

# WORLD CHRISTIANITY



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## *Continuities in Contrast: World Christianity and the West<sup>1</sup>*

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### **The Lions Look Back: World Christianity**

“Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunters.”

—African Proverb<sup>2</sup>

Dramatic transitions now in motion throughout the world show a new scene is actively on stage, specifically the drama of world Christianity. Western missionary roles are supportive though more in the background now, at least in places. Exploding Christian populations in the non-Western world cycles to the next part of the script in motion. Props, and the next scene changes, are now being made.

Andrew F. Walls's writings illustrate historic ebb and flow patterns of Christianity. His *foci* certainly spotlight this living drama as the paradigm for interpreting Christian history is shifting from Western myopia to non-western points of view. Christians everywhere are standing at one of those major crossroads in time that Timothy C. Tennent calls “living on the seam of history;”<sup>3</sup> where many things are different and differently seen.

Walls points out an “indigenous-pilgrim” tension in Christian history. It accounts for the serial development of Christianity and he notes that it is a dynamic set of forces. These twins create differing momentums in the Christian church. Indigenous ideas take root in a given culture. Then believers speak or live out Christ prophetically in context. Yet the gospel is usually restless and moving to the margins of lostness with transformative energies of life and salvation. Christianity takes on flavoring from all its journeys and settings along the way. In his now famous article Walls depicts

<sup>1</sup>This article first appeared in John Mark Terry, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 563–72.

<sup>2</sup>Hyung Jin Park, “Journey of the Gospel: A Study in the Emergence of World Christianity and the Shift of Christian Historiography in the Last Half of the Twentieth Century.” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2009), 143.

<sup>3</sup>Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 6–8.

a hypothetical “scholarly space visitor—a Professor of Comparative Inter-Planetary Religion”<sup>4</sup> who visits Earth at five distinct times and places over the past two millennia to study the phenomenon of Christianity. The visitor sees continuities and discontinuities in various forms of the Christian faith.

Just as the indigenizing principle, itself rooted in the Gospel, associates Christians with the *particulars* of their culture and group, the pilgrim principle, in tension with the indigenizing and equality of the Gospel associating them with things and people outside the culture and group, is in some respects a *universalizing* factor.<sup>5</sup>

While Christian presence in the West seems numerically to be waning as it encounters the full press of strongly secular and pluralistic cultural challenges, there are enduring Christian principles and responsibilities regarding lostness wherever Christianity is present, including the West, that require missiological initiatives for Christianity to retain New Testament characteristics. Prophetic life and verbal witness constitute the proclamation engines of the pilgrim principle as it seeks new indigenous ground.

This article introduces the drama of contemporary World Christianity that developed most expansively during the 19th and 20th centuries,<sup>6</sup> and is now center stage for the 21st. It delves into selected thematic categories of this phenomenon and suggests ways in which Western academicians may inadvertently marginalize some World Christians by ignoring theological factors by which many believers outside the West define themselves, namely, their understanding and use of the Bible, theological (and yes even denominational preferences), and striving for religious freedoms, particularly in crisis prone areas. So, the lions have their own historians now, and have always had their own history makers, so the story of the hunt can be seen more completely if Western eyes will to see.

### World Christianity in Motion

“Ok, Ok, Mister, same same but different.”<sup>7</sup>

#### World Christianity: A Journey

It had already been an extensive trip and this writer still had a long set of flights out of Nigeria routing back to the United States. During a visit to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoso in 2010, this writer met many fine folk. They are actively doing theological education amid hor-

<sup>4</sup>Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 9.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. 7 vols. Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937; Reprint, 1970), vols. 6 and 7.

<sup>7</sup>Bargaining phrase for an agreed price often heard in Thailand’s night bazars.

rific conflict posed to the whole nation, and the world, from a violent stream of Islam known as *Boko Haram*. One of the institution's administrators accompanied me back to the Lagos airport.

