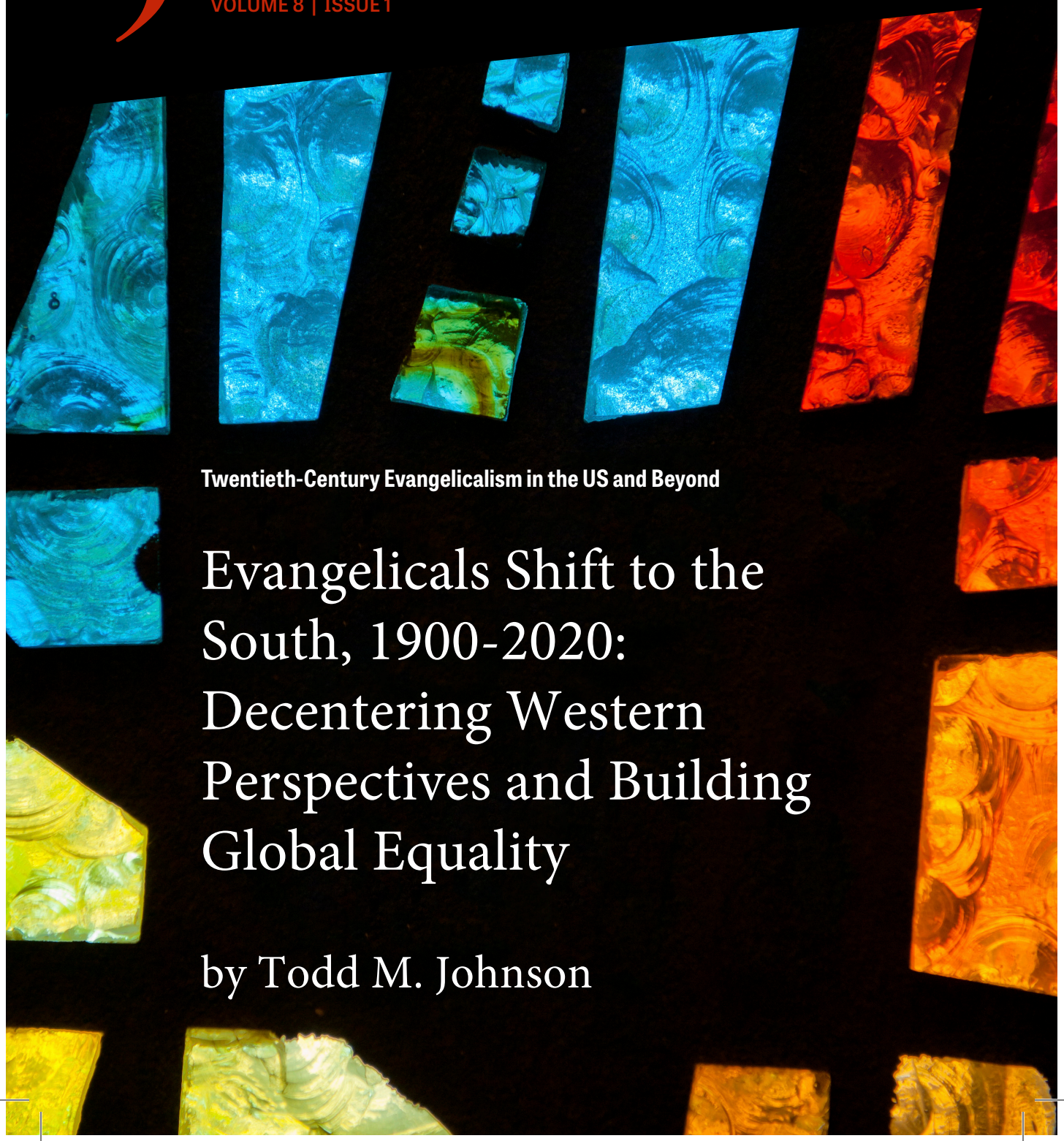

Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism in the US and Beyond

Evangelicals Shift to the South, 1900-2020: Decentering Western Perspectives and Building Global Equality

by Todd M. Johnson

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Abstract: In 1900, 7.8 percent of all Evangelicals lived in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. By 2020, this grew to 77 percent, representing an epochal shift to the Global South. Yet, Evangelicalism is still characterized as a European faith, with Western perspectives normalized in theology, spirituality, leadership, and other areas. This article examines what it would look like to decenter Western perspectives and build equality for perspectives from cultures around the world. We consider how increasing diversity within Evangelicalism impacts the reading of scripture, the development of key theological concepts, holistic or integral mission, relationships between Christians of different denominations, and relationships with people of other religion or no religion.

