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GLOBAL SOUTH CHRISTIANITY AND ADVENTISM: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

In recent decades, Christianity has experienced two major phenomena as a religion: its decline in the global North (Europe and North America) and its rise in the global South (Africa, Asia, and South America). The Seventh-day Adventist Church as a denomination has experienced similar trends. The global South has become the home to the majority of Adventists in the world and the global North is now home to only a minority. Studies show that this southward movement in Christian and Adventist demographics may continue for several decades. Studies also indicate a steady growth of other world religions on the continent of Africa, including Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. This development poses several challenges to Christianity in general and Adventism in particular, especially the challenge of how to cope with the influx of new converts, most of whom are young, poor, orphaned, uneducated, and unemployed. The conclusion of this study suggests that there is need for fresh thinking and better strategizing in order to respond responsibly to the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the global South phenomenon and its side effects.

Keywords: Global South Christianity, Global North Christianity, world religions, Brandt report, Non-Aligned Movement, Global South Adventism, Global North Adventism.

Introduction

As we stand in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the world is witnessing a decline of Christianity in Europe and America. These regions that were Christianity's stronghold for many centuries are now becoming less and less Christian. On the other hand, the world is witnessing an increase in the prevalence of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and South America—regions which used to be considered non-Christian, pagan, or heathen. In the past few decades, these regions have registered Christians in record numbers—enough to earn these continents the reputation of being the next Christendom.¹

¹Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Though these trends are true of Christianity generally, similar trends and patterns characterize the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in particular. For the first century of Adventism's growth, America and Europe were the regions with the largest number of Adventists in the world. However, statistics show that this is no longer the case. These two northern regions, comparatively speaking, are now home to only a minority of Adventists.² Instead, countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, which used to have a small Adventist presence, now have the most Adventists in the world. The center of Christianity in general and Adventism in particular has shifted to Africa, Asia, and South America, and it is likely that these regions will remain the new strongholds of the Christian religion for decades or even centuries to come.

In this article, I seek to explore these demographic trends in detail. I first examine the situation in Christianity generally, tracing its decline in Europe and North America and its simultaneous rise in Africa, Asia, and South America.³ Then I examine the parallel development in Seventh-day Adventism in particular. Regarding Seventh-day Adventism, I demonstrate that Africa has become the new center of the denomination, numerically speaking. Finally, I explore some of the implications of this phenomenon for the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the African continent, detailing both the challenges and the opportunities it presents.

First, I must provide definitions of three related concepts that are used throughout this article: *global North*, *global South*, and *global South Christianity*. *Global North* is a term used to describe the richest northern regions of the world, which include North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia such as Japan, China, and South Korea.⁴ On the other hand, the term *global South* is used to describe the developing countries of the world, most of which are found in Africa, South America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. The term *global South Christianity* refers to the presence of Christianity in the global South as the result of the massive Christian demographics moving from the global

²According to G. T. Ng, Executive Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the global North claimed only 8 percent of the world membership in 2014. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/transcript-20150703am.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2016).

³The phrases "new center of Christianity" and "new center of Adventism" as used in this article simply as an acknowledgement that the global South is now the region with the largest number of Christians in the world, as opposed to the global North, which used to be home to the largest number of Christians for many centuries. The phrase as used here has nothing to do with economic prowess or authority.

⁴This article leaves Australia out of the discussion even though it displays characteristics similar to Europe and America. The reason for this exclusion is that in this work the author is not trying to compare global trends in the northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere, but rather in the global North and global South. For an elaborate definition of the terms *global North* and *global South*, please see their definitions and descriptions as presented in this essay.

North (Europe and America) to the global South (Africa, Asia, and South America). With these definitions in mind, let us now look at where Christianity stands among major world religions.

Christianity among the World Religions

Given the wars, police brutality, genocides, xenophobic acts, international terrorism, and other atrocities that innocent people experience in the world today, we might be tempted to conclude that the world is becoming less and less religious. Statistics, however, point in the opposite direction.⁵ In 1970, religious people represented 82 percent of the general world population. Forty years later, in 2010, this number had gone up to 88 percent, with a projected increase to almost 90 percent by 2020.⁶ Evidently, then, the people of the world today are more inclined to embrace religiosity, not less.

