
**THE NEXT CHRISTENDOM: THE COMING OF
GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

BY: PHILIP JENKINS
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We are living in revolutionary times, according to Philip Jenkins. In his recent book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Jenkins contends that during the past fifty years the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia. The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the clay of Southern Christianity is dawning. The fact of change is undeniable: it has happened and it will continue to happen (3).

Jenkins is not the first to recognize this change. He readily acknowledges that Dana L. Robert, Harvey Cox, Andrew Walls, and others have been working this territory for years. However, Jenkins' work differs from the others in approach and scope. The notes on the book jacket claim that this "is the first book to take full measure of the changing face of the Christian faith." While it is possible that Jenkins may not be the first to write a full length book on this subject, this one is certainly worth reading by anyone interested in the past, present, and future of Christianity.

Jenkins' major concern is that the West is not participating in these revolutionary times. He believes Christianity is changing in ways that are going unnoticed by many Westerners, including theologians, academics, and the media. Perhaps more importantly, he is concerned about the misinformation in the West that Christianity is declining and that Islam is the faith of the future globally. This has major implications for Christian leaders in the West.

Jenkins bravely, or as he claims, foolishly, steps into this void. This book is focused on identifying the reality of Christianity in the world today using demographic data. Jenkins makes the case that Christianity will experience tremendous expansion in the 21st century. However, the majority of the growth will not occur in the West but in the

global South – Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Jenkins writes that "Christianity is doing very well indeed in the global South – not just surviving but expanding" (2). In particular, rapid growth is occurring in non-traditional denominations that adapt Christian beliefs to local traditions (7).

Throughout the book, Jenkins adeptly integrates demographic data into the narrative. Fortunately, the data does not become burdensome or overwhelming. Though he notes that historical demography is not an exact science, he effectively utilizes available data for making his case. But, Jenkins' objective here is not to simply inform. This book is a call to action. Western Christianity's gravest challenge is not Islam. It is the Christian Third world. The real question is how all of Christianity will respond. What is the future of global Christianity? What are the implications?

The shift in global Christianity must be acknowledged and understood by all Christians. In particular, religious leaders must anticipate the impact of this change and develop a proactive approach for informing and training future leaders. This is a book for pastors, congregations, and denominations. This book should be read by faculty and students in colleges, as well as seminaries. It would be a great selection for a book club, educational small group, or adult forum class.

Jenkins begins his study by returning to the roots of Christianity. In chapters two through four, Jenkins carefully rewrites global Christian history from a non-Western perspective. He adeptly summarizes and critiques two thousand years of history in sixty-four pages with no apologies to Stephen Neill or Kenneth Scott Latourette. His perspective is refreshing and honest. His choices highlight peoples and places often overlooked by other historians. One interesting example is the Nestorians. Traditionally, the Nestorians have been marginalized as heretics but here their role in the expansion of Christianity to Central Asia and China is rightly acknowledged.

Jenkins' treatment of the missional era provides another opportunity for the West to reconsider how history has been written and perceived. For many in the West, missions were at worst "ruthless, racist, colonial expansion" (40). At best, missions "manifested ignorant paternalism" (41). Despite these concerns, Jenkins believes that Christian missionaries left a

rich, global heritage. Christianity was effectively embraced and spread by the indigenous peoples. After many years of struggle and persistence, these communities are gaining momentum across the global South and are sharing the gospel around the world – even to the West.

It is important to understand that these communities of faith are not Western clones. Christians in the global South are among the poorest people on earth. Their beliefs and practices are far more conservative and traditional than in the West. They firmly believe in faith healing and exorcisms. They read the Bible from a unique perspective. In Latin America, they are very devoted to the Virgin Mary.

Jenkins cautions against using traditional Western terms and definitions to describe the global South. For example, the Western understanding of "Pentecostal" simply does not apply in the global South. Pentecostals can be found within Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions as well as independent congregations. Protestant growth in Latin America and Korea has been primarily Pentecostal (71). Pentecostal and independent churches are flourishing in the urban areas with the fastest population growth.

The influence of the global South on Christianity will continue to increase and should not be underestimated by the West. The question that remains unanswered is, "How will the West respond?" Jenkins does not attempt to make a prediction which may disappoint some readers. It is important to remember that he is a historian, not a fortuneteller. He has written a fine book about the past and the present. He intends for the information presented here to be used by those who will take action. He knows that history will take its course. Then he will write the sequel.

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