Keywords: Evangelicalism, Global North, Global South, global equality, Scripture, theology, unity, diversity, contextualization

Introduction

The global Christian family (and consequently, Evangelical family) is an extended family—a vast assemblage of aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives.[1] Ever since the first century the Christian family has reflected a broad and far-reaching collection of people related by faith—approximately 8 billion Christians since the time of Christ (out of 38 billion human beings).[2] Today the world's 2.5 billion Christians

1. The global family of Christians is described in more detail in Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu, *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

2. David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends, AD 30-AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 97.

constitute 32.3 percent of the global population.[3] Christians have never spoken just one language, represented just one ethnicity, or lived in just one country. As the demographic center of Christianity (and Evangelicalism) shifts, its new global complexion is essential to understanding its future.

The contemporary comprehensive practice of counting Christians can be traced back to an Anglican missionary in Kenya in the 1960s who wrote his doctoral dissertation on 6,000 African Independent church movements.[4] Against all odds, for fourteen years, the Rev. Dr. David B. Barrett had traveled to nearly every country in the world, compiling information on the religious status of "every soul on earth." The result was the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, a thousand-page oversized volume listing twenty thousand Christian denominations in the world and recounting the history of Christianity in every country from the time of Christ to the present.[5] Barrett also provided a detailed snapshot of the status of all religious affiliation, the first time such a comprehensive treatment had been achieved. In 1982, *Time* magazine called him the "Linnaeus of religious taxonomy," dubbing his magnum opus "a miracle from Nairobi" and a "benchmark in our understanding of the true religious state of the planet."[6] In the years that followed, the *WCE* was cited extensively in both Christian and secular publications. Consequently, Barrett is largely responsible for launching the modern field of religious demography. In 2001, Barrett and I published the second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and in 2019, Gina Zurlo and I produced the third edition.[7]

Christianity's Dramatic Shift to the South

The cultural and linguistic composition of Christianity has changed drastically over the past century.[8] The demographic shift of the religion from the Global North to the

3. See Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Religions 2022: A Complicated Relationship," in *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 1 (January 2022): 71-80.

4. David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

5. David B. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900–2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

6. Richard Ostling and Alistair Matheson, "Counting Every Soul on Earth: [Miracle from Nairobi: the first census of all religions]," *Time Magazine*, May 3, 1982.

7. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2 vols; Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

8. For sources and methodology related to counting religionists (including Christians), see Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religion in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* by (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). Primary sources for Christian figures include censuses in which a religious question is asked, censuses in which an ethnicity or language question is asked, surveys and polls, scholarly monographs, religion statistics in yearbooks and

Global South has challenged centuries-old traditions of theological interpretation, liturgical expression, and relationship to culture. The recent growth of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has had a distinctive impact on linguistic expression and theological education, despite the fact that less than eight hundred of the world's seven thousand languages have a complete Bible in their mother tongue.

The shifting cultural contexts of Christianity and Evangelicalism form the background to and impetus for exploring what it would look like to decenter Western perspectives and build equality for perspectives from cultures around the world. We consider how increasing diversity within Evangelicalism impacts the reading of scripture, the development of key theological concepts, holistic or integral mission, relationships between Christians of different denominations, and relationships with people of other religion or no religion. We begin with a brief discussion of the population and demographics of Christians and Evangelicals across the globe.

Table 1 shows the shift in Christian demographics by continent from 1900 to 2020. While 68 percent of all Christians lived in Europe in 1900, by 2020 only 22 percent lived there. By contrast, less than 2 percent of all Christians lived in Africa in 1900, skyrocketing to almost 27 percent by 2020. The Global North (defined by the United Nations as Europe and Northern America) contained over 82 percent of all Christians in 1900, falling to 33 percent by 2020. This demographic shift is the single most important trend in global Christianity as we consider its main characteristics.

Table 1. Christians by Continent, 1900, 2000, and 2020

	1900		2000		2020	
Continent	Christians	%	Christians	%	Christians	%
Global North	459,901,000	95.0	816,017,000	78.5	833,360,000	74.9
Europe	380,647,000	94.5	562,140,000	77.3	565,416,000	76.1
Northern America	79,254,000	97.1	253,877,000	81.2	267,944,000	72.6
Global South	98,445,000	8.7	1,172,950,000	23.0	1,685,474,000	25.2
Africa	9,640,000	8.9	382,510,000	46.8	667,169,000	49.3
Asia	21,966,000	2.3	279,960,000	7.5	378,735,000	8.2
Latin America	62,002,000	95.2	486,111,000	92.5	611,964,000	92.1
Oceania	4,837,000	77.4	24,369,000	78.0	27,606,000	65.1
Global total	558,346,000	34.5	1,988,967,000	32.4	2,518,834,000	32.3

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed August 2022).

handbooks and governmental statistical reports. Further chapters on data and methods offer the rationale, techniques, and specific problems associated with counting religionists. Case studies illustrate how these sources and methods are used in counting Muslims, Christians, and other religious communities.

