Interpreting Religion

Religious Demography and Mission Strategy

by Todd M. Johnson and Albert W. Hickman

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A previous *IJFM* article[1] described findings from the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburg University Press, 2009) concerning globalization and Christian identity and their impact on frontier missions. In this article (which is based on a presentation given by Todd Johnson at IMB[2] in Richmond, Virginia, on July 11, 2011), we describe significant demographic trends documented in the Atlas for three different areas: religious demography, global Christianity, and Christian mission. We then note obstacles within American churches and society that mission leaders must confront when formulating mission strategy. Finally, we offer suggestions for designing mission strategies that we believe will be effective in the twenty-first century.

Trends in Religious Demography

1. Major changes in religious demographics have occurred over the past 100 years.

One such change is the dramatic decline between 1910 and 2010[3] in the percentage of people globally who are identified as Chinese folk religionists (from 22.3% to only 6.6%). Chinese folk religion is an amalgam of Buddhist, Confucianist, and Daoist traditions. Followers are open to borrowing from and mixing various Eastern religions, and ancestor worship is prevalent as well. Although the People's Republic of China is still home to the majority of Chinese folk religionists, the population of atheists and agnostics soared with the advent of Communism. Recent surveys, however, have shown increasing interest in traditional religions, with the greatest interest in Buddhism. Another major change is the increase in the percentage of people globally who adhere to Islam (from 12.6% to 22.4%). While this is due in part to higher birth rates among many Muslim peoples than in the general global population, it is also the result of a third major change, the shrinking presence of animism. The number of animists[4] fell from 7.7% of the world's population in 1910 to only 3.8% in 2010, largely as a consequence of the conversion of

animist peoples to Islam in Western Africa[5] and Indonesia, as well as to Christianity in large areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Africa experienced the most profound religious transformation over the one hundred years from 1910 to 2010.

Christianity in Africa has experienced dramatic growth, increasing from 11.7 million adherents (9.4% of Africa's population) in 1910 to 495 million (47.9% of the population) by 2010. This represents an average annual growth rate of 3.82% over the century, almost twice that of the population as a whole (2.14%). The number of Muslims also increased significantly, from nearly 40 million (32.0%) in 1910 to 418 million (40.5%) by 2010. Over the same period, tribal religionists declined from 58.0% of Africa's population in 1910 to only 10.4% by 2010, although they increased in number, from 72 million to over 107 million.

3. Asia is the world's most religiously diverse major area.

In 1910, over 50% of Asia's population was Chinese folk religionist or Buddhist. Today they total only 22%. Regionally, gains in adherence percentage over the century were made by Muslims (from 16.6% to 26.0% of Asia's population) and Christians (from 2.4% to 8.5%). Notably, agnostics and atheists grew from very small populations (0.0% of the total in 1910) to 11.8% and 2.8%, respectively, in 2010.

4. True religious diversity is limited to the Koreas and South-Eastern Asia.

As of 2010, both Canada and Suriname are home to nine different religions that can claim adherents among at least 0.5% of the population each. More significant diversity is found in Asia, however, where six countries have at least five religions claiming a minimum of 5% of the population each: Vietnam (six), Brunei, China, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan. The greatest overall diversity is found in South-Eastern Asia and the Koreas. Five religions in South Korea each claim more than 10% of the country's population, while North Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam each have four religions above the 10% level.

5. Migration is increasing religious and ethnic diversity around the world.

Today 200 million people are on the move, carrying with them their cultural and religious backgrounds. At least 720 million have settled permanently outside the main countries of their home cultures. Almost half of these are Christians, representing almost 16% (nearly one in six) of all Christians globally. Muslims, Hindus, and Bud-

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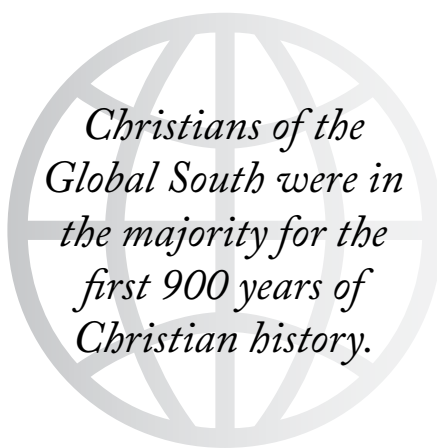
dhists also live outside their homelands in large numbers. An excellent treatment of migration is given in Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron, and Meera Balarajan's *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped our World and Will Define the Future* (Princeton University Press, 2011), which observes that never have so many people been on the move, and never have they been so unwelcome.

