



MISSION

ISSUE 3 2018

# CATALYST

*Intelligent comment on faith and culture*



## WORLD RELIGIONS

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# A FUTURE FULL OF QUESTIONS



THE FUTURE ISN'T SPACE-FORCE SHINY. IT'S COMPLEX AND FULL OF HARD QUESTIONS. BUT IF WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO ASK THEM, THE KINGDOM WILL BENEFIT.

I still believe in mission. As a word and as a concept. Not everyone in this issue does. And that's okay – *Mission Catalyst* is all about challenging assumptions, even those at the core of who BMS World Mission is. We must always, as thinking Christians, be open to questions.

And as you read the articles and infographics that follow, you'll notice some key questions coming out. Does mission need to be West to Rest or North to South? Does it need to involve sending at all? Does it need to be 'professional'? Must it involve proclamation, and what does it need to proclaim? These are all good questions as we ponder what the future of mission might be and what organisations like BMS should be for over the next 225 years of their existence.

But there are other questions, too.

If mission should be less about sending people to 'be mission workers' and more about Christians being witnesses where they are, why should Christians here (or in any country) support it financially? If we are to stop what we currently do in favour of letting Christians in every context just be themselves and minister to their cities and districts, what will fall through the gaps?

As we mention again and again the decline of Christianity in the UK, can we

think of another country this evangelised and this wealthy where we'd gladly send our best and brightest to help to build the kingdom? Would we, for instance, ask North Korean believers to offer themselves for service in Canterbury or ask Indian churches to answer a special appeal for funds for soup kitchens in York?

The changing demography of global Christianity (and a Christian future that is far from Eurocentric) also opens questions to us regarding our position, our responsibility and, yes, our privilege and arrogance as British believers.

So, as we talk about listening to the voices of the World Church, which voices do we mean? Those of our brothers and sisters who consider homosexuality worthy of the death penalty and women in leadership as anathema? Those wealthy believers in 'manifest destiny' for whom God and (often red, white and blue) flag are indivisibly intertwined? Or another, more carefully-selected and progressive-palatable section of Jesus' followers beyond these shores?

In our efforts to avoid the traps of imperialism and arrogance, do we put ourselves in danger of imposing yet another western philosophical construct on the Church (and the unchurched) abroad: the idea that transcending one's own culture is both possible and desirable

in pursuit of authentic Church, authentic mission?

Might, as an alternative, the future of *our* mission involve a transmission of our culture's interpretation of our faith – carrying the best aspects of that interpretation unapologetically, but also humbly? Could we welcome similar transmissions from the Church around the world and encourage spaces of hearing without always assuming (in a perverse reversal of colonial missionary arrogance) that 'their' way is necessarily better than 'ours' (any more than ours was ever the pure, unenculturated truth)?

I still believe in mission because I believe we are all called to witness to God's glory and to help his kingdom to break out. I believe in mission because the wealth and freedom we enjoy come with a responsibility to share with those who have less. And I believe in mission because in it we have the most direct and authentic opportunity to hear and learn from the world – if we will but listen.

I hope this issue of *Catalyst* will be a helpful step on your path towards participating fully in a truly global Church, sharing, learning and growing together – and making God's kingdom more evident.

**Jonathan Langley**

Editor, *Mission Catalyst*

Head of Creative Content, BMS World Mission

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Come to **Catalyst Live 2018** in Birmingham and Bristol on 7 and 8 November 2018. Watch specially recorded video from Stanley Hauerwas (who sadly can't make it in person because of surgery). Hear from wonderful Christian thinkers like Paula Gooder, Amy Orr-Ewing and Dame Elizabeth Berridge. Explore disability, journalism, biblical archaeology, music, comedy and poetry with our other speakers in a TED-style format, and prepare yourself for the mission of tomorrow, through the mission of the mind.



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# THE FUTURE OF MISSION: SOUTH VERSUS NORTH?

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*EAST VERSUS WEST IS SO LAST CENTURY.*

*WELCOME TO THE CURRENT REALITY.*

*WHAT WILL BE THE NEXT?*

At the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 on problems facing Protestant missions, mission was conceived geographically as from West to East. Of the southern continents, Latin America was not considered at this conference, and Africa was given little attention. Moreover, mission was unidirectional. European peoples were considered to possess the gospel, which needed to be “carried” to the “non-Christian world”.

In contrast, at the centenary conference in Edinburgh in 2010 the geographical references were to a North-South dynamic, with mission conceived as reciprocal and flowing in both directions.

How is it that in 100 years there was such a significant change in perception of the global geography of mission? And what does this shift suggest about the future of mission?

To answer these questions, we need to examine the global affairs with which world mission is inevitably entangled. Edinburgh 1910 took place at the high point of the British Empire which controlled much of world trade, the global economy, and international relations. After two world wars, the United States became the leading global power, but until 1989 it was strongly opposed by a second power – the Soviet Union. The global stand-off known as the Cold War between liberal democracy and Communism divided East from West. Not only was the western world separated from Russia and Eastern Europe, but missionary access to China and India, which had been the largest mission fields, was severely restricted by the Communist revolution in China in 1950 and post-colonial resistance to foreign interference in India.

As Communism and post-colonialism spread and non-Christian religions became resurgent, much of the northern hemisphere became inaccessible to western missions, so they turned their attention to the regions that were still open to mission work. These were mainly Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific Islands, and parts of South-East Asia. They mostly comprised countries that were economically poor and lacking in infrastructure, education, health care, stable institutions, and good governance.

As part of its policy to contain

the West/North was even more dominant globally. The growth of churches in the Global South to outnumber those in the North suggested they had greater faith. But northern Christians tended to think of their religion as more developed. The tensions generated increased the formation of independent churches in the South and contributed to splits in global bodies, for example the Anglican Communion. However, the Global South should not be thought of as one place or a single entity that is ranged against the North. The Majority World population which lives outside the West/North is extremely diverse and has many competing interests, and the same is true of the churches.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new centres of economic and military power have emerged – Russia, China, and India, for

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“ *To combat Communism the USA launched international development* ”

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Communism after the Second World War, the USA launched its programme of “international development” to bring what were considered the benefits of modernity to the “under-developed” world. Relief and development aid flowed from the North to the South, and increasingly global economics were described in North-South terms. Because engagement in education, health care, and other services had been part of western missionary activity in the colonial period, many mission agencies continued this work under the auspices of development. Although the secularisation of development caused a backlash among western agencies that prioritised evangelism in the sense of proclamation and church planting, they also increasingly worked from North to South.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc in the early 1990s, the US became, for a period, the only superpower, and

example. The world no longer appears as divided into North and South or East and West. It is becoming increasingly polycentric. Similarly, Christian mission has become multi-directional with significant missionary movements from new centres such as South Korea, China, Brazil, and Nigeria, while western missionary sending declines. As a result of 2,000 years of mission and renewal movements, there are very few places on the globe without some form of Christian witness. Moreover, migration movements are changing the religious map and bringing Christians from different regions into contact with each other. As global instability and mutual suspicion between peoples increases, the challenge for mission today is whether we can recognise one another as fellow Christians, share our gifts, and work together in the one mission of God.