Nearer the airport, he pointed out a long stretch of highway that had many open-air ministry facilities, one after the other, and on both sides. He mentioned how many people they were attracting to their "signs and wonders" styled meetings. Signboards all along the way advertised different ministries and their emphases clearly were on miracles, healing, prosperity, and the like. After he pointed out these ministries, this traveler turned to him and said, "Indeed, there seem to be many people in the 'miracle' business here." The look on his face said it all. He was dismayed and replied, "Sadly that is true." As elsewhere certainly there are theological challenges to faith for non-Western Christians.

### **Amazing Grace Growth: Good News Travels**

Anyone traveling to non-Western settings (especially areas not predominately Islamic) observes a distinct rise in Christian presence and various expressions, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The statistics per 24-hour period of change is astronomical. Even if discounted for the fact that every group that even claims to adhere to Christianity is counted; this kind of growth is phenomenal. A respected group of missiological researchers assess annual global statistical summaries of Christian presence by region at the start of each year. One column now indicates an estimated 24-hour change rate in Christian adherents for the year 2012; Africa increased by 37,000 per day, Asia by 23,000, and Latin America by 18,000.<sup>8</sup>

With explosive growth rates like these, it is no wonder Philip Jenkins says that,

The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning. The fact of change itself is undeniable: it has happened, and will continue to happen. So little did we notice this momentous change that it was barely mentioned in all the media hoopla surrounding the end of the second millennium.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, "Christianity 2013: Renewalists and Faith and Migration," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 1 (2013): 32–33. For additional documentation of the rise and dates for the growth, each from different points of view, see the following: Dyron B. Daugherty, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011); Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

<sup>9</sup>Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 3. Note Jenkins's use of the term "Southern Christianity" does not encompass the full scope of this growing phenomenon. China, for example, does not

### Global vs. World: Words and Their Meanings

Some things seem the same in this millennium; others are vastly different. The distinction between the terms “Global Christianity” versus “World Christianity,” for example, shifts one’s perspective and sheds light on newly perceived categories of thought. Lamin Sanneh, a native of Gambia, prefers the latter term because it gives greater credence to the recipients’ points of view in the expansion and development of World Christianity. He wants, “to reverse the argument by speaking of the *indigenous discovery of Christianity* rather than the *Christian discovery of indigenous societies*.”<sup>10</sup>

### Theologically Marked: Convictions and Distinctions

Sanneh’s differentiation clarifies why, and perhaps how, categories of theology look the same yet different now. Some western theologians are starting to note ways this thriving population of Christians sees things. Sanneh contends that,

“World Christianity” is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel ... “Global Christianity,” on the other hand, is the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

A mediate position seems warranted instead of minimizing the complexities of non-Western Christianity to only these two options. In a middle view, one could recognize that the Bible is taken seriously and earlier forms of the faith were voluntarily embraced. Yet there is new flavor for those historic traditions in the non-Western world. As long as the Bible is in local languages, indigenous theologizing happens, and people come to faith in Christ, some adherents embrace semblances and continuities with other forms of the faith in other places. The idea of doctrinal bundles of beliefs, willingly and locally embraced, is a distinct possibility that could perhaps link to earlier forms of the faith that came to indigenous peoples sociologically or historically. Some categories of thought could be “same, same but different.”

How those differences come about, what prior contacts may exist with earlier forms of the faith, what they are functionally like in various settings, how they are digested by the local adherents, and what common touch points may exist between various new forms of faith with the older ones, are all subjects of interest for the student of World Christianity. The aim is to dis-

fit if one thinks only south of the Tropic of Cancer. The explosive Christian growth rates are best defined by theme not geography per se.

<sup>10</sup>Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 10.

<sup>11</sup>Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, 22.

cover how Christianity has serially progressed over time as a cultural pilgrim becomes different while remaining the same.