6. Language is an important element of religion.

Language both shapes and is shaped by religion, and people often make assumptions about one of them based on the other. For example, it is perhaps no surprise that all of the top five languages spoken by Hindus (Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, and Tamil) are Indian languages. The links between religion and language are not always so obvious, however. Ask people which language has the most speakers who are Muslim and they are likely to answer "Arabic." This seems intuitive, yet it is also inaccurate. It is important to remember that Arabic exists in many spoken forms, and the degree of mutual intelligibility among them varies. Egyptian Arabic, the one with the most Muslim speakers, ranks only sixth globally. The mother tongues with the largest numbers of Muslim speakers are Bengali, Urdu, Western Panjabi, Turkish, and Javanese. Together these five languages encompass over one quarter of all Muslims worldwide.

For other religions, however, diversity is readily apparent. For example, the five mother tongues with the most Buddhist speakers are Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Thai. For agnostics, the results are even more geographically diverse, with Mandarin holding the top spot, English second, and three more Chinese languages completing the top five; German and Korean (North) are not far behind. How many people, though, recognize that Mandarin is also one of the largest Christian languages, ranking fifth behind Spanish, English, Portuguese, and Russian?

7. Century growth rates reveal that atheism and agnosticism grew most rapidly. Current growth rates favor small religions and Islam.

Atheists and agnostics showed the highest global rates of growth over the period 1910–2010 (averaging 6.55% and 5.39% per year, respectively). From 2000–10, however, they were declining at average annual rates of -0.09% and -0.36%. Current growth rates favor small religions and Islam. Today, smaller religions like Daoism (2.45%) and the Baha'i faith (1.86%) have the highest average annual growth rates, with Islam having the fastest current growth (1.84%) among large regions.

That smaller religions (which included atheism and agnosticism in 1910) are growing most rapidly is not surprising, however, given that the same number of converts results in greater percentage growth for a small religion than for a large one.

8. The world is less religious in 2010 than in 1910, but more religious than in 1970.

In 1910, over 99% of the world's population was religious; by 2010 this had fallen below 89%. Simply comparing 1910 to 2010, however, hides the fact that in 1970, the non-religious (atheists or agnostics) comprised nearly 20% of the world's population. The collapse of Communism in the late twentieth century means that the world is more religious today than in 1970.[6] Indeed, as Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shaw note in their recent book *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), "over the past four decades, religion's influence on politics has reversed its decline and become more powerful on every continent and across every world religion" (Toft *et al.*, 3).

Trends Inside of Global Christianity

Like religious demography, global Christianity has been characterized by significant realities—in this case, six—over the past century.

1. Christianity has shifted dramatically to the South.

At first glance, the status of global Christianity seems to have changed little since 1910. For the entire 100-year period, Christians have made up approximately one third of the world's population. This statistic, however, masks dramatic changes that have taken place in the geography of Christianity—changes that date back to the earliest days of the world Christian movement.

The Global North (Europe and Northern America[7]) was home to more than

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80% of the world's Christians in 1910. By 2010, this figure had fallen to less than 40%. The drop was particularly severe in Europe, whose share dropped from 66% of all Christians in 1910 to only 26% by 2010. In contrast, Africa was home to less than 2% of the world's Christians in 1910, a figure that had skyrocketed to almost 22% by 2010.

The movement of the statistical center of Christian gravity, the point at which equal numbers of Christians live north and south, or east and west, illustrates this shift. At the time of the 1910 Edinburgh conference, the statistical center of global Christianity was near Madrid, Spain. By 2010, the statistical center had lost the westward trajectory it had been following since 1500. Instead, it could be found well south of Timbuktu in Mali and had been moving on a southeastern trajectory since at least 1970. This 100-year shift (1910 to 2010) is the most dramatic in Christian history.

The southward shift can also be put in the context of the entire history of Christianity. Christians of the Global South were in the majority for the first 900 years of Christian history. Europeans dominated global Christianity for the next millennium, but this phase of world Christianity has now passed. Since 1981, Southern Christians are, once again, in the majority.