As the global inclination toward religiosity increases, Christianity is just one of the many religions that work to satisfy the demand. Christianity is currently still the largest religion in the world today, but it has many rivals. Traditionally, Islam has been its closest rival, and Christianity is currently being outpaced by Islam when it comes to general growth trends. For example, in 1970 Christians made up 33.2 percent of the global population. Muslims represented 15.6 percent, while other groups such as Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, adherents of Chinese folk religions, ethno-religionists, and others represented 42.8 percent of the world population. By 2020, the percentage of Christians is expected to go up by at least 1 percentage point, but the percentage of Muslims is expected to increase by 8.3 percentage points.⁷ This shows that while the world may be becoming more and more religious, that does not necessarily mean it is becoming more and more Christian. If anything, these statistics suggest that Islam has been making more gains than Christianity and may continue to do so for a number of years to come.

⁵Generally, religion is associated with peace, love, honesty, and justice, which stand in opposition to brutality, genocide, terrorism, etc. The increase in violent acts in the world may give the impression that the world is facing such unfortunate acts because it is not religious enough.

⁶For a detailed treatment of this subject, see “Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020: Society, Religion, and Mission,” <http://www.gordonconwell.com/netcommunity/CSGCResources/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2015). I have found this report by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity based at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary a useful resource in this study. Their report was released in June 2013.

⁷Ibid.

However, on the whole, with 33.4 percent of the world population currently, Christianity still has the most followers among world religions.⁸ This general picture of where Christianity stands as a religion brings us to the discussion of the concepts of global South and global South Christianity.

*The Decline of Christianity in the Global North and
Its Rise in the Global South*

In the past two decades or so, experts in world Christianity have been using the concepts of “global South” and “global South Christianity” to describe the demographic trends that have been taking place in the Christian world.⁹ I find these concepts useful in discussing the two phenomena that are happening in Christianity currently—the decline of Christianity in Europe and North America, and its rise in Africa, Asia, and South America. Although the world has traditionally been divided between east and west, dividing between north and south is more applicable in a study of this nature. Before I show how this works, I wish to provide the context within which the concept of the global North / global South division emerged.

Global South and the Politics of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Even though the concepts of the global North and global South are widely used in religious circles today, especially in Christianity, “global South” as a rallying concept for the developing countries was born in a secular, politico-economic environment, and it took several decades before it found its relevance in religious discourse. The term originated in the politico-economic environment of the 1950s, when emerging African and Asian nations decided to form a protective united front against the ideological influences of the most developed countries of the world at the time. These nations wanted to distinguish themselves from what then seemed the unbending ideological separation between the capitalist West and communist East. This divide ended up splitting the world into two blocs, which in turn put a lot of pressure on the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America.

⁸The annual “Status of Global Christianity” survey published by the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 39, no. 1, indicates that in 2015 there were over 2.3 billion Christians in the world, which is about 33.4 percent of the world population.

⁹Christian writers have been using the terms *global South*, *global Christianity*, and *global church* for the last two decades or so. See, e.g., Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*; Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

In order to free themselves from the ideological and political bondage of the time, leaders of some African and Asian countries met for a conference in Bandung, Indonesia, April 18–24, 1955—about a decade after the Second World War—and proclaimed their membership in the Non-Aligned Movement.¹⁰ The formation of the Non-Aligned Movement created a common platform on which the developing countries would stand together and speak to the countries of the Western and Eastern blocs in one voice.¹¹

Although the Non-Aligned Movement was a first attempt at moving beyond the bilateral division of the world between East and West, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, first chaired by Willy Brandt (former chancellor of Germany) in 1980, soon provided another formula for how the world should be divided. The first report of this commission, *North-South: A Programme for Survival*, also famously known as the Brandt report, depicted the international community as split not between the capitalist West and communist East, as was the case before, but rather between the rich North and the developing South.¹² When the report was published in 1980, it brought into common use the idea of the global North and global South.

As has been suggested previously, the global North is generally understood to include regions such as North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia such as Japan, China, and South Korea. On the other hand, the global South is made up of Africa, South America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. The economic disparities that the Brandt report originally sought to describe remain today: Even though there has been some progress in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction in the global South, generally, the North remains rich and the South poor. In addition to reflecting economic disparities, the division between North and South also reflects realities of world politics and power balancing.¹³

¹⁰For a concise description and history of the Non-Aligned Movement, see “The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History,” <http://www.nam.gov.za/background/history.htm> (accessed April 12, 2015). See also Dietmar Rothermund, “The era of non-alignment,” in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi- Bandung-Belgrade*, eds. Natasha Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tine, and Nada Boskowska (London: Routledge, 2014), 19–34.

¹¹Guy Arnold, *The A to Z of the Non-Aligned Movement and Third World* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 38.

¹²See *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1980).