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STANLEY HAUERWAS is one of the most influential theologians of the last century. He will be appearing in a specially recorded video interview at **Catalyst Live**. ROB BELL is a popular writer, speaker and podcaster, controversial for his shift from megachurch media pastor to poster-boy for progressive post-evangelicalism.



Q&A

# STANLEY HAUERWAS & ROB BELL

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*THE GREAT THEOLOGIAN AND THE POPULAR PROGRESSIVE  
ON THE FUTURE OF CHURCH, MISSION AND THE FAITH.*

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## STANLEY HAUERWAS

**Should the Church be propelled outwards, to have an effect on the world?**

Well of course, the Church has a mission into the world, that mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. And it is to discover what that means in many different ways. You have to be careful, because the mission sometimes forgets that it is formed

by Jesus Christ as Lord, and it carries the Church into a social agency that primarily wants to make the poor (and other folk seen as under oppression) middle class. There's nothing wrong with being middle class, but it's not the vision that the Church is about. So how the Church can be present in the world is an ongoing project that is not easily accomplished.

**Michael Stroope has argued that mission is a problem now for the Church, that mission is always colonialist, it's always**

**linked to something around globalisation in a grasping kind of way. Do you think we have that kind of problem with mission?**

The Church is mission, because it is always the proclamation of what God has done in a way that is good news to the people that are in churches as well as people who are out of church. So of course the Church is always a people on the move. And so mission is the outworking of the possessed piece of witness as part and parcel of Christian truth for us.

**That reminds me of Antony Bevan's phrase 'the Church doesn't have a mission but the mission has a Church'.** I think that's wonderfully put.

**What would you like to see then as the future of mission and the World Church, if you look forward over the next 20, 30 years?**

A very basic commitment of Christians in different geographic areas resolving never to kill one another. That would be I think a signal to the world that this is a people in a dangerous world, a murderous world, who need one another because they can't kill in order to survive. And of course, they can't kill one another but they can't kill at all, and that means that you're often going to have to watch innocent people suffer for your convictions. And that's going to put you in a very strange position.

That's first and foremost. I think also that what it means for Christians to learn, from other Christians, ways of being Christian is absolutely crucial. One of the problems with Christianity in America particularly, is when Christians have a lot of money it makes being a Christian a hard task. What it means to be able to share resources I think is going to be one of the crucial questions before us.

## ROB BELL

**I work for a mission society that helps local people make sure that mothers and babies are no longer dying in childbirth in rural villages in Afghanistan. That's very different from the awful colonialist image we sometimes associate with the word 'mission'. What might the future of mission be?**

I think you always go back to the fact that Jesus called 'disciples' and probably the best modern word for that is 'student'. So begin with curiosity. Imagine with all those horrific colonial imperial situations if they had said: "Tell you what, we are going to be just down the street, we're going to be just around the corner, we would like to ask questions and see if there's any way we can help. What do you need? What is needed in this time and in this place?"

I begin with: "Is this unquestioned good for whoever needs it most?" Because the good news announcement will come in lots of different forms. To me it will always look like: "What does good news look like for these people, in this place, at this time?" So, these people over here are hungry. We can do all the studies on the gospel of John we want, these people

## Hear more Hauerwas (sort-of) live!

A longer video interview with Stanley Hauerwas will be exclusively shown to audiences at **Catalyst Live 2018** in Birmingham and Bristol on 7 and 8 November. Professor Hauerwas' contribution will appear with exciting talks by Paula Gooder, Amy Orr-Ewing and Alistair Brown, as well as musical comedy from performance poet/songwriters Harry and Chris and contributions from archaeologists, journalists, musicians and theologians.

**Visit [BMS-CatalystLive.com](http://BMS-CatalystLive.com) to view the full line-up and buy your tickets today.**

can't hear us because their stomachs are grumbling. You go back to if it's good news – like you talk about in Afghanistan.

There is always the danger of people saying: "we need to get back to how the Early Church did it." I guarantee you that, whatever the Early Church was, the one thing they would not say is: "do it like this." They would say: "We work in our time and our place, asking: "what is Spirit up to? What does good news look like?" So you ask those questions. And they will probably have different answers in different places.

And that to me is the curiosity of a student, who goes in not with: "I have what you need," but: "tell me about your world and what's happening here, and is there any way that we can help and serve and contribute and help move things forward?" That's just a completely different discussion. And much more interesting.

**What do you think the Church is going to look like in the future?**

When we talk about 'the Church' are we talking about Syrian Copts, or Southern Baptists, or Anglicans, or Pentecostals in Latin America? Whenever people use that word I'm always fascinated to find out what they mean, because often they're

really referring to the thing they grew up in. Like: "Oh, you're referring to 271 people in the state of Alabama? Got it."

What you're seeing now is the re-appropriation of space. For many people in the modern world, 'church' meant a temperate space that you come in out of the world to – and gather with each other and the divine. And I think you're going to see more people less concerned with the built temple and saying more: "let's refer to the whole *thing* as a temple." So: art, business, education, economics, planting a garden, raising a family – it's *all* happening in a temple. And that to me is the great leap.

It's not: "let's build a space where we can hide from how the world is, in our own little temple," but: "let's create spaces where people can have their eyes opened to the holiness and the sanctity of all life." Which I reckon is at the heart of all true Christian worship. Having your eyes open. This bread and wine is holy because all bread and wine is holy. Because all of life is holy.

We crave community and connection as human beings. Our cells are bonded with other cells to make us. Molecules bonded with other molecules to make cells, atoms bonded with other atoms to make molecules... All the way down to the smallest elements of our being, life bonds with life to make something more.

I think you are always going to see a human need to connect with others to journey with. So, it's funny when people say to me: "I don't want anything to do with church, man. It's just me and my friends and we get together and we have some beer and we discuss late into the night. Every now and then we pitch in to pay each other's rent..." What you're describing is a community. Throw some bread and wine in there and you've got the Early Church! You know what I mean?

I think it's also important to remember the cyclical nature of things. Things begin to calcify as they institutionalise and they lose that limber flexible ability to follow Spirit wherever it leads. So then that thing, that big, bulky, monolith has to be blown to pieces. Then people are inventing laptops in their garages. They don't have big budgets and they don't have big buildings – the cathedrals are empty but the pubs are more alive than ever. And then someone says: "Will you read this poem?" And then someone says: "Let's do some bread and wine." Do you know what I mean?

A friend of mine always says: whatever needs to die, let it die. Just relax and let it die.

*Stanley Hauerwas was talking to Mark Ord. Many thanks to Durham University. Rob Bell was talking to Jonathan Langley. Many thanks to Greenbelt Festival and the Holy Shift tour.*

# FOUR CRUCIAL ISSUES

## THE FUTURE SHAPE OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

OUR THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE WILL NEED TO CHANGE IF OUR MISSION IS TO BE RELEVANT IN TOMORROW'S WORLD.