Who is a "Christian"? Who is an "Evangelical"?

To properly count Christians, we adopt the United Nations definition of a Christian as one who self-identifies as such.[9] Under this rubric, the global Christian family is made up of all who consider themselves Christians, regardless of theological differences. Utilizing this method does not render one less committed to their particular tradition. Rather, it provides the opportunity to see beyond one's own network, to learn about and express solidarity with all who consider themselves Christians.

From an ecclesiastical view, Global Christianity can then be divided into four different traditions: Catholics, Independents, Orthodox, and Protestants. Independents are a critical part of this taxonomy because, throughout the past two centuries, thousands of networks have broken off from the other three. These are especially prominent in Africa (African-Instituted Churches) and China (house churches), but this category also includes postdenominational networks in the Western World.[10]

In addition to these major traditions, two movements cut across the four traditions. First are Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, now numbering over 640 million.[11] Pentecostals and Charismatics hold the distinctive teachings that all Christians should seek a postconversion religious experience called baptism in the Holy Spirit and that a Spirit-baptized Christian may receive one or more of the supernatural gifts known in the early church: the ability to prophesy; to practice divine healing through prayer; to speak (glossolalia), interpret or sing in tongues; to sing in the Spirit, dance in the Spirit; to receive dreams, visions, words of wisdom, words of knowledge; to discern spirits; and to perform miracles, power encounters, exorcisms (casting out demons), resuscitations, deliverances or other signs and wonders.

Evangelicalism, another movement within these traditions, now includes over 380 million Christians. From an historical perspective, David Bebbington's 1989 fourfold set (quadrilateral) of Evangelical descriptors—conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism—continues to be a relevant and widely-used definition of Evangelicalism.[12] It is argued that these characteristics are the common features defining the movement over time, despite the many changes Evangelicalism has undergone since its inception in the eighteenth-century revivals among Protestant groups While some of the particulars within each of these descriptors vary among

9. The starting point in any analysis of religious adherence is the United Nations' 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." The full text of the UN resolution can be found in Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 368–72.

10. See "Independents" in *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 22.

11. See Todd M. Johnson, "Counting Pentecostals Worldwide," *Pneuma* 36, no. 2 (2014): 265-88.

12. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2–3.

denominations, the general scope and importance of each remains the same for the broader Evangelical movement as it has spread around the world.[13] From a sociological perspective, how evangelicals relate to Pentecostals, how they are counted worldwide, and how they differ in terms of culture, is much more complex than the Quadrilateral might suggest.

Quantifying Evangelicals Around the World

First, in her seminal article, "Demographics of Global Evangelicalism," Gina A. Zurlo observed that "using denominational affiliation to define Evangelicals is a method generally popular among social and political scientists."[14] Zurlo demonstrates that various methods of defining and counting Evangelicals—in terms of denomination, of self-identification, or of theology—have both strengths and weaknesses. She also sees denominational strategies as most helpful in measuring Evangelicals before the rise of surveys and censuses. She further noted Barrett's definition of Evangelical (echoing the Bebbington quadrilateral):

> A sub-division of Protestants consisting of affiliated church members calling themselves evangelicals, or all persons belonging to Evangelical congregations, churches or denominations; characterized by commitment to personal religion (including new birth or personal conversion experience), reliance on Holy Scripture as the only basis for faith and Christian living, emphasis on preaching and evangelism, and usually on conservatism in theology.[15]

To count Evangelicals, the World Christian Database uses a denominationally based method, adding (1) everyone in 100 percent Evangelical denominations, (2) all individuals in non-Evangelical denominations who identify as Evangelicals, and (3) all individuals who are not affiliated with churches who identify as Evangelicals. Note that this definition and its measurements include all forms of Evangelicalism regardless of denomination or country.

Second, there is an overlap between Evangelical and Pentecostal movements. We estimate that more than one third of all Evangelicals are Pentecostals. For example, Classical Pentecostal denominations like the Assemblies of God are largely Evangelical in that they belong to Evangelical councils in most of the countries they are located in. On the other hand, Charismatic Catholics are counted as Pentecostals

13. This case is made by historian Brian Stanley in his chapter "The Evangelical Christian Mind in History and Global Context," in Timothy Larsen, ed., *Every Leaf, Line, and Letter: Evangelicals and the Bible from the 1730s to the Present* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2021), 276-301.

14. See Gina A. Zurlo, "Demographics of Global Evangelicalism," in *Evangelicals around the World: A Global Handbook for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, and Mark Hutchinson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 34–47.

15. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982), 826.

but very few identify as Evangelicals. Consequently, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are not mutually exclusive categories. The overlap is not precisely known because if 10 percent of a denomination is Evangelical and 10 percent of the same denomination is Pentecostal, they could all be the same Christians, or they could all be different people (or some the same and some different). In each case, the method is transparent because the codes and percentages for each denomination is available in the World Christian Database.

Third, based on this method of tabulation, the number of Evangelicals in the world has increased from 81 million in 1900 to 386 million in 2020 (see table below).[16] Increasingly, Evangelicalism is a predominantly non-White movement, with 77 percent of all Evangelicals living in the Global South in 2020. This is up from only 7.8 percent in 1900. This reality runs against the popular perception in the West that the United States is the home' of contemporary Evangelicalism, where it is a largely White, politically conservative movement.[17] Nine of the ten countries with the most Evangelicals in 2020 are in the Global South.

The situation is similar on a continental and regional basis. In 1900, Evangelicals exceeded 40 percent of the total population in Northern America and in Northern Europe but also in Australia, New Zealand, and in Polynesia (where just over 50 percent of residents were Evangelicals). A century later, although they have seen significant growth in some areas, Evangelicals make up no more than 20 percent of the total population of any region except in Oceania, where they represent 31 percent (highest in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia). Africa has had the most profound shift, since Evangelicals were only 1.7 percent of the population in 1900 (and mostly in South Africa), but in 2020, 12 percent of the continent is Evangelical. Africa's share of global Evangelicalism has increased from 2 percent in 1900 to 42 percent in 2020. If trends continue, more than half of all Evangelicals in 2050 will be Africans.

The denominations with the most Evangelicals worldwide in 2020 include the Assemblies of God in Brazil, the Southern Baptist Convention (USA), the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China and the Anglican Church of Nigeria. Two global organizations are of special note in representing Evangelicals: The World Evangelical Alliance (founded 1846) and the Lausanne Movement, established in a 1974 meeting spearheaded by American evangelist Billy Graham. Many countries also have national Evangelical alliances that work to bring Evangelicals together.

Table 2. Evangelicals by Contintent, 1900, 2000, and 2020

	1900	2000	2020

16. See "Evangelicals" in *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 25.

17. See John G. Stackhouse, Jr., Introduction to *Evangelicalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 1-4.

Continent	Evangelicals	%	Evangelicals	%	Evangelicals	%
Global North	74,593,000	15.4	74,860,000	7.2	87,009,000	7.8
Europe	33,062,000	8.2	14,651,000	2.0	15,907,000	2.1
Northern America	41,531,000	50.9	60,209,000	19.2	71,102,000	19.3
Global South	6,319,000	0.6	194,776,000	3.8	298,817,000	4.5
Africa	1,789,000	1.7	91,235,000	11.2	161,716,000	12.0
Asia	1,336,000	0.1	62,742,000	1.7	80,442,000	1.7
Latin America	825,000	1.3	36,066,000	6.9	50,595,000	7.6
Oceania	2,370,000	37.9	4,732,000	15.2	6,063,000	14.3
Global total	80,912,000	5.0	269,636,000	4.4	385,826,000	4.9

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed August 2022).

Decentering the Western Evangelical Perspective

Though Evangelicalism is shifting South, Westerners often fail to grasp its impact, as they continue to consider their particular expressions culturally and theologically normative.[18] The social and theological debates of White Evangelicals in the USA are unlike the debates of most other Evangelicals worldwide. Whereas USA Evangelicals have often narrowly prioritized matters regarding sexuality and abortion, Evangelicals around the world are also more broadly concerned with economic equality, immigration, climate change, the poor, and social justice.[19] With a demographic shift from the North to the South, one would expect many new theological insights to emerge in the Global South. But Western theological perspectives have taken a privileged place among non-Western theologies. Consequently, theology needs to be de-Westernized and contextualized among the peoples and languages of the Global South. Latino theologian Juan Martínez's observation in this regard is judicious, "One of the most important contributions contextual theologies can make to U.S. evangelical theology is to help it name itself as a contextual theology. Because of the outsized influence of U.S. evangelicalism, it will be particularly difficult for it

18. Initial reflections appear in Todd M. Johnson, "The Rise of Global Christianity and Theological Education" in *Torch Trinity Journal* 22, no. 1 (2019): 7-51. Some of the examples that follow are explored in my chapter "Evangelical Mission in an Age of Global Christianity" in *Advancing Models of Mission: Evaluating the Past and Looking to the Future*, eds. Kenneth Nehrbass, Aminta Arrington, and Narry Santos (Littleton, CO: William Carey, 2021), 189-202.