¹³It is important to mention here that the North is home to four of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The South is represented by only one country, China.

Global South Christianity

Although the concept of the global South was first coined in the corridors of political power and economics, Christian thinkers found the concept helpful in describing the shift in the demographic center of Christianity from the North to the South. In Christianity, the terms *global South* and *global South Christianity* have been popularized by a number of Christian writers and thinkers from Africa, Europe, and America.¹⁴ Through their works, these writers have brought this concept to the level of almost regular use in Christian discourse.

In the language of the Brandt report, global South Christianity, geographically speaking, is found in those regions of the world that are considered least developed.¹⁵ These nations share a number of factors that distinguish them from the North. Not only are they generally poor, but they also tend to have the highest population growth rates in the world¹⁶ and the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world.¹⁷ Religiously speaking, they are also nations in which Christianity is spreading rapidly.

The Decline of Christianity in the Global North

A number of indicators show that Christianity as a religion is in decline in the global North, where it was the strongest for many centuries. Even though from 1900 on the number of Christians grew significantly in these regions, there are indications that that trend has changed. For example, the number of Christians in Europe grew from 381 million in 1900 to 492 million in 1970, and then to 588 million in 2010, but it is projected to plummet to 530 million by 2050. This means that there will be 58 million fewer Christians in Europe come 2050 than they were in 2010; a decrease of about 10 percent.

¹⁴These writers and thinkers include Philip Jenkins, Kwame Bediako, Lamin Sanneh, and Mark A. Noll. See Sanneh's *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Jenkins's *New Faces of Christianity*, or Noll's *New Shape of World Christianity*.

¹⁵Generally, the Brandt Report seems to cover the same countries considered as Global South in this study. The so-called Brandt Line was carefully done as to avoid including Australia as part of this understanding.

¹⁶"The 20 Countries with the Highest Population Growth Rate in 2014 (Compared to the Previous Year)," <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264687/countries-with-the-highest-population-growth-rate/> (accessed April 21, 2015).

¹⁷"Maternal Mortality Rate," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2223rank.html> (accessed April 18, 2015).

The declining membership in Christian churches in Europe can be partly attributed to the fact that Europe's general population is shrinking.¹⁸ But even taking into account a decline in the general population, Europeans are increasingly unlikely to embrace Christianity. For example, the United Kingdom, a nation that has been explicitly Christian for more than a millennium, has recently witnessed the number of people who consider themselves Christian falling at an alarming speed. According to the 2011 census, there were 4.1 million fewer people identifying as Christians in UK in 2011 than in 2001 despite the overall population growth.¹⁹ While this decrease affects both genders and all age groups, it seems a particular male age group is affected the most: the male 35 to 39 age group decreased the most, with 47 percent reporting as Christian in 2011 compared to 66 percent in 2001.²⁰

The 2011 UK census reveals one more reality about religious dynamics in the country: the number of people with no religion is growing. Indeed, the number of individuals who claim no religion has increased across all age groups, particularly for those in their early twenties and early forties. Nearly 44.7 percent of the people of England do not belong to any religion at all. The result is that people do not see the point of becoming Christian. This reality raises concerns about the future of Christianity in the UK in particular and Europe in general.

Evidence shows that other European countries are seeing a similar decline in the influence of Christianity, a religion that has shaped much of Europe's way of life for centuries. Take, for example, the current situation in the Netherlands. In the next decade alone, it is projected that the Netherlands will close more than two-thirds of its Roman Catholic churches. The report also shows that Protestant denominations in this country are planning to close more than 700 of their churches.²¹ It seems that the decline is not happening along the Catholic-Protestant divide, but rather affects Christianity as a whole regardless of historical

¹⁸“Population of Europe 2014,” <http://www.worldpopulationstatistics.com/population-of-europe-2014/>. While the population of the so-called EU25 is expected to increase from 456.8 in 2004 to 470.1 million in 2025, the projection shows that the population of these countries will decrease to 449.8 million in 2050—a decrease of 20 million inhabitants from 2025.

¹⁹Projections show that the population of Europe was expected to grow between 2005 and 2025.

²⁰See Office of National Statistics, “What Does the Census Tell Us about Religion in 2011?” http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_310454.pdf.