**O**ur world today is undergoing tremendous changes. What will the shape of future mission from Britain be? I want to reflect on four crucial issues which will determine the quality of Christian mission into the next century.

### 1. An appropriate theology of mission

Christian mission is rooted in the unchanging character and purposes of God for the world to know Jesus Christ and for the Church to be a community who participates in the life and mission of God. In past centuries, the goal of mission was to send out western mission workers to convert people groups to Christianity. Today, there is a growing recognition that the whole gospel must be shared through both word and deed. Mission is no longer the calling of a few sent out into the world, but is a privilege of participation for every believer, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Therefore, the Church's comprehensive mission will include evangelism, church planting, challenging injustices, and caring for creation as well as showing what it means to be a reconciling community.

### 2. A changing Christian demography

Even as Christianity has grown rapidly in the Global South, it is declining in her traditional centres of Europe, North

America and Oceania. Instead of sending western mission workers as our model, we can train, support and catalyse local discipleship movements for national and cross regional missions. Europe is now a post-Christian continent, there is a need to educate and challenge western Christians to welcome learnings and leadership from the Global Church for the re-evangelisation of Europe. Migration has brought a new context for mission vocation for every church. The future of Christian mission will be determined by the quality of meaningful and mutual partnership between non-western Christianity and the post-Christian West.

### 3. A deeper engagement between religions

Generally, less than three to five per cent of the world's religionists (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews) have turned to Christianity, despite reports of the shift of Christianity towards non-western peoples. Rapid church growths have primarily been seen among tribal communities, secularised individuals and among those marginalised by their majority cultures. But not so with world religions. 200 years of Protestant mission work have not seen Christianity rise above 33 per cent of the world population. The future of mission will need a new approach beyond preaching the gospel and planting churches. New engagements, such as stronger interreligious apologetics,

presenting the gospel as a whole-life discipleship that transforms nations.

### 4. A role for Christian missions from the West?

Given the decline of Christianity in the West, there is a danger that British churches abdicate our responsibility for global mission. The reality is that over 60 per cent of Christian resources remain firmly located in the West. Meanwhile, Christian missions from Africa, Latin America and Asia are still in their infancy and have much to learn from the sending structures of older Churches. In our world today, over 3.5 billion people still do not know Jesus – of which over 80 per cent of the world's non-Christians do not even personally know a Christian friend. The majority of seekers coming from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam continue to live in communities where the gospel is not assessible because there are no local churches within a thousand mile radius and they have never met a Christian friend. For example, more than 50 per cent of the small towns in Japan (with populations of about 200,000) are still without a single church.

The good news is there are indigenous witnesses on all continents of our needy world. Western missions could play a catalytic role as we partner humbly with newer missions from the Global South. Together, we participate in the mission of God for the healing and rebirth of the entire creation. We confess that deep and lasting transformation can only come through the new life of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Mission is no longer the monopoly of a select few but the privilege of every disciple: to share Jesus and see lives transformed among all nations.

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“ 200 years of Protestant mission haven't seen Christianity rise above 33 per cent of the world ”

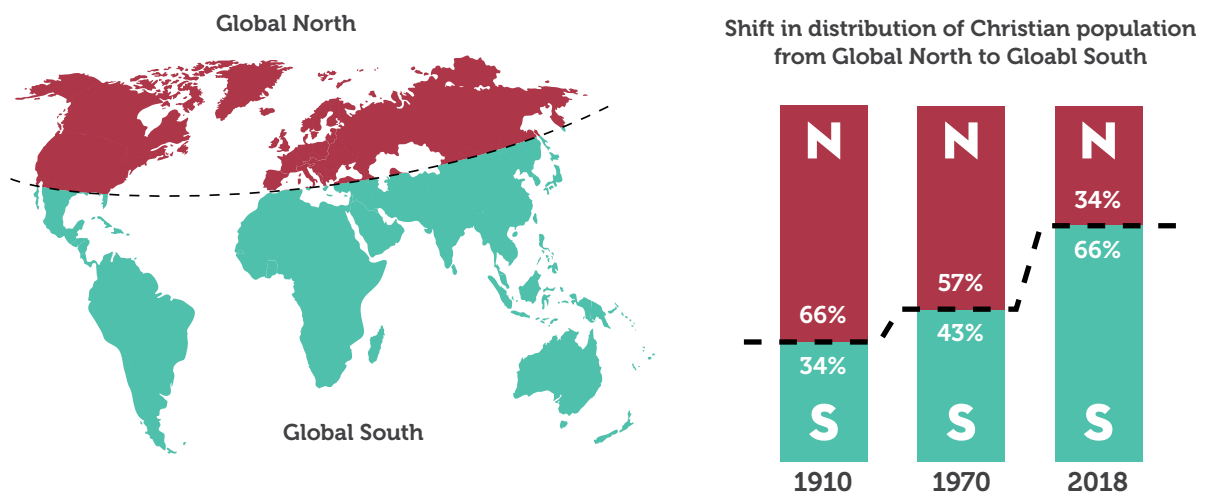
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Gina A Zurlo

Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, USA, and Co-Editor of the Yearbook of International Religious Demography

# FUTURE TRENDS: THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY

*A LEADING STATISTICIAN BREAKS DOWN THE NUMBERS BEHIND  
THE FUTURE OF THE GLOBAL RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE.*



Countries with the highest Christian population. ● Global North ● Global South



Christianity is the world's largest religion: 2.5 billion people representing 33% of the world's population. The demographic makeup of Christ's followers changed dramatically during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1910, 66% of all Christians lived in the Global North (Europe and North America); by 1970, 57% lived in the Global North, and by today (2018), only 34% live in the Global North and 66% in the Global

South (Asia, Africa, Latin America). Latin America is home to the highest percentage of Christian affiliation at 92%, followed by Europe (77%) and North America (76%). This year, however, marks the first year that Africa has the most Christians – 30 million more than Latin America. Eight of the ten countries with the most Christians in 2018 are in the Global South: Brazil, Mexico, China, Philippines, Nigeria,

Democratic Republic of Congo, India, and Ethiopia.