19. See Deborah Fikes, "A Challenge to My Fellow Evangelicals," *New York Times*, Opinion Page, August 19, 2016, https://archive.nytimes.com/kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/08/19/a-challenge-to-my-fellow-evangelicals/

to name its theologies as contextual. But until that happens all 'minority' theologies will be marginalized."[20]

While the Global South is in the majority, the Global North still has the majority of the resources. As mentioned, most theological education is derived directly from Western culture. Most Christian worship music is Western in origin. Soong Chan Rah, Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, asserts that in order for Western churches to engage the globalized Church of the twenty-first century, it must break away from its captivity to Western culture. Missionary endeavors, spearheaded for the past several centuries by Westerners, transmitted both faith *and* culture—distinctly white, Western cultures. Evangelism and colonialism often went hand in hand. The result was white, Western theological traditions imposed upon non-Western peoples, with insufficient regard for their cultural expressions. Rah offers at least four classic characteristics of white, Western cultural captivity: individualism, racism, materialism, and consumerism.[21]

The United States has a substantial influence on Western ecclesiology and missions, and the spirit of rugged individualism nurtured in our country's cradle has contributed to division within our society. Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, in their landmark book on racism in the American Church, *Divided by Faith*, contend that "contemporary white American evangelicalism is perhaps the strongest carrier of this free-will individual tradition."[22] Not surprisingly, America has the highest national score (91 out of 100) in a study on individualism.[23] Individualism in the extreme tends to be self-centered and independent, rather than interdependent. Materialism and consumerism only exacerbate these trends.

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. While individuality is important, community is the basis for many non-Western cultures. Theological education is not a complete package developed in the West and delivered to the rest of the world. Instead, tools for doing theology from a variety of cultures can assist Evangelicals everywhere in their study of God. What if the cultures of the Global South were to lead in biblical and theological reflection? They are already building the kingdom in their own communities, but Global South perspectives could also open up new possibilities for the life and health of Evangelicalism around the world. According to Finnish World Christianity scholar Mika Vähäkangas, "All theology is contextual in the sense of it

20. Quoted in William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson. *Theology without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 8.

21. See the compelling analysis of Soong-Chan Rah in *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009).

22. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29.

23. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 79-108. Visit www.geert-hofstede.com for more.

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 the disciplinary, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. borders."[24] Evangelicals risk losing the sense of "good news" if its shift to the Global South is not accompanied by theological reflection from fresh cultural perspectives.

For example, the story recorded in Luke 15 of the young man who squanders his inheritance is usually introduced as the Parable of the Prodigal (or Lost) Son. Hwa Yung writes, "To read it from the Western perspective of sin and guilt draws attention to the twin themes of repentance and forgiveness. Nevertheless, it misses something crucial. Only when we understand the *shame* that the son's act has engendered for the family in the setting of an Asian (or, Middle-eastern and African) village, and the fact that the father has totally 'lost his face' in the eyes of the whole community, with nowhere to hide, can we begin to grasp the costliness and the depth of the divine love in the heart of God."[25] Africans who read this story suggest that it might be more appropriately labeled "The Welcoming Father."

Dismantling the Ethnic Food Aisle in Evangelicalism

One way to illustrate the futility of Western dominance is 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 two 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 highlighted some of the issues it raises, as follows:

> "Consumers are trained, if they want Indian products, to go to that aisle," said Ms. Agrawal, 42. "Do I like the fact that that is the way it is? No." New York, where she runs her company out of her home, is one of the most diverse cities in the world. Yet even there the ethnic aisle is ubiquitous, and its composition often perplexes her. "I buy Finnish crackers. Why are they not in the ethnic aisle?" she said. "An Asian rice cracker would be in the ethnic aisle."

The problem that Agrawal points to is that while certain foods are considered ethnic, others are not. Specifically, "food" belongs to the White community, and "ethnic food" belongs to the non-White community.[26]

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

25. Hwa Yung, "Theological Issues Facing the Asian Church," 2 (paper presented at ALCOE V, August 2002, Seoul). See also his more detailed proposal in Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997).

26. 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/

As it pertains to Evangelicals, 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.[27] 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 do not match reality. Krishna concludes, "Today, the section can seem like an anachronism—a cramming of countless cultures into a single small enclave, in a country where an estimated 40 percent of the population identifies as nonwhite, according to the Census Bureau. … The word 'ethnic,' emblazoned on signs over many of these corridors, feels meaningless, as everyone has an ethnicity."[28]

Indeed, everyone has an ethnicity, and so to imply that Western or White Evangelicals—by virtue of lacking a cultural bias—produce a theological 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."[29] As all peoples are equally valued by God who created them, so must they be equally valued by all his children. When we go to the theology section of the library, we should encounter a collection representative of all the voices that are faithfully reflecting on God's Word.