²¹See “Europe's Empty Churches Go on Sale.” <http://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-empty-churches-go-on-sale-1420245359>.

labels. The decline of Christianity in the Netherlands and the UK represents the reality on the European continent as a whole.²²

North America is following the same general pattern. In North America, the number of Christians grew from 79 million in 1900 to 211 million in 1970, and then to 286 million in 2010; here, the number of Christians is projected to reach 333 million by 2050.²³ Although that growth may sound strong, Christianity's status is more precarious than it may first appear. The general population of North America, unlike that of Europe, is projected to continue growing beyond the 2025 mark.²⁴ And although the number of Christians is expected to increase by 47 million in the four-decade period from 2010–2050, this is as compared to the increase of 75 million in the previous four decades, 1970–2010. So, while the general population will have increased by 28.5 percent, the number of Christians will have increased by only 16.4 percent within the same time period.

Like Europe, North America is also becoming less and less Christian and more increasingly without religion. Recent studies and reports have consistently shown this to be the case. For instance, in 1990, 86 percent of Americans called themselves Christian. Twenty years later, the number of people in North America who identify as Christian has fallen to 75 percent. As is the case with Europe, the decrease in Christians in North America seems to give way to an increase in individuals who belong to no religion.²⁵ Considering these prevailing trends in both Europe and North America, it seems unlikely that these two regions will be able to reclaim their reputation as the regions of the world with the largest number of Christians—the reputation they enjoyed for a long time.

²²Pew Research Center data, presented by the Wall Street Journal, highlights the degree to which the European population reports no religious affiliation: France (28%), Germany (24.7%), Italy (12.4%), Netherlands (42.1%), and the United Kingdom (21.3%).

²³World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandata-base.org/wcd> (accessed May 14, 2015).

²⁴The projections show that the population of North America will increase to 401 million in 2050, an increase of about 50 million inhabitants from 2025. See “10 Projections for the Global Population in 2050,” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/10-projections-for-the-global-population-in-2050/> (accessed May 14, 2015); “United States of America 2025,” <http://populationpyramid.net/united-states-of-america/2025/> (accessed May 14, 2015).

²⁵“Christianity Faces Sharp Decline as Americans Are Becoming Even Less Affiliated with Religion,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/12/christianity-faces-sharp-decline-as-americans-are-becoming-even-less-affiliated-with-religion/> (accessed May 14, 2015).

The Rise of Christianity in the Global South

While Christianity is declining in the global North, it is on the rise in the global South, and this region is becoming the center of the Christian religion for the first time since Christianity's inception in the first century AD. The regions of the world that were on the receiving end of Christian missionary activities until very recently are quickly becoming Christianity's stronghold, at least demographically. At the beginning of the twentieth century, about 83 percent of all Christians in the world lived in Europe and North America. By all standards, this was a significant number of Christians to live in only two northern regions. However, somewhere the tide changed, and now experts project that by the year 2050, more than 72 percent of all Christians will live in the global South.²⁶ This scenario is made possible by the fact that while the number of Christians in the global North has been consistently decreasing and is projected to continue to do so for decades, the number of Christians in the global South has been consistently increasing and is projected to continue to do so for decades to come.

The demographic shift in Christianity toward the global South can be traced as far back as the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1900, the population of Africa was 108 million people, 10 million of whom were Christian. As the population of Africa grew from 108 million in 1900 to 357 million in 1970, the number of Christians grew from 10 million to 143 million in the same period. Thus, while the general population increased by about 231 percent, the number of Christians increased by 1,330 percent within the same time period. Asia also saw the number of Christians soar. The general population of Asia grew from 956 million in 1900 to 2.1 billion people in 1970, an increase of about 120 percent. In that same time, the number of Christians grew from 22 million in 1900 to 96 million in 1970, an increase of 336 percent. South America experienced a tremendous increase as well. The general population grew from 65 million people in 1900 to 285 million in 1970, an increase of about 338 percent. In the same time, the number of Christians grew from 62 million in 1900 to 270 in 1970, an increase of about 335 percent.²⁷

This trend has continued on all three continents since 1970. By the year 2010, Africa, Asia, and South America had 1.4 billion Christians, compared to 874 million Christians in Europe and North America.²⁸ In other words, in just one

²⁶Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, xi.

²⁷See David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:13, 14.

²⁸Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 2, 3. It is important to note here that this set of statistics is not trying to compare the ratios of Christians to the general population in the

century, the global North lost its place as the region with the largest number of Christians in the world. This shift also means that of the 2.3 billion Christians alive in the world in 2010, Africa, Asia, and South America claimed over 60 percent, leaving Europe and North America sharing only 38 percent. For the first time in the history of Christianity, there are more Christians living in these southern regions than in the other regions of the world. Judging from this reality and the demographic projections given, we cannot help but conclude that the center of Christianity has already shifted to the global South.