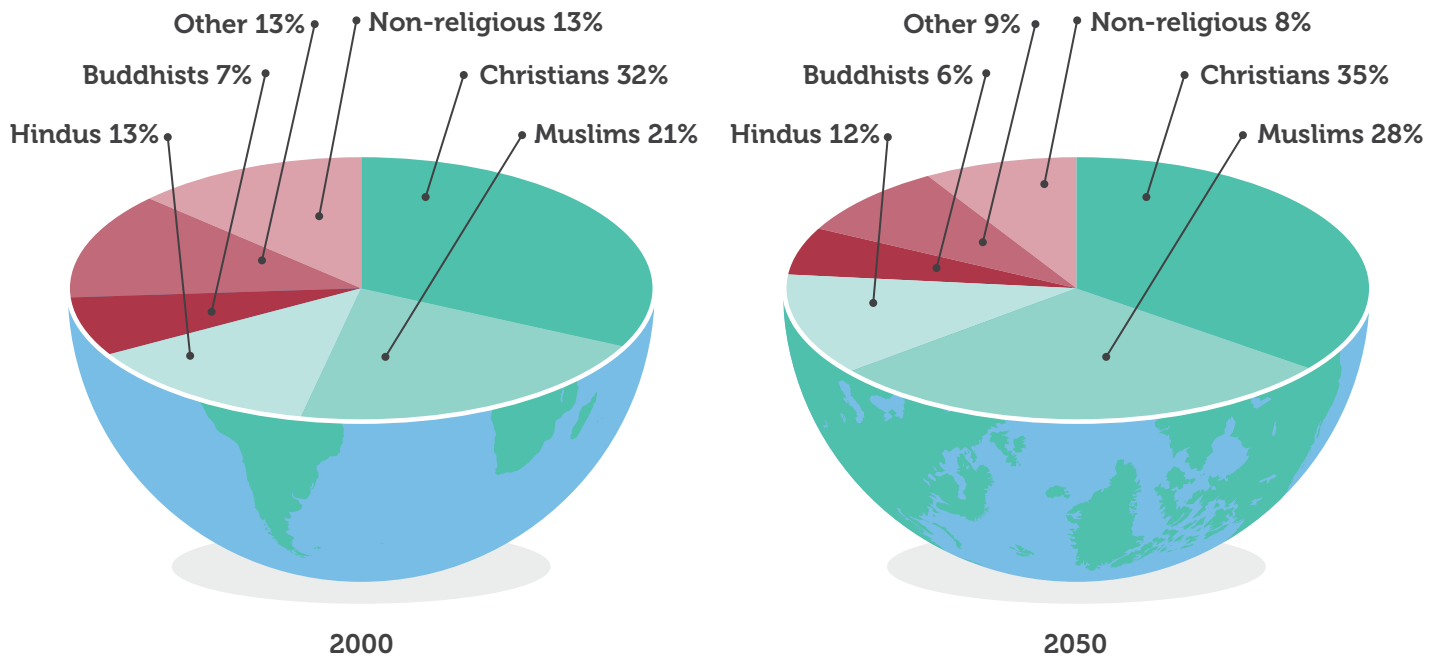
Knowing that Christianity has changed so dramatically over the last several centuries, what does the next century look like for the faith? Here are three quick points about the status of world Christianity in 2018 and the future.



## 1. Christians and Muslims together will constitute nearly two thirds (64%) of the world's population by 2050.

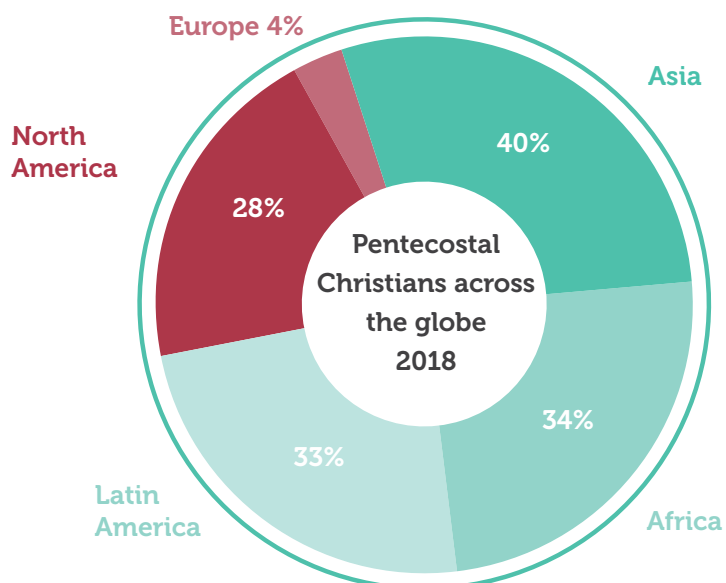
Muslims have one of the highest growth rates between 2010 and 2020 (2.2% increase per year) and are thus poised to grow to 2.8 billion by 2050. Christianity is growing slightly slower (1.3% per year), though Pentecostal/charismatic and

evangelical Christianity are each growing at over 2% per year. In 2050, Christians will be 35% of the world's population (3.5 billion) and, overall, the world is likely to become more religious (91.5%), with only 8.5% non-religious (atheist and agnostic).

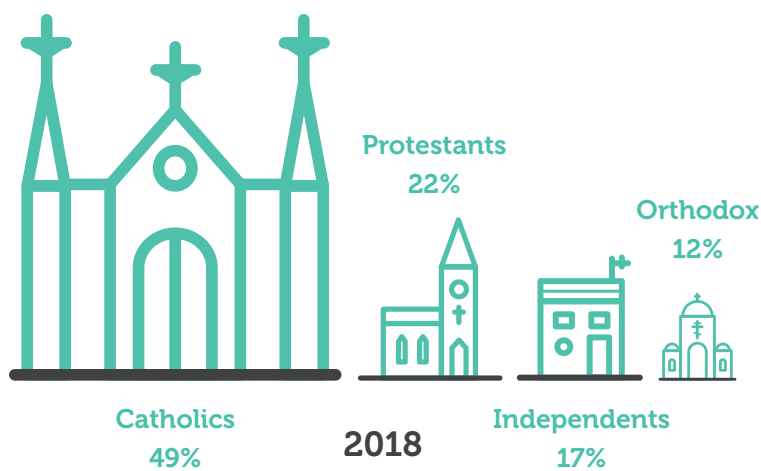
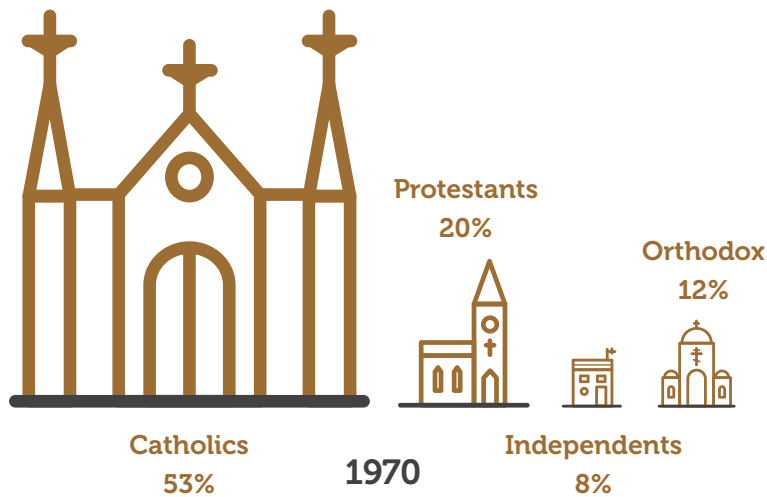


## 2. World Christianity is becoming more Pentecostal/charismatic in nature.

Historic “mainline” churches have remained somewhat static as a portion of the world's Christians between 1970 and today, but there has been a significant rise in Pentecostal/charismatic churches. In 1970, only 5% of the world's Christians were Pentecostal/charismatic, but by 2018, over 27% are, and by 2050 31% likely will be. Asia is home to the largest proportion of Pentecostals/charismatics (40%), followed by Africa (34%), Latin America (33%), and Northern America (28%). Europe has the smallest concentration of Pentecostal/charismatics at only 4%.