### World Christian Dimensions

“Christianity can only be expected to become even more multiple, diverse, and hybridized”<sup>12</sup>

#### Angles and Avenues: New Perspectives

Changes in angles make for unique viewpoints. Also one’s point of view affects the ways of understanding and analyzing Christianity, especially its missiological and historical developments. The essence of World Christianity, in this analysis, is a perspectival shift. It involves learning to look at Christian history from the other end of things.

Like others, this writer has experienced frustration when teaching Church History in Africa, thematically arranged as if only North American and European church history ever existed. Call it ethnocentric, and it is, though at the time it was done simply because of ignorance regarding a larger horizon of understanding, that of the gospel receiver’s view on a worldwide scale. An awakening of sorts comes about when historians see things from inside out.

#### History Lives Again: A Fresh Look

God has been moving since before Creation, always engaging, reaching out, around, and toward (Ephesians 1:3–14). He is, by His own nature, relational, redemptive and—one can even say—missionary? It is evident now that the Christian church exists in some way throughout the world, and it has not grown consistently the same throughout time. It grew iteratively; it has ebbed and flowed like a tide with rhyme and rhythm, push and pull. Telling the story of that rolling tide is the core task of those engaged in studying World Christianity. Such study goes beyond gospel *transmission* and delves into intricacies of the gospel *translated* into lives hitherto untouched among and between a myriad of global peoples. Then again, it latches onto the inmost parts of the human soul at deep levels, core convictions *transform* lives individually and corporately.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon repeats throughout the history of Christianity, and gives rise to current non-Western growth. It is contingent on the “missionary.” Walls defines the term broadly to encompass two millennia of history, “The ‘missionary’ in the technical sense is one present, and historically important, example of a recurrent Christian phenomenon.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong, eds., *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, Christianities of the World series, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), series Introduction.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew F. Walls “Christianity,” In *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Penguin, 1997), 55.

<sup>14</sup>Andrew F. Walls, “The Old Age of the Missionary Movement.” *International Review of Mission* 76, no. 301 (1987): 26–32.

Further he observes,

Christian history has seen a constant tension between the forces which localize and indigenize it, and those which universalize it ... The universalizing forces are the same as ever: the worship of Israel's God, the according of ultimate significance to Christ, the sense of continuing divine activity in the Christian community, the use of the scriptures and the consciousness of a community transcending time and space. It will be surprising if the localizing forces of the southern continents do not lead it into new paths.<sup>15</sup>

Evangelicals affirm Holy Spirit inspired transformation and work to see it overflowing and *retransmitted*, or further *diffused* so that Christianity's transforming germ, will ultimately be an epidemic.

### **The Bible: Always A Prophetic Voice**

Scholarly conversations surrounding World Christianity tend to diminish or perhaps overwhelm the more traditional Western conservative voices, though the non-Western populations now embracing Christ are often doing so with conservative evangelical views of the Bible and the faith. Why is there a conversational disconnection between biblically conservative views of millions of new adherents in the non-Western world and the same, or similar views, of their Western Christian counterparts? Again, one's perspective matters.

In the ancient church, Tertullian contrasted Jerusalem's biblical fidelity to the paganism of Athens. Jenkins notes a temporal metaphor between the early church and modern religious parallels, "Christians of the global South are citizens of Jerusalem, and they follow the Bible; Americans and Europeans, residents of Athens, obey secular texts. And what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"<sup>16</sup>

Concluding that the Bible is inerrant means that in this conversation one can applaud the progress that an enlarged perspective yields, namely whole new vistas of study regarding burgeoning 21st century World Christianity, especially that of the non-Western world. Yet, there is also a sense of pause regarding the tethering affect that ought to come along with revealed, inerrant truth. Scripture, taken for what it claims, is absolute, normative, and should have the determinative role over human experiences and cultures,

<sup>15</sup>Walls "Christianity," 157.