Our study so far has revealed that Christianity as a whole has been impacted by unprecedented demographic trends. However, it must be noted here that Christianity as a religion is no longer a single, unified body, as it used to be before the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Today, there are said to be more than 33,000 Christian denominations in the world, which function under varied models of church governance and use different methods and strategies to reach the inhabitants of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁹ This also means that the global South phenomenon presented above impacts these denominations differently, and consequently these individual Christian denominations have to respond to the multiple challenges posed by the global South phenomenon. In the next section of this article, I attempt to demonstrate how individual denominations are impacted by the reality of global South Christianity. To do so, I have selected one Christian denomination—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—for the simple reason that as a Protestant denomination the Adventist Church is considered one of the fastest-growing churches in the world.³⁰ It also has an established presence in more than two hundred countries and territories globally.³¹ For these reasons, I think the Adventist Church can be a good example of how individual Christian denominations manifest the characteristics of global South Christianity already discussed and how this phenomenon may impact the way churches carry out their missions. With this in mind, let us now turn to the Adventist Church and see how the global South dynamics have impacted it as a denomination.

global South and global North, but rather to state a general fact that the number of Christians currently living in the global South is bigger than that in the global North.

²⁹See Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1:10.

³⁰Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “The Season of Adventists,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2015, 18.

³¹See G. T. Ng, “To Every Nation.” <http://www.adventistreview.org/1515-18> (accessed August 1, 2016).

Global South Adventism: Africa as the New Center of Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism as a Christian denomination has experienced its share of the global South Christianity phenomenon. The number of Adventists living in the global South regions of Africa, Asia, and South America is growing by leaps and bounds, and the former Adventist stronghold regions of North America and Europe have become the minority.

The Rise of Global South Adventism

The Adventist Church was founded in the United States of America in the middle of the nineteenth century and subsequently extended its presence to Europe, Australia, and the rest of the world. In the first fifty years, most Adventist activities were centered in the United States.³² By the turn of the century, Europe had become a second center of the denomination. In 1902, the church still had more organized institutions and administrative entities in North America and Europe than it had in the rest of the world combined. For instance, there were a total of sixty-six local conferences and mission fields³³ in North America and Europe (fifty-four in the former and twelve in the latter), while Africa, Asia, and South America combined had only eleven.³⁴ In 1903, when the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was in the process of moving its headquarters from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Washington, DC, 88 percent of all Adventists in the world lived in North America and Europe; Africa and Asia claimed only 2.9 percent of the world membership.³⁵

By the very beginning of the twentieth century, however, the rise of global South Adventism was already in the making. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, Adventists in North America and Europe sent a significant number of missionaries to work in countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.³⁶ This initiative propelled the

³²For about half a century, the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was at Battle Creek, Michigan, in the United States.

³³Some European countries had mission fields in other countries; however, this does not include those territories.

³⁴From the years 1895–1903, there were no yearbooks, but the vital information appeared in quarterly issues of the General Conference Bulletin. For the information about local conferences and mission fields that were organized by 1902, see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1904), 7.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶See Bruce Lee Bauer, “Congregational and Mission Structures and How The Seventh-day Adventist Church Has Related To Them” (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983). Between 1890 and 1937, Adventists entered 110 countries worldwide.

growth of the Adventist church in the global South. Adventist membership in these regions grew rapidly, so that by 1970, the distribution of church membership worldwide had changed significantly: the percentage of Adventists in Africa, Asia, and South America had grown to 50.4 percent of the world membership (up from 2.9 percent in 1903). At the same time, the percentage of Adventist members in North America and Europe had shrunk from 88 percent in 1903 to just 29.3 percent. Fifteen years later, in 1985, the number of Adventists in the southern regions made up 58 percent of the world membership, while North America and Europe claimed only 18.4 percent. In 1985, for the first time, Africa surpassed North America in membership by at least 1,000 members. Since then, the southward movement has not been reversed.

The first decade of the third millennium continued to see Africa, Asia, and South America recording more and more gains, so that by 2010, global South Adventism claimed just over two-thirds (68.2 percent) of all Adventists worldwide. At this point, Africa had consolidated its place as the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world, claiming more than 6.3 million members, or 37 percent of the sixteen million members worldwide. Asia took second place, with more than 3.3 million members, or 19.4 percent. On the other hand, North America and Europe combined had only 9 percent of the world membership.³⁷ By the year 2013, global South Adventism claimed about 70 percent of the world membership, and Africa alone reported more than seven million members, which was about 39 percent of the world membership of about 18 million.³⁸

It is also insightful to note that by 2013, the three East African countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, with a combined population of about 133 million people, had 1.5 million Adventists; this was more than all Adventists living in the United States of America, with a population of over 318 million people.³⁹ Early in 2015, Zambia became the first country in Africa, and only the fourth in the world, to celebrate its first one-million-member harvest. The other three countries that have reached that milestone are the United States of America, Brazil, and India.