One can easily see Christianity as a Western phenomenon in 1910—including a strong European Roman Catholic presence in Latin America, where few church leaders were Latin Americans. Nine of the 10 countries with the most Christians in 1910 were in the Global North, Brazil being the lone exception. The fastest Christian growth in the past 100 years and in the past 10 years has all been in the

Global South. Indeed, seven of the 10 countries with the most Christians in 2010 are in the Global South. The most dramatic difference in 2010 is in Africa—less than 10% Christian in 1910 but nearly 50% Christian in 2010, with sub-Saharan Africa well over 70% Christian. Finally, the spread of Christianity can be seen by the fact that in 1910, 80% of all Christians globally lived in countries that were 90% or more Christian. Today only 33% of all Christians live in such overwhelmingly Christian countries.

Yang Liu, a Chinese immigrant to Germany, has captured differences in the ways of life in those two countries (one in the South, the other in the North) in her book *Ost trifft West* ("East meets West") (Verlag Hermann Schmidt Mainz, 2007). She uses side-by-side illustrations to contrast elements of German and Chinese culture, such as

- The status difference between employee and boss is much greater in China than in Germany.
- Grandparents in Germany play a much smaller role in the raising of children than do grandparents in China.
- Queues in China tend to be chaotic, whereas those in Germany are more orderly.
- Germans tackle problems head on, while Chinese deal with them by going around them.
- Similarly, opinions are expressed quite directly in Germany, whereas in China it is more polite to take one's time in getting to the point.
- The Chinese way of life is community-based, while in Germany it is more individualistic.
- As a result, Germans tend to have a limited number of direct

contacts, whereas Chinese live in a more complex web of relationships encompassing many people.

These comparisons are useful as we ponder the shift of Christianity from North to South generally and, more specifically, the role of Asian Christians in the future of global Christianity. In particular, the contrasts raise an interesting question: Which of these worldviews—Chinese or German, Southern or Northern—aligns better with the way of life outlined in the Christian scriptures? Might the shift of Christianity to the Global South open up new possibilities for the life and health of Christianity around the world?

With these questions in mind we might ask, as Hwa Yung (now bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia) has, whether the future of Asian Christianity is one of "bananas"—where Asian Christians are yellow on the outside but white on the inside (e.g., Chinese Christians trained with a German worldview, using the previous example)—or "mangoes"—yellow on the inside as well as the outside (e.g., Chinese Christians with a Chinese worldview) (Hwa, 240–1). Is the demographic shift of Christianity really good news if it is not accompanied by theological reflection from fresh cultural perspectives of more recent members of the global body of Christ?

Western Christians, we must admit, have picked up habits along the way that are now considered normative in Christianity. Consider, for example, that most Christians today bow their heads, close their eyes, and often clasp their hands when they pray. Yet evidence shows that during Christianity's first millennium, Christians prayed with outstretched arms (forming a picture of the cross) and open eyes. The change in posture, which mirrors the submissive posture of a vassal before his lord, came about as a result of the feudal system and Germanic custom (Fletcher, 4–5). Fortunately, examples of the indigenization of Christianity—in areas as varied as art, architecture, music, and liturgy—can be found in all areas of the world today.

2. Christianity is fragmented.

Christians are now found in over 41,000 denominations, which range in size from millions of members to fewer than 100. These denominations are listed for each of the world's 230 countries in the *World Christian Database*. Each denomination can be categorized as belonging within one of six major traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Independent, or Marginal), which can

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be subdivided further into 300 minor traditions (such as Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Independent Charismatic). In some countries, many separate denominations exist within a single minor tradition; South Korea, for example, is home to more than 100 Presbyterian denominations alone.

This tendency to divide has led Moonjang Lee to observe,

> Christianity has become too fragmented. Existing in a fragmented world, churches fail to show a united front. There are so many divisions within Christianity that it is an intriguing task to clarify a Christian identity. At the beginning of Christian history, the designation of a person as a "Christian" was sufficient to tell about his or her social, religious and cultural identity. Today, however, we have to supply subcategories to tell about who we are as Christians, for there are many different and conflicting forms of church life. (Lee, 104, in Johnson and Ross)

Note that the majority of denominations are in the Independent and Protestant traditions. By 2025, there likely will be 55,000 denominations globally.