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 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).

Building Global Equality

So far, we have overviewed the population and demographics of Christianity and Evangelicalism and argued that Western perspectives should be decentered. We now address how increasing diversity within Evangelicalism impacts various themes, including the reading of scripture, spirituality and discipleship, leadership, Christian unity, relationships with people of other religion or no religion and holistic or integral mission.

american-grocery-stores-ethnic-aisle.html.

27. Catholic missiologist Stephen B. Bevans argues that "all theology is contextual" in *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

28. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

29. See https://lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment#capetown

Global Scripture Readings

In his book, *Reading While Black: African-American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*, New Testament professor Esau McCaulley offers a strong biblical rationale for justice for all peoples.[30] 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."[31] 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 generally comes from a place of wealth, privilege, and power, often overlooks these themes woven throughout the Scriptures.

The global gospel call that compels believers to go to the ends of the earth to fulfill Christ's vision for representation of all peoples compels an equal commitment to Christ's vision for biblical justice for all peoples. These passages also legitimate theological perspectives from all peoples. Since all theology is contextual, all contexts have an equal voice in describing the Christian faith. This is freeing for Black, indigenous, and other peoples of color because they have been told, in so many Orwellian words, that some theologies are more equal than others. White theology, in particular, tries to locate itself at the center of the Christian story. But these biblical passages do not allow that. McCaulley writes, "Our distinctive cultures represent the means by which we give honor to God. He is honored through the diversity of tongues singing the same song." He continues, "Therefore inasmuch as I modulate my blackness or neglect my culture, I am placing limits on the gifts that God has given me to offer to his church and kingdom. The vision of the kingdom is incomplete without Black and Brown persons worshiping alongside white persons as part of one kingdom under the rule of one king."[32] This vision is much more compelling than the world's peoples singing exclusively White hymns or choruses.

You would have to look long and hard to find a book in any theological library with the title "Reading While White." In fact, if such a book were to exist, it would likely be cataloged under "General Works of Interpretation," whereas one would find McCaulley's book under "Black interpretation," sandwiched between the separate

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

31. McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 105.

32. McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 115-116.

categories of "Demythologizing" and "Feminist criticism." In other words, the Library of Congress classification assumes that reading the Bible through a White lens is normative and that 'non-White cultures' read with *perspective*. McCaulley addresses this problem when he writes, "Everybody has been reading the Bible from their locations, but we [Black people] are honest about it."[33]

Global Spirituality and Discipleship

In the same way we might consider differing cultural perspectives to better understand the Scriptures, we also benefit from this diversity in spirituality and discipleship. British theologian Alister McGrath describes Christian spirituality as a set of beliefs, a set of values, and a way of life. More specifically, he defines Christian spirituality as the *quest* for a *fulfilled* and *authentic* life, which involves taking the beliefs and values of Christianity and weaving them into the fabric of our lives so that they "animate" them, providing the "breath" and "spirit" and "fire" for our lives.[34] Evangelicals globally resonate with this understanding.

But British theologian Rose Dowsett warns us, "We too often read into Scripture Greek dualism, thus profoundly misunderstanding texts that speak of the soul (e.g. Matt 16:26). Modern Western culture, in the wake of the Enlightenment, emphasizes (entirely falsely) that the spiritual and the rational/material are totally separate, the latter being objective and the former subjective and beyond verification (and therefore unreliable)."[35] As Dowsett explains, many Western cultures fail to deliver a holistic spirituality. Western Christians might be challenged to move toward a spirituality that involves the whole person—in every dimension of life, in community, and in dialogue with other cultures.

With spirituality at the heart of different cultures, one would expect it to be diversely represented among the world's peoples. And yet, at the same time, Evangelical spirituality—if focused on Christ—is pointing to the same purpose. We see the interplay of the local and the global: Global is not an overarching, noncontextual form of spirituality but a conversation between various local cultures about differences and the commonality of spiritualities.

Finally, gender also plays an important role in global Evangelical spirituality. Indian theologian John Amalraj writes, "Women are considered more spiritual than men in most cultures. Women are the bearers of culture … in the Indian context, it is the devout women who sacrificially set aside money, rice, wheat, etc. for the cause of giving to missions. It is the mothers who most often dedicate their sons to become

33. McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 20.

34. Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999).

35. John Amalraj, Geoffrey W. Hahn, and William D. Taylor, eds., *Spirituality in Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2018), 7

pastors or missionaries. It is the mothers who are always praying for the prodigal son or daughter."[36]

Yet, despite these realities, the vast majority of writings and reflections on spirituality are from men of the Global North. Understanding global Evangelical spirituality 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 comprehend a truly global Evangelical spirituality.