About 50 percent of these countries were in the global South. For example, the Adventist Church in Germany sent two missionaries to start Adventist missions in Tanzania (then German East Africa) in 1903, and the British Union Conference sent two missionaries to start Adventist work in Kenya (British East Africa) in 1906.

³⁷Information about the demographics of individual Adventist Church entities can be found in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks online at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

³⁸*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015).

³⁹Information about the demographics of individual countries of East Africa plus the North American Division, can be found in the 2014 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* online at <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?page=ViewAdmFieldSubEntities&EntityType=A&AdmFieldID=EAKU> (accessed January 31, 2015).

Of these four countries, all but the United States are from the global South.⁴⁰ It is also insightful to mention here that it took the worldwide Adventist denomination about a hundred years to reach one million members (hitting that mark in 1957).⁴¹ It has taken Zambia about the same amount of time to reach the mark of one million Adventist members within its borders.⁴²

While Africa is the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world, in 2010 Adventists still represented only 1.3 percent of all Christians on the continent, and as of 2015 Adventists made up only 0.63 percent of all Africans on the continent. Looking at it this way, it is obvious that Adventists make up a small part of the entire African population. It also means that Africa being the continent with the largest number of Adventists in the world does not necessarily mean Adventists are the largest Christian group in Africa.

As we discuss the dynamics of membership growth in the global North and global South within the Adventist Church, one more observation must be made, which has to do with the role of immigrants in this process. Studies have consistently shown that global North Adventism has always benefited from Adventists who have moved to the North from other regions of the world, usually countries with weaker economies and typically in search of advanced education or a better life.⁴³ This means that if the many Adventist churches that are primarily for immigrants were to be excluded when computing Adventist membership in the global North, most likely, the percentage of North America and Europe would have been much lower.⁴⁴

So, what do all these numbers mean? The statistics above show at least three things, all of which are significant to our analysis of global South Adventism: (1) The Adventist Church worldwide is growing fast. There were at least five million

⁴⁰See “Zambia’s President Celebrates Milestone of 1 Million Adventists.” <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2579-zambia%E2%80%99s-president-celebrates-milestone-of-1-million-adventists> (accessed May 14, 2015).

⁴¹See *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1959), 4.

⁴²The Adventist denominational work in Zambia began in 1903. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Zambia.”

⁴³According to Ng, the modest growth taking place in North America and Europe was largely coming from immigrants from the global South. See <http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2014-10-12/church-membership-reaches-181-million/> (accessed May 5, 2015). There are also reports of people moving from Eastern Europe into the richer countries of Western Europe within the global North.

⁴⁴For example, it was reported in 2007 that “more than 80 percent of the Adventist Church’s membership in England comes from other countries.” See “Immigrants Sustaining Adventist Church Membership in Some Regions,” <http://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2007-08-05/immigrants-sustaining-adventist-church-membership-in-some-regions/> (accessed May 5, 2015).

more Seventh-day Adventists living in the world in 2015 than there were in 2010. (2) Although about a century ago, Africa, Asia, and South America represented less than 10 percent of all Adventists in the world, today these continents represent the majority of Adventists in the world. In other words, the global North and global South have switched places in terms of demographic dominance. (3) Africa as a continent has become the new stronghold of Adventism, numerically speaking.

Now that we have demonstrated the dominance of the global South in terms of membership, we must now ask another question: what are the implications of such a phenomenal development? In order to correctly determine the implications of such massive demographic shifts, one needs to pay attention to the general trends present in the global South relative to the work of Seventh-day Adventism. Here the focus is placed on Africa, since among the three global Southern continents, it is the continent with the largest number of Adventists. Looking at the general trends currently in operation on the African continent, a number of consequential implications for the work of the Adventist Church in Africa loom large on the horizon. But before we look at the potential implications of these trends, we first need to briefly describe and analyze the trends themselves.

Adventism and General Trends in Africa

Currently, Africa is witnessing a number of megatrends that are likely to impact the work of the Adventist Church on the continent in a significant way. These trends include high population growth rate, socioeconomic development, and religious growth, among others. So, how do these trends affect the church's work and capacity for future growth and prosperity on the African continent? In an attempt to explore this question, I will first describe these trends and then point to their potential implications for Seventh-day Adventism in Africa.