### 3. Independent Christianity is growing much faster than Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.

Independent Christians are those who self-identify outside of traditional Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity, such as African Independent Churches, house church movements in China and elsewhere, Independent charismatic networks, and churches that claim a “post-denominational” characterisation. Leaders of these churches and their members typically self-identify as “independent” and are not formally connected to Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christianity. The global Church is experiencing a substantial increase of Independent Christianity, where Independents nearly equal Protestants.

### Make up of Christians by denomination

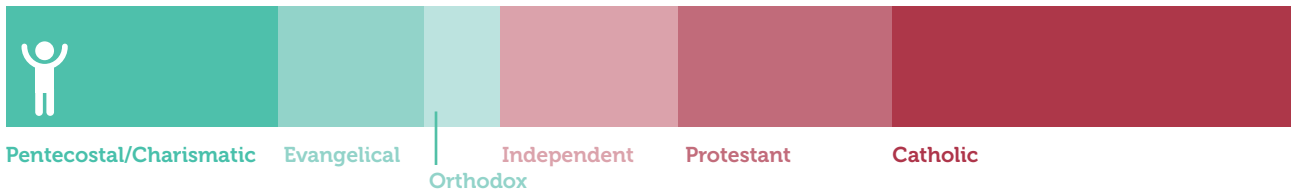
1970 Total Christians: 1,229,448,000



2015 Total Christians: 2,408,048,000



2050 Total Christians: 3,467,159,000



These demographic trends pose very important questions for pastors, church leaders, mission organisations, and others. There are serious theological implications of Christianity’s shift to the South. What can churches in the West learn from those in the South who are now in the majority? How does the new makeup of global Christianity impact mission worldwide? These, and other, pressing questions should be at the forefront of theological investigation at both the local and global levels.

Eddie Arthur

Director of Strategic Initiatives for Global Connections (a UK-based network for mission thinking and support) and former Executive Director of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Eddie is currently completing a PhD in contemporary beliefs and practices among UK mission agencies.

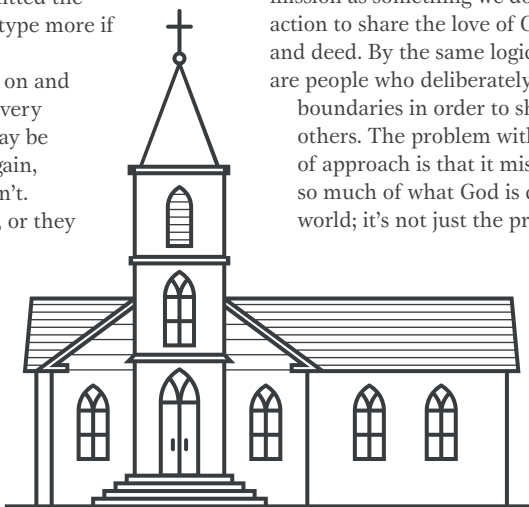
# DO UK MISSION AGENCIES HAVE A FUTURE?

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MISSION IF THE WORLD NO LONGER NEEDS 'CHRISTIAN BRITAIN' TO GO TO IT WITH THE GOSPEL?

Thirty years ago, my wife and I, along with our one-year-old son, moved into a village in the centre of Côte d'Ivoire, to start learning the local language and culture, so that we could join a Bible translation project. You could tell we were missionaries; we tried to help people as much as we could, we worked hard to fit in with the local culture and we participated in the life of the small village church. Oh, and we were the only white people in the village and (despite thinking of ourselves as not very well off) we were far richer than anyone else around. We were part of a movement that stretches back to William Carey, and, short of wearing a pith helmet and dubious khaki shorts, we couldn't have fitted the missionary stereotype more if we'd tried.

Three decades on and missionaries look very different. They may be white, but then again, they probably aren't. They may be rich, or they may not be, and they certainly won't be wearing a pith helmet. Today's missionaries are refugees witnessing to Christ in tent

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cities across the globe, Philipino taxi drivers sharing their faith as they drive their cabs in the cities of the Middle East, Chinese businessmen working in Africa, African students at universities in secular Europe, Brazilian church planters in Asia and British believers serving under local church leadership in Latin America.

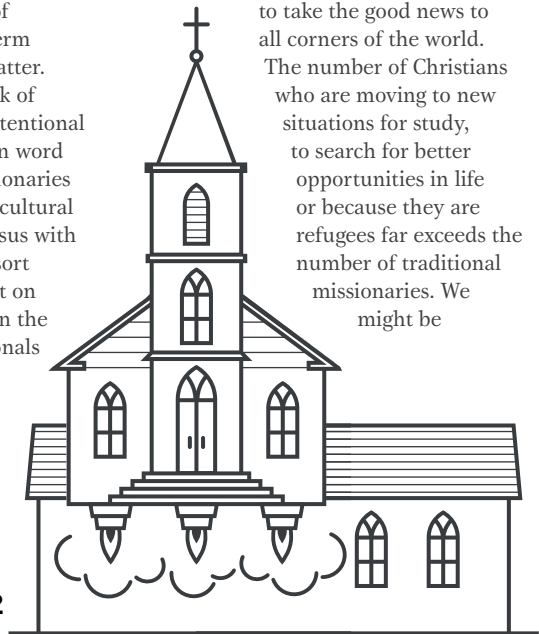
I realise that some people might question that last paragraph; refugees, cab drivers, businessmen and students might well be sharing Christ with people, but they aren't really missionaries. However, all this does is raise the question of what we mean when we use the term missionary, or mission, for that matter. We've become accustomed to think of mission as something we do; an intentional action to share the love of Christ in word and deed. By the same logic, missionaries are people who deliberately cross cultural boundaries in order to share Jesus with others. The problem with this sort of approach is that it misses out on so much of what God is doing in the world; it's not just the professionals

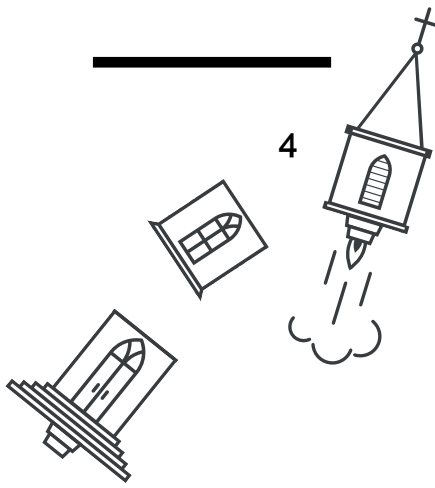
who are taking the message of Jesus to the world.