3. Christian demographics are determined by six different factors.

It is important to remember that six factors influence the number of Christians in a country: births, conversions, immigration, deaths, defections, and emigration. Of these, the first three increase the number of Christians, while the latter three cause it to decrease. Birth, death, conversion, and defection also operate at the global level (whereas there is no net immigration and emigration[8]). Charting these changes globally for 2009 to 2010 shows a net increase of 27.8 million Christians over the year, from 2.265 billion to 2.293 billion. This net increase is the result of gains of 61.2 million (45.2 million births and 16.0 million conversions) offset by losses of 33.4 million (21.8 million deaths and 11.6 million defections). The year also saw inter-country migration of 4 million Christians, which did not contribute to the net global change.

4. Christians are experiencing unprecedented renewal.

The locus of the renewal is clearly in the Global South, where the majority of its practitioners live and where it is growing the fastest. Renewal comes in many forms, including evangelical movements, liturgical renewal, Bible-study fellowships, and house church movements. One of the most significant is the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal, which dates from the beginning of the twentieth century and coincides with the period on which this paper focuses. Hundreds of millions of

believers are involved in various forms of renewal, including the following:

- 300–500 million evangelicals; the lower figure is based on the "structural" definition used by the World Christian Encyclopedia (Barrett et al., 660) and consists mainly of Protestants, while the upper figure is based on the theological definition used by Operation World, 7th edition (Mandryk, 958–9) and consists largely of Anglicans, Protestants, and Independents
- 600 million Pentecostals/charismatics, found within all Christian traditions
- 700 million Great Commission Christians, encompassing Christians of all traditions who are aware of and seek to implement Christ's Great Commission (Barrett et al., 662)

Note that these categories can overlap and are not mutually exclusive. An individual Christian can be included in one, two, or all three categories.

5. Christian resources are not evenly distributed.

Christians of the Global South represent 60% of all Christians worldwide, yet they receive only about 17% of all Christian income. This disparity puts them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their Northern counterparts in many areas, including health, education, communications, and overall quality of life. Such an imbalance in income and resources is one of the great tragedies of global Christianity today, and one that could not have been easily predicted by those who attended the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910.

6. Christians speak a multitude of languages.

The language with the most Christian native speakers (nearly 360 million) is Spanish, followed by English, Portuguese, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese. Of the 25 languages with the most Christian native speakers, 11 are from

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the Global South (including Tagalog, Amharic, and Korean), with Mandarin being the largest of these. Another four (Spanish, English, Portuguese, and seventh-ranked French) are Northern languages that have significant numbers of native speakers in the Global South; for Spanish and Portuguese, a majority actually live in the South.

Trends in Christian Mission

1. There is enough evangelism to reach everyone in the world.

One might have the impression today that more evangelism is needed to reach the world for Christ. In sheer quantity, however, there is enough evangelism in the world today for every person (Christian and non-Christian alike) to be evangelized for one hour every other day all year long. This amounts to over 1.136 *trillion* hours of evangelism generated by Christians every year, ranging from personal witnessing to radio and television broadcasting. Unfortunately, evangelistic activity is not distributed uniformly across the world. As a result, Asia and Northern Africa, which have the largest non-Christian populations, also receive the fewest hours of evangelism on a per-capita basis.

2. Most Christian outreach never reaches non-Christians.

Over 85% of all Christian outreach is aimed at professing Christians. This is due in part to the uneven distribution of Christian missionaries globally. The unanticipated success of Christian missions in the twentieth century has meant that much of current missionary deployment is aimed at keeping up with the growth of churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One surprising consequence has been how missionaries from the Global South,

like their Northern counterparts, have been drawn into mission primarily to other Christians. Deployment studies in Nigeria and India have shown this to be the case (see, e.g., Bloecher 2005; Johnson 2002), although there has been a perceptible shift in the past decade toward work among non-Christians. Although we have mentioned missionary deployment here, close examination of virtually any Christian evangelistic activity reveals this massive imbalance.

3. Christians are out of contact with Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

Recent research reveals that as many as 86% of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists do not personally know a Christian (Johnson and Ross, 316). This must be viewed negatively in the light of the strong biblical theme of incarnation that is at the heart of Christian witness. Christians should know and love their neighbors. In the twenty-first century it is important to realize that the responsibility for reaching Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists is too large for the missionary enterprise alone. While missionaries will always be at the forefront of innovative strategies, the whole church needs to participate in inviting people of other faiths to consider Jesus Christ. Note that Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists increasingly are found living in "Christian" lands.