Global Leadership

We see that belonging to a worldwide family requires the decentering of Western ideas (that is, no longer making them the standard) while giving equal status to ideas from around the world. While this is perhaps more obvious in areas of scripture reading, spirituality and discipleship, it is more difficult than it sounds when it relates to leadership. In fact, most of the time "global leadership" refers to Western styles of leadership taught around the world. While Western leadership texts, translated and distributed abroad, offer helpful information, they cannot represent a truly global leadership. In fact, global leadership experts reveal liabilities of Western leadership concepts, with respect to a world that is inclusive, multidirectional, interlinked, and complex.

Western institutions, 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?"[37]

In other words, most Western leaders assume—either directly or by default—that leading a global organization is not very different from leading a local or regional one, that the same approaches apply to securing resources, building, and motivating teams, creating and applying new models, understanding and serving different situations, and so on. What they do not realize is that Western positions are not neutral in a global context. They can actually cause harm.[38]

36. Amalraj, Hahn, and Taylor, eds., *Spirituality in Mission*, 17.

37. Ernest Gundling, Terry Hogan, and Karen Cvitkovich, *What is Global Leadership? 10 Key Behaviors that Define Great Global Leaders* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2011), 33.

38. 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.

Global leadership, on the other hand, recognizes the complexity of executing in a cross-national, cross-cultural context. A new set of skills is required to navigate today's complex world. Surveying leaders from many countries, researchers have found that global leaders

- lead with a natural curiosity about the world and with an interest in people different from themselves
- inspire visionary initiatives and organizations that span national boundaries
- recognize the impact of their actions on surrounding communities and constituencies
- understand that personal prosperity is dependent upon the prosperity of others
- craft solutions by bringing together people and resources across national, cultural, even organizational boundaries
- address worldwide challenges and social injustices that have been ignored or long deferred
- identify and call on individuals who together possess the pieces necessary to make the vision a reality
- discern the cultural, social, or political differences that divide contributors and find ways to connect them despite, and sometimes because of, those differences.[39]

In the context of a truly global Evangelical, leadership training must value indigenous perspectives, as opposed to parroting those of the West. While the West (a minority of Evangelicals) still speaks with the loudest voice, Evangelicals of the Global South (the majority) are producing new and exciting perspectives on leadership, delving into different cultures and connecting them to address the world's most pressing issues.

Allow me to illustrate this further. While commemorating five hundred years of the Protestant Reformation at an Evangelical conference in Wittenberg in 2017, I presented research showing that over 40 percent of all Protestants were Africans. Yet, out of the one hundred people at the meeting, only a few were African. 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. It was then that 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."

His point was clear: Why are Evangelicals from the Global South simply invited to a table in the Global North when they should be found with everyone else in the kitchen? What would it mean to have Africans as decision-making hosts instead of being relegated as perennial guests? And why, in light of a gospel for all peoples, are Black, indigenous and people of color normally invited to a White table?

39. Cabrera and Unrush, *Being Global*, 12.

These perspectives differentiate a global organization—one that is polycentric in its decision-making—from an international organization, which radiates its leadership from its home country (usually in the West). Global leaders and their organizations will be the ones that show the way to mutuality and solidarity in our endeavors.

Global Christian Unity?

How does the shift to the Global South impact global unity? Western Evangelicals seem to value individual choice over unity. There are now over 45 thousand Christian denominations in the world, mostly found among Protestants and Independents, and, consequently, among Evangelicals.[40] One solution to denominational fragmentation is for Evangelicals to identify themselves primarily as followers of Jesus Christ across all of the cultures of the world.

Social psychologist Christena Cleveland offers unique insights into why Christians are divided.[41] She observes that Christians tend to cluster in theological groups, gender groups, age groups, ethnic groups, educational groups, and economic groups. They freely criticize those who disagree with them, do not look like them, and do not act like them. Subsequently "we" apply the term *Christian* exclusively to "us" and not to the broader, diverse Christian family. Ultimately, culturally dissimilar Christians are labeled "them" and are treated like outsiders. Cleveland says we exaggerate our differences with culturally different Christians and cling to our subordinate identities (that is, identities based on ethnic, denominational, theological, or political affiliations) while distancing ourselves from our common identity—our identity as members of the worldwide body of Christ. Once we do this, we may technically share group membership and the label of "followers of Christ," but we are no longer a team. We are driven by our own needs, not the needs of the entire group.

From the earliest days of the Christian family, prophetic writers have called the global Church to unity. Yet our history is one of division. While there are important theological differences, much of our problem can be attributed to cultural and social differences. Today, Evangelicals have the opportunity to come together in unity while maintaining distinctives. This quest for reconciliation and unity is rooted in the gospel we proclaim. Believing in a God who reconciles and heals in Jesus Christ, the churches are obliged to heal their own divisions through prayer, theological dialogue, and witnessing together in the world. The process of healing and reconciliation is rooted in our common faith and heritage in Christ.