Over recent years, we've started to think of mission in terms of God's actions in the world, rather than as something that we do. God calls us to participate in *his* mission, rather than just leaving us to get on with it. When we look at mission in perspective, we realise that it is far bigger than we had ever imagined. People are moving around the globe in unprecedented numbers and God is

using these movements to take the good news to all corners of the world. The number of Christians who are moving to new situations for study, to search for better opportunities in life or because they are refugees far exceeds the number of traditional missionaries. We might be

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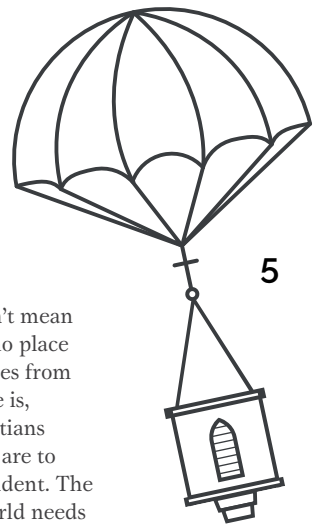
becoming increasingly diverse as time moves on.

So, what does this have to do with us? The first thing is that we need to humbly re-evaluate our place in what God is doing around the world. Britain has a magnificent missionary history and we can reel of the names of heroes of the faith who came from these islands; William Carey, James Hudson Taylor, C.T. Studd, Amy Carmichael and the list goes on. However, we must not allow this wonderful history to determine our future. We simply aren't as important to the world mission movement as we once were or as we might like to think we are. We have to be prepared to learn from others and to take a lead from the innovations that Christians in other parts of the world are coming up with rather than expecting that we will be the ones in charge. This also means that we need to be careful in our use of finance. Whatever the state of the Church in the UK, we are still a relatively wealthy nation and if we are not careful, we can use our money to force our agenda on others without even realising that we are doing so.

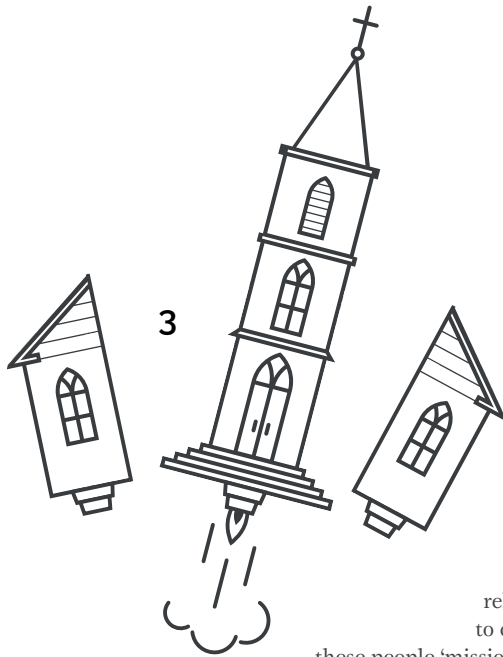
When you put all of the current trends together, it is clear that mission agencies, such as BMS World Mission, are facing an existential crisis. They came into existence in order to take the gospel from Christian

to grasp this nettle and work together if they are to survive.

This doesn't mean that there is no place for missionaries from the UK. There is, because Christians and churches are to be interdependent. The rest of the world needs us - and we need the rest of the world. If the British Church is to thrive in the future, it will be because God blesses us through an infusion of brothers and sisters from around the world. They may come as formal missionaries, or they may be students, business people and immigrants. It is quite probable that they won't have all of their theological Ts crossed and Is dotted, but they will bring an experience and expectation of God working in their lives that we desperately need in the UK today. The big question is whether we are ready to welcome and learn from people who don't fit our stereotypes of what missionaries and Christian workers should be like. To my mind, this is still an open question.



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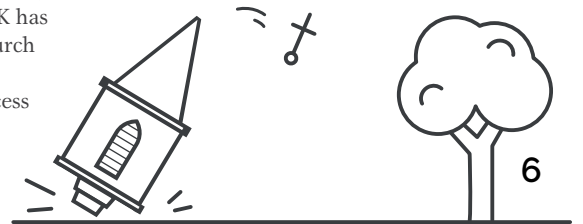
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reluctant to call these people 'missionaries', but they are a part of God's mission to our world and we need to recognise that. To be

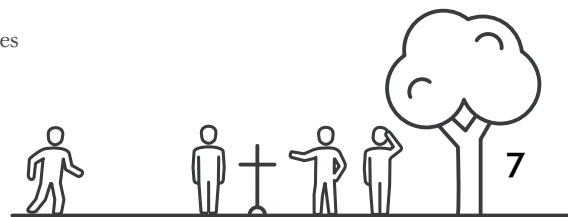
honest, there is nothing surprising here. Christianity has always spread through the organic, unsung witness of ordinary believers as much as through the influence of missionaries, pastors and others. There is another aspect to this movement of people that we need to consider: millions of people who would be unlikely to hear about Jesus in their home situation are moving to countries where they can encounter the gospel for the first time. After decades of missionary activity in the Middle East, we are now seeing significant numbers of Iranians being baptised as believers, but in the UK, not in their home country. God's mission to the world is much broader and diverse than the missionary movement that we are familiar with. Not only that, but it is growing and

Britain to the rest of the world. However, in the last two hundred years, the UK has become less Christian, while the Church has grown in much of the rest of the world (partly in response to the success of the mission movement). History has moved on, leaving agencies facing in the wrong direction. However, there is a further, hidden problem. Although church attendance in the UK has been in decline for a long period of time, the number of mission agencies has continued to increase. A growing number of agencies are looking to find recruits and a supporter base from a shrinking pool of Christians. This is simply not sustainable, even in the short term and agencies need

*“ We simply aren't as important to the world mission movement as we once were ”*



6



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*Michael Stroope*

*Veteran of over 21 years' missionary service with the International Mission Board, Associate Professor of Christian Missions at Baylor University, USA, and author of Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition.*

## CHANGING LANGUAGE, OPENING POSSIBILITIES

Language is important. Words matter as they form who we are and our view of the world. They are channels through which we communicate to others our identity and frame of reality. Through language, we embrace the world as it is and project what could be.

In my recent book (see *Delve deeper*, page 16), I examine the language of mission (*missions, missional, missionary*). At the centre of my enquiry are questions regarding the source and meaning of mission language, its use and aims. Is it biblical? If not, when did the Church begin using this language? What extrabiblical

baggage accompanied its introduction into the Church?

While most Christians view mission as biblical and thus sacred language, mission, in its present religious use, did not enter the church's vocabulary until 1539. As Spain and Portugal began exploring and colonising, the Catholic Church accompanied the State to new lands and peoples. Ignatius de Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, took existing language and infused it with new meaning in order to depict their willingness to go wherever commanded by the Pope. Protestants initially resisted this distinctive Catholic

term but eventually adopted it around 1700.