4. Many of the most responsive peoples are Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist.

Our analysis in the *World Christian Database* reveals that of the 100 most-responsive people groups over 1 million in size, 31 are Hindu (48% of the total by population), 31 are Muslim (25%), 22 are tribal religionist (9%), and four are Buddhist (9%). Of these, the five most responsive are the Jinyu of China (Buddhist), the Khandeshi of India (tribal),

the Southern Pathan of Afghanistan (Muslim), the Magadhi Bihari of India (Hindu), and the Maitili of India (Hindu). What this means is that God himself is inviting the world's peoples into his family. Christians must be more alert to his initiative. A world map of response to the gospel shows that the most-responsive groups appear to be in the least-Christian areas. One related and growing phenomenon is insider movements—defined as "movements to faith in Christ where the Gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible" (Lewis, 75). Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists around the world are following Christ while remaining within their own communities.

5. Mission to the world's cities is increasingly important.

Today, half the world's population is found in cities. In 1910, the largest cities in the world were all Christian. Today, many of the top 25 cities have Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or nonreligious majorities. Although Western evangelists often target cities for city-wide outreaches, mission agencies have come to realize cities as legitimate mission fields only in the last half century. Edward Glaeser's book *Triumph of the City: How our Greatest Invention Makes us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (Penguin, 2011) provides an insightful discourse on the role of cities in human history.
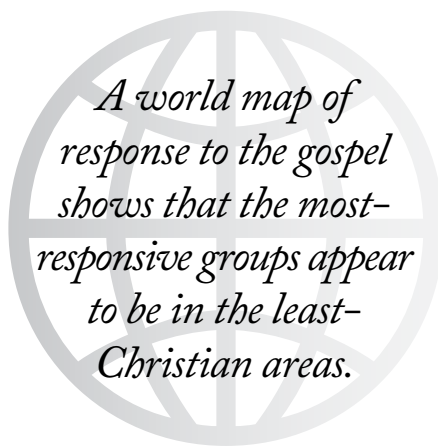
Obstacles for Americans Crafting Mission Strategy

1. Lack of knowledge about other religions.

Despite playing a major role in missions over the last century, American Christians—and particularly American evangelicals—seem ill-equipped to craft mission strategies that address the trends and realities described above. A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (Pew Forum 2010) showed that American evangelicals are less knowledgeable about world religions than are atheists and Jews. Evangelicals correctly answered an average of 17.6 out of 32 questions about world religions (including Christianity), while atheists/agnostics, Jews, and Mormons each answered an average of more than 20 out of 32 correctly.

2. Lack of knowledge about solving the world's problems.

In another Pew Survey, evangelical leaders from around the world indicated that helping the poor and needy is a mark of

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a good evangelical but that transforming individual hearts is more important than transforming society (Pew Forum 2011, 43). At the same time, bold new plans to evangelize and to rescue people have been announced (such as Rick Warren's PEACE plan). For an alternative perspective on the limitations of Christians' ability to change the world, see James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

3. Lack of knowledge about geography.

The National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs *2006 Geographic Literacy Study* painted a dismal picture of the geographic knowledge of the most recent graduates of the U.S. education system. After more than three years of combat and nearly 2,400 U.S. military deaths in Iraq, nearly two thirds of Americans aged 18 to 24 could not find Iraq on a map. The study also found that less than six months after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, 33% could not point out Louisiana on a U.S. map. "Taken together, these results suggest that young people in the United States … are unprepared for an increasingly global future," said the study's final report. "Far too many lack even the most basic skills for navigating the international economy or understanding the relationships among people and places that provide critical context for world events" (GfK Roper and National Geographic, 7). Inside the United States, "half or fewer of young men and women 18–24 can identify the states of New York or Ohio on a map (50% and 43%, respectively)" (*Ibid.* 6).

4. Lack of knowledge about history.

Our Fading Heritage, a report produced by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in 2008, presents a rather bleak picture of Americans' knowledge of their country's history, politics, and economics. The average score received by the 2,508 people surveyed was only 49 points out of a possible 100, with 71% of respondents achieving a failing grade of less than 60. Politicians fared even worse, averaging a less-than-stellar 44 out of 100 (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, no page number).