40. See Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Religions 2022: A Complicated Relationship," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 1 (January 2022), 76.

41. Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

Global Interactions with People in other Religions?

The twenty-first century began with two major unexpected trends in relation to the world's religions.[42] First, despite the prognostications of leading academics in the mid-twentieth century, the world is becoming increasingly religious. In 2020, 88.7 percent of people worldwide profess a religion—up from 80.8 percent in 1970. The demographic pivot was the collapse of Communism in the late twentieth century and the opening of China to the rest of the world. China, the world's largest country, has experienced a resurgence of religions of all kinds since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1970s). Russia has reclaimed its Orthodox heritage, as have other former Soviet republics in Eastern Europe.

Second, 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 continent—and beyond, where immigration has transformed previously homogeneous societies into more diverse communities.

Where do we find examples of robust interaction between people of different faiths? The Churches of the Global South are making original contributions in relations with other religions. They have the advantage of living in multireligious 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 ten households are comfortable living and working alongside people of different faiths.[43] At the same time, Evangelicals in the West seem to know very little about people in other religions.[44] 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 percent of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims do not personally know a Christian.[45] 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

42. This section is condensed from "Religions" in *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 28.

43. 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.

44. 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/.

45. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 29.

must be willing to cross cultures, learn languages, build friendships, and become religiously aware.

Global Holistic or Integral Mission?

Two streams flow from the Lausanne 1974 meeting: a call to address the unreached peoples of the world and a call to minister to the poor and advocate social justice. The scriptures, when read in the Global South, are clear on the need for integral mission. Yet, historically, many in the Global North struggle with the relationship between proclamation and demonstration. Thus, globally, Evangelicals diverge in opinion on the place of social activism. Is not the greatest gift we can offer someone the eternal message of salvation? If so, why concern ourselves with temporal sufferings? Detractors of a social gospel warn against a salvation produced by works (Eph. 2:8–9), while promoters of social action point to exhortations in Scripture to live out our faith in word and in deed (James 1:22).

Social concern recognizes the inherent value of all humanity based on the concept of *imago Dei*. The Lord is Maker of us all (Prov. 22:2; 29:13). 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. Oppressing the poor is insulting our Maker (Prov. 17:5); conversely, whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Prov. 14:31). If doing good to the least of these is doing it unto Jesus (Matt. 25:40, 45), justice can become an act of worship. The Scriptures are clear that concern for the poor is not optional for Christians (Matt. 25:31-46).[46]

Doing justice is multi-dimensional and holistic, and this is pervasive in Scripture. Paul took up a collection for the poor during his missionary journeys (Acts 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1; Gal. 2:10). Jesus's ministry included filling stomachs and healing hurts while at the same time speaking to hearts (Mark 6:32-44). South African Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to the hungry person is bread."[47] Evangelicals concerned for our global human family walk with the Bible in one hand and in the other hand holding whatever tool of service God gives us to change the world. This might be a breadbasket to feed the poor, a drill to dig a water well, a laptop to report about injustice, or a seed to plant a tree. Doing justice can serve as a vehicle for evangelism but justice is also a worthy end in itself.

46. Dewi Hughes, "Understanding and Overcoming Poverty," in *Transforming the World? The Gospel and Social Responsibility*, eds. Jamie A. Grant and Dewi A. Hughes (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 176.

47. Johnson and Wu, *Our Global Families*, 166.

Conclusion

We live in an age of global Evangelicalism, where the typical Evangelical is a woman from the Global South. Yet Evangelicalism is considered by many as a Western faith. Fortunately, Western perspectives can be both acknowledged and decentered, no longer considered as the standard for all to follow, while global voices increasingly represent who we are. Since all biblical and theological studies are contextual, our understanding of scripture will be greatly enriched by the hundreds of new cultural perspectives Evangelicals are found in today. In fact, its global diversity strongly encourages new theological reflection. It can be difficult to ascertain exactly *how* these new insights might impact traditional interpretations of scripture, but it is nevertheless necessary for the perspectives of other cultures to speak into what has been accepted as the "original vision" of the gospel for people all over the world. This same dynamic can be found in global spirituality, discipleship, leadership, and Christian unity. In addition, we live in an age of increasing religious fervor and diversity around the world where churches of the Global South are taking the lead in interfaith relations and mission. Finally, our path forward in global Evangelicalism is recapturing an integral mission of sacrifice that takes into account grave injustice and courageously preaches a gospel for the poor and downtrodden. The true test of a global Evangelical community is how diverse cultural perspectives will be received, considered, and encouraged.