Population and Socioeconomic Trends

Africa has one of the highest general population growth rates in the world. As has been indicated in this study, in 1900 Africa had around 120 million people, or 7 percent of the global population at the time. In 2005, the number of Africans reached one billion. There is no sign that this pace will slow down any time soon. Judging from the current trend, it is estimated that by 2050 the population of Africa will be between two and two and a quarter billion people⁴⁵—a tremendous growth over just four decades.

Narrowing the focus to some small regional blocks, the demographic statistics are still more revealing. Take for example, the three East African nations of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. In 1900, these countries had about seven or eight

⁴⁵Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 104, 105.

million people. By the year 2000, the population had risen to about 90 million. In 2015, their population is estimated at 133 million people, and projections point to 260 million people by 2050.⁴⁶ This population explosion is directly related to another noteworthy characteristic of most African nations—namely, their youthfulness. In countries like Uganda, Niger, and the Congo, for example, the median age of the population is sixteen.⁴⁷ Tanzania, with a median age of 17.4, follows the same general trend.⁴⁸ Other African countries, comparatively speaking, are younger than most European nations, where the general median age of the population is said to be forty.⁴⁹

But what are the factors that contribute to Africa's population explosion? Experts give a number of reasons for the high population growth rates in Africa. One of the factors is the average age of marriage for women. In East Africa, Central Africa, and West Africa, the average of marriage for women is 18.8 years. Even though fertility rates per woman have relatively declined in certain regions of Africa over the years, with North and South Africa recording three children per woman, the three regions above retain much higher fertility, between five and six children per woman.⁵⁰

As would be expected, the higher population growth rates and fertility rates in Africa have a bearing on the quality of life and general development of the people, especially when these growth rates do not match up with the economic growth rate. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, most of the African countries are in the category known as "low human development,"⁵¹ signifying low quality of life. Because most of these countries have small and weak economies, they lack the financial capacity to meet the ever increasing basic needs of their citizens, including food, clean and pure water, decent housing, health care, and education, among others. This and other realities have contributed to high maternal and child mortality rates on the continent.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 106.

⁴⁸Information about the demographics of individual countries can be found in the CIA World Factbook, online at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (accessed April 19, 2015).

⁴⁹Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 106.

⁵⁰This report which was prepared by Elizabeth Leahy Madsen who is a consultant on political demography for the Wilson Center's Environmental Change, is very telling indeed. "What's Behind West and Central Africa's Youthful Demographics? High Desired Family Size," <http://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2015/05/whats-west-central-africas-youthful-demographics-high-desired-family-size/> (accessed November 11, 2015). The average marriage ages for women in these regions are as follows: 18.5 years for West Africa, 18.9 for Central Africa, and 19.0 for East Africa.

⁵¹"Human Development Index," <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2015).

Religious Trends

While the general population explosion and slow economic growth in Africa are attention grabbing in themselves, religious trends are also of great interest. As has been demonstrated in this study, Christianity is on the rise in Africa. It is estimated that from 493 million Christians in 2010, the number of Christians in Africa might reach more than a billion by 2050.⁵² This number will include adherents of mission churches such as the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, as well as other Christian traditions such as Pentecostalism and hundreds of African Independent Churches.⁵³

While Christianity is growing rapidly, Islam is also growing rapidly in Africa.⁵⁴ Some African nations that had a modest number of Muslims at the beginning of the twentieth century now have more than ten times that. Take, for example, the West African country of Nigeria. In 1900, Nigeria had 4 million Muslims; today, a little more than a century later, the number has grown to over 70 million strong, and Nigerian Muslims now represent about 5 percent of the total Muslim population worldwide.⁵⁵ Islam is booming in East Africa as well. In Tanzania alone, Muslims make up about 35 percent of the general population. Although in Kenya and Uganda the percentages are lower, Islam remains Christianity's closest rival religion in the region.

The presence of other world religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, is becoming more and more noticeable in Africa as the number of their adherents grows slowly but surely. According to 2010 estimates, the percentage of Hindus in South Africa stands at 2.4 percent, while Buddhists have increased from 0.2 to 0.3 percent in recent years.⁵⁶ South Africa has the largest number of Buddhist

⁵²Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 3.

⁵³Some of the African Independent Churches have been growing by leaps and bounds. A good example is the Christ Holy Church International in Nigeria. This Independent church has grown "from 12 members in 1947 to over a million baptized members in 2002." Thomas Oduro, *Christ Holy Church International: The Story of an African Independent Church* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 13.