5. Lack of knowledge about the Bible.

More distressing than the above deficiencies, at least from a Christian perspective, is Americans' biblical ignorance. "The Christian body in America is immersed in a crisis of biblical illiteracy," researcher George Barna warned in 2001. "How else can you describe matters when most churchgoing adults reject the accuracy of the Bible, reject the existence of Satan, claim that Jesus sinned, see no need to evangelize, believe that good works

are one of the keys to persuading God to forgive their sins, and describe their commitment to Christianity as moderate or even less firm?" (Barna Group, no page number). Another disturbing finding of the Barna report is that the most widely known Bible verse among adult and teen believers is "God helps those who help themselves," which is not in the Bible and actually conflicts with the basic message of Scripture.

6. Over-emphasis on the "Clash of Civilizations."

Too much attention has been given to conflict between Muslims and Christians. In 1800, one third of the world's population was either Christian or Muslim. Today, it is 55% of the world and could grow to two thirds before 2100. This underlines the necessity of pursuing good relations between Christians and Muslims rather than focusing only on the potential for conflict. For example, in the context of a stimulating discussion on whether or not Christians and Muslims worship the same God, Miroslav Volf's *Allah: A Christian Response* (HarperOne, 2011) also examines the basis Christians and Muslims have for working together on issues facing their communities.

7. Lack of hospitality and friendship with non-Christians.

As previously stated, 86% of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists do not personally know a Christian. Christians should know and love their neighbors. The whole church needs to participate in inviting people of other faiths to consider Jesus Christ. Note again that Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists are increasingly found in traditionally "Christian" lands.

Designing Mission Strategy

1. Prioritize religions by their relative size by country.

Adherents to a minority religion are sometimes overlooked because the majority religion in their country is so overwhelming in number. This can be

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true even when the minority religion has a sizeable population itself and might otherwise stand out. One such "obvious" group that has been overlooked in mission strategy is the 168 million Muslims in India—the second-largest Muslim population in the world. Others include the 4.5 million Hindus in Indonesia and the 57 million ethnoreligionists in China. Prioritizing by size by country can reveal such gaps in mission strategy and focus attention on neglected peoples.

2. Prioritize religions by their major schools or traditions.

Significant differences can exist among traditions within a given religion. Major schools of Buddhism such as Mahayana, Theravada, and Tibetan separate Buddhists across the world, just as Sunni and Shi'a separate Muslims. A one-size-fits-all approach to "Buddhists" or "Muslims" sometimes can be counterproductive. Mission strategies that consider differences as well as similarities will enable those who are sent to use the most effective approaches with the people among whom they serve.

3. Prioritize small religions.

Some groups are relatively small but still very important. Baha'is, for example, are in nearly every country of the world but have received little attention in Christian missions. Some of these small religions are closely associated with specific peoples, whereas others have much broader adherence. In the latter cases, how "reached" can we say a people is if the gospel has been taken to adherents of only one of the religions practiced among them?

4. Develop global strategies that include Christians from different denominations and countries.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw increasing cooperation across

denominational lines among Western missionaries. Today, however, Christians all over the world are sending missionaries—through denominations, parachurch movements, and individual congregations—to the whole world. Mission strategists need to consider questions they have not encountered before. For example, how do national strategies intersect with each other? What cooperation is emerging between Americans, Brazilians, Koreans, Nigerians, and Filipinos? What are the cultural, linguistic, and nationalistic barriers that Christians from different countries must overcome in order to cooperate in mission in the twenty-first century?

5. Develop strategies that focus on peoples and languages.

The primary bridge to individuals will always be the mother tongue. How are strategies taking into account the huge disparities of resources by language? There are still major translation priorities for Scripture, to say nothing of other resources such as film, radio, television, and the Internet. And the existence of a translation, of whatever medium, in a given language is no guarantee that those who need it will be able to obtain it. How will strategists plan for both the production and distribution of needed materials—for migrants as well as for peoples in their home settings?

6. Develop strategies that focus on cities.

An increasing percentage of the world's population lives in cities. Yet urban mission undertaken by North Americans has focused mainly on Christian cities in Northern America and Latin America or on the urban poor in a limited number of large cities globally. How many Westerners

would recognize the names of large cities such as Ekurhuleni, Kumasi, Mbuji-Mayi, Dongguan, Bandung, or Surat—much less know where they are, or anything else about them? How intentional is mission strategy about putting workers in the world's megacities?