<sup>16</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4. Jenkins further argues that a defining characteristic of world Christians is their embrace of "the Bible as an inspired text and a tendency to literalism; ... Any acquaintance with African or Asian Christianity soon indicates the pervasive importance of the Bible and of biblical stories," Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 4. See also parallel arguments in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 128, 202, and 7.

especially in translation or transmission phases.<sup>17</sup> Scripture critiques culture rather than the reverse. Can someone thread the eye of the needle between such shifts in perspective while maintaining conservative, biblical convictions? It is not necessary to impose liberal western convictions regarding biblically revealed truth into this discussion, especially when the non-Western leaders generally prefer to align themselves with existing evangelical traditions already.

### **Theology: In Technicolor**

This reviewer confirms that Jenkins' conclusions regarding the non-Western church not only exist and thrive but that those churches generally share the aforementioned normative view of Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Western Christian writers generally tend to express an ecumenical, more convergent view, and downplay theological implications of the Bible, and personal ethical issues, except where socially oriented. These implications are either unaddressed or only cursorily considered. Sanneh addresses Anglican struggles at Lambeth in 1998 over uses of the Bible, as related to homosexual issues. The West, and the Anglican rest, took differing sides. Western bishops accused African counterparts of being, "misguided enough to think that the Bible could replace enlightened reasonableness as a standard of guidance and Christian teaching." He concluded that this was a turning point for, "a post-Christian West, still recovering from seeing religion as contagion, mobilizing behind a domesticated highbrow view of culture for safeguard."<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, doctrinal bundles and denominational polity are generally eschewed and deemed culturally conditioned, curiosities best left in 16th century Europe that were framed in reaction to medieval Catholicism.<sup>20</sup> Oddly enough, there are Christian populations in the non-Western world that appreciate their identity and heritages linking them to the historic churches that came and connected with them in their non-Western settings.

<sup>17</sup>For development of biblically conservative evangelical ideas see these examples: David J. Hesselgrave, "The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration and Communication" *JETS* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 443–54; Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, discussion and citation regarding the theological convictions of the Nigerian scholar, Byang Kato who set the pace for a normative use of the Bible among African Evangelicals, cited in: Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 92.

<sup>19</sup>Jonathan J. Bonk, "The Defender of the Good News: Questioning Lamin Sanneh," accessed 24 November 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/october/35.112.html?order=&start=1>.

<sup>20</sup>Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 245–47. Walls distinguishes between the doctrinal bundles, denominational polity or practices, and the formation of sending agencies since William Carey's era and presents them as evidence of younger churches generating new avenues for implementing the Great Commission.



While indeed not all came with the best interest of their hosts, others did and were well received.<sup>21</sup>

If study of World Christianity shifts one's perspective by telling the rest of the story, particularly that of the gospel-receivers, then those same receivers' convictions and distinctions should be told, heard, and studied. This is especially so lest an odd form of neocolonialism accrue in Western academia, one that prescribes ways for non-Western churches to view their vernacular Bibles that downplays scriptural implications and bundles of doctrine simply because western denominational partners affirm the same convictions. Does enough academic freedom exist to acknowledge that some non-Western believers wish to link to historic, missionary related identities? Time will tell.

### **Critiquing Forward: Time for Western Introspection**

Syncretism, spoken by one from outside the recipient culture, signals colonial attitudes or ethnocentrism as concluded by some World Christian Studies writers<sup>22</sup>. This is largely because of their views and uses of the Bible. Traditional—and yes, formerly predominantly Western—evangelicals define their theology by interpreting the Bible didactically. Sanneh, for example, cites an unnamed African convert mentioned by Robert Moffat in 19th century southern Africa as saying, "... We thought it [the Bible] was a thing to be spoken to, but now we know it has a tongue. It speaks and will speak to the whole world." With that evangelical perspective, self-theologizing commenced. Indeed, the translation itself was an act of indigenous theologizing.<sup>23</sup>