Mission emerged at the outset of the modern era and eventually became a tradition – the modern mission movement. The meaning and use of mission grew and morphed in order to accommodate social and theological shifts. In turn, mission became more and more ambiguous and confusing. Its association with colonial expansion and occupation, as well as modern notions of progress and development, present serious questions concerning its past, as well as its future. Adding to this murkiness is its present-

*David Smith*

*Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of Aberdeen. The following is an edited extract from a longer response to Michael Stroope.*

## FACING A MAJOR JUNCTION OR REACHING THE END OF THE LINE?

I must beg forgiveness if I confess that I am drawn back again to William Carey. I am reminded that the religious context in which Protestant missions began in these islands was one in which a deterministic hyper-Calvinism had paralysed all evangelistic activity. When William Carey preached his famous sermon in 1792 containing the phrase “expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God”, he was met by resistance and inaction from contemporaries whose theology allowed no place for human agency in the outworking of the divine decrees. Christians often walk a tightrope

between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and while I unreservedly welcome Michael Stroope's call for a renewed kingdom theology, this must not result in a passive dependence upon God and the neglect of human agency in the outworking of the divine purposes.

So I must go back to the title of his book and ask: *what might the transcending of mission actually look like?* I was drawn to the book by the promise encapsulated within the word ‘transcending’. The word suggests the reality of a divine, heavenly foundation for Christian existence and witness, hence Michael Stroope's stress

on the kingdom; but ‘transcending’ also implies, I think, a respect and affirmation for what has gone before. That pre-existing tradition has necessarily been limited and flawed, as all human constructs are, yet it seems to me that it pointed in the right direction and played its part in the divine purpose. Andrew Walls' recent writing has direct bearing on this discussion:

*The missionary movement... differed in concept from crusading in that it depended upon persuasion and demonstration, rather than compulsion. This took mission into concerns that crusaders rarely had to*



# SCENDED MISSION?

## CURRENTLY BEING DEBATED.

day use in diplomacy, business, the space industry, and routine speech.

Scrutiny of our use of mission is absolutely necessary, if we are to faithfully engage the world and proclaim with effect the good news of Jesus Christ. The realities and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require a clear expression of who we are and a certain vision of the kingdom of God. Because vibrant forms of Christianity exist all over the world, we need language that communicates a desire to come alongside and learn from others. Because thriving centres of Christianity exist in Africa and Latin America, the gospel no longer travels in just one direction but is multi-directional. As territory and distance no longer restrict cross-cultural ministry, Christians everywhere must be encouraged in their witness and service. Mission language fails to engage these new realities. Language that enables and inspires is needed.

What might be better, more biblical language? As authentic witness requires humility, mutuality and love, our language must convey our need for personal transformation and the necessity of God's



*Triggered.*

power. The imagery of *Pilgrim Witness* fosters this kind of vision. With *pilgrim*, the focus is on living without privilege or place, acting with humility, and coming alongside others. Likewise, pilgrim language is biblical. Abraham, Moses and Israel sojourned as exiles in foreign places and among strangers. Peter identified early

believers as “aliens” and “sojourners” (1 Pet 1: 1; 2: 11). The early Church Fathers and monastics self-described as pilgrims. With *witness*, the emphasis is on who we are, as well as what we do. Jesus says, “you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1: 8). Scripture describes witness as a bi-directional move – beholding and telling. We behold the life-changing power of God, and then, we tell others what we have seen and experienced. A Pilgrim Witness is one who journeys with no claim to privilege and power, alongside those with whom she lives, works, and plays, and gives witness to what she has seen of God's power. The language of Pilgrim Witness carries the potential to change how we understand the reign of God, view ourselves, and act toward others.

The crux of the matter lies not in sending or going but in the reign of God that converts us into authentic witnesses, as we pilgrim with others to our places of work, along the high street, or across the globe. By changing language, we open ourselves to the ultimate concern – our witness to God and his possibilities for all people.

*worry about: learning a language, seeking to understand a society, looking for a place or niche within it, living – however unwillingly or uncomfortably – on terms set by others. The missionary movement from the West... was a semidetached part of the great European Migration – semidetached because its essential motor derived not from the economic, political and strategic interests that produced the migration, but from the nature of the Christian message itself.*

From *Crossing Cultural Frontiers*

With regard to the shape of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are many significant ‘signs of the times’ and I offer three quotations by way of example. First, the World Council of Churches’ statement *Together Toward Life* clearly reflects significant changes occurring within that body:

*The history of Christian mission has been characterised by geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the “unreached” territories, to the ends of the earth. But today we are facing a radically changed ecclesial*

*landscape described as “world Christianity” where the majority of Christians are either living, or have their origins in the global South and East.*

My second witness comes from the *Global Dictionary of Theology*, which I only discovered when teaching in Northern Nigeria last year. My quotation comes from one of many remarkable articles in this volume, this one on ‘Theological Method’ written by two Filipino theologians:

*Times have changed. With the collapse of Euro-American (Western) dominance in Christian theology, there is an increased recognition of a polycentric world Christianity, with an emphasis on many theological centres... The future beckons for a truly catholic Christianity that honors unity-in-diversity in both church and theology.*

And finally, I offer a statement concerning the context of the post-Christian West, especially Europe. This comes from one of the most interesting intellectuals at work at the present time, Terry Eagleton,

who teaches English Literature in the UK, Ireland, and North America, where he is Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Notre Dame. Eagleton concludes a brilliant recent study entitled *Culture and the Death of God* with these words:

*If religious faith were to be released from the burden of furnishing social orders with a set of rationales for their existence, it might be free to rediscover its true purpose as a critique of all such politics. In this sense, its superfluity might prove its salvation. The New Testament... [brings] the grossly inconvenient news that our forms of life must undergo radical dissolution if they are to be reborn as just and compassionate communities. The sign of that dissolution is a solidarity with the poor and powerless. It is here that a new configuration of faith, culture and politics might be born.*

If Eagleton is right, then we could indeed be moving toward a time when mission as we have known it will be completely transcended.



# THEY ASKED ME TO WRITE ABOUT THE FUTURE. SO LET'S TALK ABOUT THE 1880S

A VICTORIAN MISSIONARY HAS SOMETHING TO TEACH US ABOUT  
THE CHARACTER (AND ATTITUDE TO PRIVILEGE AND POWER) THE  
MISSION WORKERS OF THE FUTURE SHOULD HAVE.

The Bristol Baptist College building in the mid-80s, when I trained for ministry there, had a rather remarkable feature. Walking along the top corridor was a walk through history: each new intake was ritually photographed and duly hung in order, and 50 paces would take you from grimly bearded Victorian heroes to – well, us, who took life rather less seriously. We hung out by the billiard room.

Among those black-and-white pioneers was George Grenfell (1849-1906), who became a BMS missionary to the Congo. An indomitable explorer and evangelist, his story ought to be known by every Baptist. Tireless and fearless, he was the epitome of the heroic age of missions – and yes, he had a splendid beard.

Grenfell has always been a hero of mine – partly because of his exploits on the mission field, partly for a very different reason.

He was married, first, to Mary ('Polly') Hawkes, who died in 1877 at Victoria in the Cameroons after giving birth prematurely. Surviving pictures of Grenfell's family, however, show him

with another woman, who is black. She is Rose Edgerley, a Jamaican, who was his housekeeper and a member of the church in Victoria. After Polly died, Grenfell, overcome with loneliness, began what we would now call a 'relationship' with Rose and she became pregnant. The affair became known; Grenfell resigned from the Society and worked for a commercial

teacher in the Congo, where she died of haematuric fever at Bolobo in 1899. It was common enough: the missionary death-rate was appalling.