7. Empower churches to interact in religiously diverse communities.

Many Christians seem to fear religiously diverse communities rather than seeing them as opportunities to impact many different people. As a result, there can be a tendency, if not to avoid these diverse communities, then to stay isolated in a Christian community within them. What might happen if missionaries intentionally went to religiously diverse communities to reach religionists of different backgrounds? What might happen if church members living in religiously diverse communities could be trained to interact with, rather than fear or avoid, adherents of a variety of religions?

8. Deepen knowledge of world religions in congregations and missionaries.

Mission to adherents of other faiths is strengthened when both those who are sending and those who are sent understand the religions of the world—including their histories, significant figures, sacred writings, and beliefs and practices. Intrinsic to that understanding is a knowledge of both the similarities and differences between Christianity and other religions. A good starting point is Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One* (HarperOne, 2010), which provides introductions to what Prothero considers eight of the world's most influential religions.

9. Strengthen theological understanding of world religions among congregations and missionaries.

Although a basic knowledge of the world's religions is a useful starting

point, mission strategy is eroded if congregations and missionaries do not go beyond the surface to understand the theology of world religions. Gerald McDermott's *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?* is a useful resource in this area *(IVP Academic, 2007)*.

10. Train congregations and missionaries in civility.

Christians can at times be so focused on being right that we fail to see the "other" as equally made in God's image and worthy of our love and respect. While civility within the church is recognized as a virtue, civility to those outside the church should be equally so. Mission strategy

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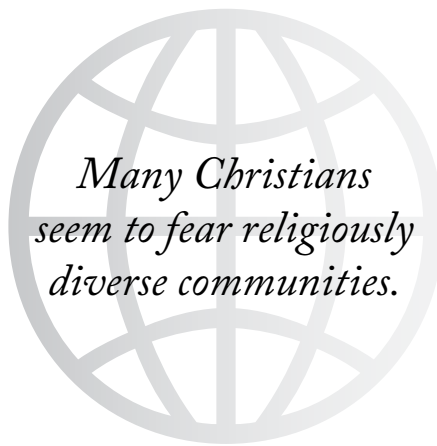
is strengthened by the civility that congregations and missionaries practice toward other religionists. Richard Mouw's *Uncommon Decency: Civility in an Uncivil World* (IVP Books, 2010, revised and updated) provides a good study of this often-neglected area.

11. Establish viable, legitimate, credible roles for missionaries.

Local people can quickly tell whether or not a missionary has a legitimate role in their society. An outsider does not acquire credibility simply by receiving a visa to live and work among a people. Mission strategy therefore needs to address mission as incarnation—how can

those who go present the gospel not merely in words and religious activities but in the totality of their lives, both "on the job" and "off," in a way that respects and transforms the society in which they live? **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Todd Johnson, "Globalization, Christian Identity, and Frontier Missions," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27:4 (Winter 2010), 165–9.

[2] International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

[3] The dates 1910 and 2010 reflect the historic World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 and its centennial in 2010, the celebration of which was marked by numerous commemorative conferences and the publication of the Atlas.

[4] "Animists" as used here refers only to those for whom animism is an explicit religious affiliation. Animists do not include other religionists (Christians, Muslims, etc.), or even non-religionists (atheists, agnostics), who incorporate animistic beliefs or practices into their primary affiliation.

[5] This paper describes trends in both general geographic areas and in United Nations regions (indicated by capitalization). For example, Western Africa and South-Eastern Asia are UN regions; western Africa and southeast Asia are general areas.

[6] Data from 1900, 1910, 1950, 1970, 2000, 2005, and 2010 indicate a large jump in global atheist and agnostic numbers between 1950 and 1970 due to the Communist revolution in China (the exact year of the peak has not been calculated). For example, 75% of all agnostics globally (as we define the term) were in China in 1970. Since that time, the percentage of the Chinese population that is atheist or agnostic has declined. Also, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in the 1990s brought a corresponding reduction in atheist and agnostic figures as people there began to (re)affiliate with religions. By 2010 only about 64% of all agnostics globally lived in China (because secularization had increased their numbers in the West). If not for the fall of Communism, however, the global total would have been higher and the Chinese share even lower. As it is, we calculate that the numbers of (people affiliated as) agnostics and atheists globally actually shrank between 2000 and 2010.

[7] The United Nations region of Northern America comprises Bermuda, Canada, Greenland, St. Pierre and Miquelon, and the United States.

[8] On a global scale there is no net immigration because no one emigrates from or immigrates to Earth. That is, migration (unlike births/deaths and conversions/defections) has no effect on the *global* Christian population.

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