If there is hope of re-evangelizing the West through migrating diaspora populations of new Christians,<sup>24</sup> then could it likewise be that a corresponding affirmation of the Bible and choice of denominational identity would come with them, albeit reshaped by their own cultural journeys? What would a Bible believing Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist look like that brings the gospel molds of Africa, Latin America, or Asia to the process of diffusion into still other places? If Western theologians and students of World Christianity do not recognize, and even encourage this sort of critical self-theologizing, allowing for indigenous embrace of historic identities from outside their contexts, then there exists a flip-flop vestige of colonial

<sup>21</sup>Robert D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 244–74. For review of colonial and mission administrative policies illustrative of both negative and some positive aspects see: Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Brian Stanley and Alaine M. Low, *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). For American mission tendencies during the nineteenth century see, Wilbert R. Shenk, *North American Foreign Missions, 1810–1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>22</sup>Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, 44.

<sup>23</sup>Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, 106.

<sup>24</sup>Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91–93.

practice, though from Western scholars, namely ecumenical convergent writers (certainly an unusual source this time around).

Conservative contextualization methods intend the Bible to be meaningful and relevant in other cultures while not altering its original, template teaching. Ecumenical theologians tend to view its teachings dynamically, blended with recipient languages and cultural elements long since in existence prior to the influx of Christian ideas. That means many indigenous religions, beliefs, customs, and languages (using their own ideological syntax) set cultural beliefs in dialectic tension with incoming biblical truths. Might there be an alternative whereby the Bible critiques all cultures to accomplish what Walls calls, “deep translation”? Walls concludes,

Cross-cultural diffusion (which is the life-blood of historic Christianity), has to go beyond language, the outer skin of culture, into the processes of thinking and choosing, and all the networks of relationship that lie beneath language, turning them all towards Christ. It requires generations to accomplish, for those processes have themselves taken many generations to form. This is deep translation, the appropriation of the Christian gospel in terms of that culture, down to the very roots of identity ...<sup>25</sup>

If cultural syntax determines the dance, so to speak, between Christ and culture then doctrinal truth is secondary. This is the tendency among some western theologians.

When self-theologizing happens uncritically, and becomes self-validating simply because it is generated within, then it well illustrates this sort of reverse colonialism spoken of above. Leslie Newbiggin alerts those engaging these ideas to the potential of such inconsistency.

The churches of the Third World belong to societies which are struggling to achieve authentic nationhood after a period in which their cultures were overshadowed by the Western invasion ... Churches in the old colonial powers, ridden by feelings of guilt, are eager to apologize for the fact that their presentation of the gospel was so much colored by their culture, that they presented a European or American gospel instead of the pure, unadulterated article, and—for the same reason—are eager to welcome and applaud any expression of Christianity which is authentically Asian or African ... *Thus we applaud in the younger churches a synthesis of nationalism and Christianity which we deplore in our missionary grandparents.*<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Andrew F. Walls, “Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-First Century,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 19, no. 4 (2002): 220.

<sup>26</sup>Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 143.

Now, however, the prophetic voices may be more loudly heard from the non-Western world's affirmation and embrace of the Bible as the basis for critique of every culture, even western ones.

The whole discussion needs balance. Every human brings to the drama of cross-cultural communication a set of gospel blinders, so to speak, that come with being human and sinful. Humans socially interact and do so with the taint of sin. Cultures bear the marks of fallen humanity in one way or another. Cultures are not amoral or neutral in the contextualization dance. People and cultures are given to flux and flow of every wind of thought for varying reasons. Yet the Bible stabilizes during life's gales. Contextualization, or self-theologizing, without biblical certainty consistently guiding the process results in relativized messages and meanings.

With these concepts in place, and differences noted, one celebrates non-Western Christian partners and enters the conversation to understand better their living realities and how believers in other parts of the world can encourage and enhance those developments where invited and feasible. Additionally, missionary activities are different with new World Christian ideas in view.