But what's so heroic about that, and what does the story have to say about the future of missions?

I don't, in fact, want to excuse him too much. He was in a position of power, and

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*“Future missionaries must go, not in power, but in weakness”*

---

concern. He and Rose married, and had a daughter.

Two years later, Grenfell was re-engaged by BMS as superintendent of the Congo mission station at Musuku. His family went with him. It was, by all accounts, a very happy marriage. Patience, his eldest daughter, was educated in England and Brussels and herself became

he abused it. That is never acceptable. He was right to resign, and it was right that his resignation was accepted.

But he was also right to marry Rose, at a time when white men were using black women for sex on an industrial scale without the remotest sense that they were responsible for the consequences. Whatever the initial irregularity, he and





*George Grenfell and his wife, Rose*

Rose seem to have cared deeply for each other. Would they have been allowed to marry, from the BMS point of view, if she had not been pregnant and he was still a serving missionary? It seems unlikely; this was 1878, close to Peak Empire, and miscegenation was generally seen as letting the white, 'civilised' side down. In wider colonial society, white men could take black mistresses, but if they married them they lost caste. Grenfell did it anyway, because he was a fundamentally decent man.

And perhaps this is what a Victorian missionary hero can contribute to a

discussion about mission's future.

There's a model of mission that involves agencies like BMS exporting the best and brightest the Church has to offer. They go to foreign parts to solve problems and meet needs, and do things that receiving churches can't. They are able and educated, driven and dedicated. They want to change the world, and they are prepared to labour for the cause in obscurity, sometimes in danger. They are called to serve, and they will go where they're called.

They are, in their way, heroes of the faith, though they would all deny it. And

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*“ Grenfell was a flawed, vulnerable and sinful human being, and a fundamentally decent man ”*

---

of course that's entirely appropriate – if mission agencies are to continue to have value, they have to identify and send those who are best equipped for the role to which they're called.

But Grenfell shows us another side of heroism. He was a flawed, vulnerable and sinful human being, very far from a spiritual superman. He epitomised not just the strengths of the empire-builder, but its weaknesses. Rather than maintain the privileged distance that prevailing prejudices and his race afforded him, he entered into an equal marriage partnership with Rose.

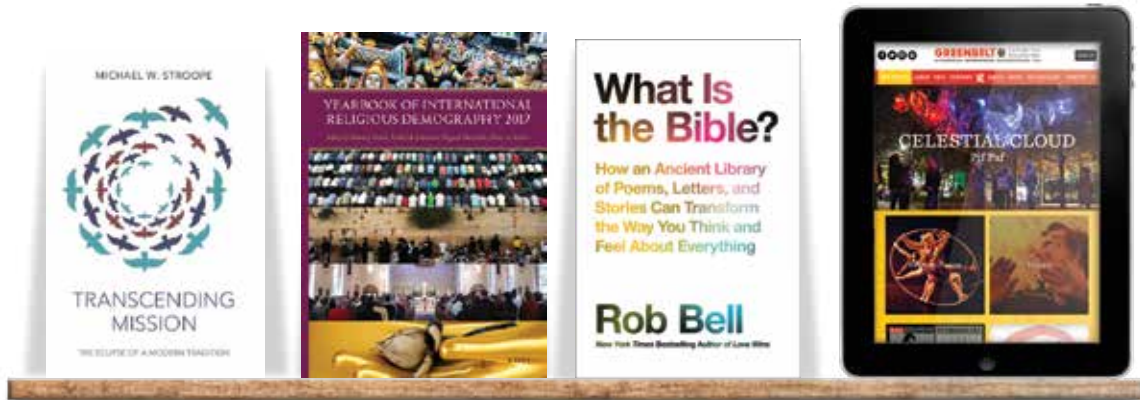
And Grenfell's situation, it seems to me, has something quite profound to say about the mission workers of the future. Though they will have certain strengths, they cannot operate from a position of strength. They will go to people from different cultures, who speak different languages, to share their lives with them rather than just to do a job. The relationship must be one of absolute equality between the receivers and the sent, tempered, on the side of the sent – as Grenfell's was tempered – by an acknowledgment of past injustices. They must go, not in power, but in weakness.

The old Bristol College building was sold years ago, and the pictures are in albums somewhere. That's just as well, because history is not just linear, a line down the corridor from fading mid-Victorian sepia to straight-to-Instagram digital snap. The past teaches us the future. We have a lot to learn from that picture of George and Rose.



# THE FUTURE OF MISSION

Forget your Heinleins, your Asimovs and your Nate Silvers. If you really want to build a future worth having for the Church and for mission, you could do a lot worse than starting here.



## BOOKS

### TRANSCENDING MISSION The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition

Michael Stroope

The history, biblical provenance and future of mission examined in a provocative conversation-starter from a former Southern Baptist missionary.

### TRANSFORMING MISSION Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

David J Bosch

Much debate around mission's potential futures will necessarily come back to Bosch. Recent editions include engagement with postmodern culture.

### YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Gina Zurlo, Todd Johnson, Brian Grim and Vegard Skirbekk  
A *Catalyst* contributor co-edited

this incredibly helpful resource for understanding the global religious landscape. What better way to understand where things are going?

### WHAT IS THE BIBLE? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything

Rob Bell

Bell is one of the key articulators of a new kind of Christianity that is growing among post-evangelicals. His postmodern approach infuriates some, but there is something attractive about the way Bell reaches people seemingly impervious to our old approaches. He was once the future. He might be again.

### WORLD CHRISTIANITY A Historical and Theological Introduction

Lalsangkima Pachuau

Christianity is a universal faith and this important work examines demography, theology and missiology as we chart its future.

### CULTURE AND THE DEATH OF GOD

Terry Eagleton

David Smith references the renowned literary theorist and cultural critic's 2014 survey of historical and contemporary religion.

## WEB

### THE FUTURE OF MISSION

Eddie Arthur

Global Connections and Wycliffe stalwart (who also blogs at [www.kouya.net](http://www.kouya.net)) develops his thoughts from this issue of *Catalyst* in this provocative article.: <http://bit.ly/Arthurfut>

### EDINBURGH 2010

The centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference

produced resources helpful for thinking about the future of Christianity in a global context. *Catalyst* contributor Kristeen Kim recommends the book series produced at the conference and available from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

[www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org)

### CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

The academic research body that studies global Christian demography and home to *Catalyst* contributor Gina A Zurlo, who is their Associate Director.

[www.globalchristianity.org](http://www.globalchristianity.org)

### GREENBELT FESTIVAL

If you want a glimpse of the post-evangelical future, go to Greenbelt Festival or listen to their range of speakers. Diversity and radical inclusion overlay a burgeoning core set of beliefs that could turn out to be the future of the Church in the West.

[www.greenbelt.org.uk](http://www.greenbelt.org.uk)

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