### **Free At Last: Cry of Religious Freedom**

Is religious freedom synonymous with separation of Church and State? Historians debate motives and mandates regarding American exportation of the latter and note that a unique set of socio-political circumstances converged at the same point as the birth of the United States that may not be reproducible on a worldwide scale.<sup>27</sup>

The larger concept of religious freedom is a more universal and universalizing principle. Church and State separation is one aspect of American democratization. Where it was imposed in mission settings it was contradicting itself. Where it was embraced and blended with deeper levels of gospel translation in mission settings religious freedom was "picked up ... from missionaries that stemmed from evangelical or Christian dynamics rather than the workings of American or Western culture ... This is a subtle but important distinction."<sup>28</sup>

Drawing a distinction between religious freedom and the American experience of it is beneficial in the discussion and development of modern understanding of World Christianity. Localized religious freedom will look

<sup>27</sup>Andrew F. Walls "The American Dimension in the History of the Missionary Movement," In *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions 1880–1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, 1–25 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 14–16, Walls sees this as a characteristic of American missionary activity that uniquely fit the American experience and blended well with corollary concepts of voluntarism, entrepreneurial ways and means of carrying out missionary vision and activities. The setting was distinctly different from European practices that reflected less voluntarism and more coercion of Church by the State.

<sup>28</sup>Jay Riley Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel: American Evangelicals and World Christianity, 1812–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 257.

and feel differently in various non-Western settings. Trails of persecution evident in Africa, Asia, and Latin America speak to the valiant efforts of many to protect conscience and religious conviction from despotic state controls.

Religious freedom, to be meaningful, is tolerant of religious pluralism but protects the right of persuasion regarding one's own convictions in a free exchange of ideas. This is religious dialogue with purpose and done well the weight of the message convinces and converts, not the strong-arm of political coercion. To undermine voluntary persuasion minimalizes the views of others because contrary convictions are ignored. Religious disagreement can be civil and polite.

Where cultures and civilizations clash, the gospel of World Christianity thrives especially if freedom of conscience is protected and where it's not it depends on a believer's willingness to affirm the gospel regardless of costs, even possibly paying the ultimate sacrifice. Expansion of World Christianity is and has been costly.

### Conclusion

"Listen to me and you shall hear, news hath not been this thousand year"<sup>29</sup>

When first this English ballad was sung, it seemed like the world was topsy-turvy. Cromwell tried to abolish traditional English celebrations of Christmas. Once again it was significant when Cornwallis surrendered to Washington after the battle of Yorktown. To the English, and the colonized Americans, the world seemed radically different for opposite reasons. The upstart set of colonies defeated the world's super power, Great Britain, to gain freedom. One's loss blossomed into the other's gain.

The bustling of Christianity in the non-Western world is another such moment in history. The loss of center stage for the West is leadership opportunity for the rest of the world's Christians. It may not alter biblical truth and the theologically universal elements therein, but it does change the perspective from which we address theology, especially its application. Historical awareness of God's activity globally is shifted in these contemporary scenes. Marginal voices of those believers who are self-identifying as part of a global family that affirms particular bundles of doctrinal assumptions and call themselves by denominational names can contribute to worldwide discussion of the Christian faith, and are doing so. Additionally, religious freedom is always a struggle to achieve and to protect. The church worldwide has vested interested in asserting and witnessing to this need far and wide.

So this is our brave new world. It changes at broadband speed. Yet it is the new serial segment in Christ's story to the nations. As the Church

<sup>29</sup>For the full citation of the ballad see *The World Is Turned Upside Down*. [Microform] to the Tune of, *When the King Enjoys His Own Again* Thomason Tracts 246:669.F.10 [47] London, 1646.

reflects continuity with earlier serial formations it also develops new, perhaps sometimes contrasting ones. Each one is to play a role in the unfolding drama and it is *to be continued*.