⁵⁴Islam as a religion is making great gains in some quarters in Africa. See World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd> (accessed November 13, 2015).

⁵⁵Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 204, 205.

⁵⁶"Religious Adherents, 2010 – South Africa," World Christian Database, http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_207_2.asp (accessed November 13, 2015).

adherents on the continent.⁵⁷ However, it should be observed that in Tanzania, Christianity has become a minority religion, claiming only 30 percent of the general population, compared with Islam and African Traditional Religions, each of which enjoys about 35 percent. Of the three East African countries, Tanzania has the smallest Christian presence; in both Kenya and Uganda, Christians represent more than 80 percent of the general population.⁵⁸

Possible Implications for the Adventist Church in Africa

The massive southward movement of Adventism calls for focused attention and a creative response. The demographic trends I have described above and the fast growth of world religions in Africa, have tremendous implications for the Adventist Church. On the one hand they pose challenges; on the other they provide opportunities. Here I would like to analyze some of the possible implications of these trends for the Adventist Church in Africa.

The first challenge for the Adventist Church is the challenge of meeting the basic physical needs of new converts. When the general population of a country is growing at a fast rate while the economy of that country is still limping, as is the case in much of Africa, this often translates into poor communities that lack access to health care, education, and nutrition, among other things. When the population is young, as is also the case in many African countries, it adds to the challenges and increases the need for sufficient schools, better social services, food security, and availability of employment for the millions of energetic young people. This means that new converts to the Adventist Church are likely to be young, poor, uneducated, hungry, and orphaned. To deal with these social challenges, the church on the African continent will have to have relevant programs in place in anticipation of the coming of the new members. These programs will have to be not only relevant but also sustainable, since the work of feeding the hungry, ministering to the poor, instructing the less educated, and supporting the orphaned may not be a sprint but a marathon.

A second challenge the Adventist Church is likely to face is the challenge of training more pastors to keep up with the phenomenal increase of believers. The increase of new converts will demand the increase of pastors to ensure proper spiritual care, which is crucial for the growth of the new believers and their integration into the church. Without proper and timely spiritual support, the new converts may feel like sheep without a shepherd in a world that is not always

⁵⁷See “Global Religious Landscape - Religious Composition by Country,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/> (accessed November 13, 2015).

⁵⁸Religious information about individual countries can be found in the World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html> (accessed November 13, 2015).

friendly to those who convert to Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular.⁵⁹

The presence of world religions in Africa poses another challenge to the Adventist Church. The fast growth of Islam and the increased presence of other world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism challenges the mission of the Adventist church in a direct way. Adventists both old and new will have to learn not only to co-exist with but also to share the gospel message with followers of these rival religions. This means that the church in Africa will need to train its clergy, evangelists, and church members how to effectively implement its mission to reach all people with the message of the soon return of Christ in a new religious environment. The church will have to reach the adherents of these world religions while feeding and keeping an eye on its own members lest they wander outside of the fold and end up in non-Christian folds.

While the Adventist church faces key challenges in Africa, the African setting also presents a variety of opportunities. First, by taking advantage of the thousands of young people who already fill the churches every week and the thousands more who convert to Seventh-day Adventism every year, the church could solve the problem of shortage of denominational workers, at least in part. The church could train these young men and women and send some of them as missionaries to other parts of the continent and to the rest of the world to preach the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ. From the pool of these young people, many future pastors and evangelists could be obtained which in due time it could reduce the shortage of trained pastors in some territories. Equipped with skills and encouragement, the young people could start income generating projects under the supervision of the church so that they might become as self-sufficient as humanly possible in their environments. In turn, through their tithes and offerings, they could support the mission of the church and fund projects that are geared to supporting the millions who flock into the church through the ongoing process of global South movement.

The increasing presence of world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and African Traditional Religions, among others, affords the church the opportunity to share with the followers of these religions a Christian perspective of religious life—showing them Christ, as it were. This also provides Adventist Christians with the opportunity to practice religious tolerance while living next door with people of other religions. In the process, the faith of Christians may grow and their love for the followers of other faiths may mature. In a very real sense, they will have the opportunity to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13–16).

Being aware of these implications and taking some steps toward formulating a creative response to the challenges is important for the relevance of the Adventist

⁵⁹See my conversion story in Christopher R. Mwashinga, Jr., *Moments of My Christian Experience* (Berrien Springs, MI: Maximum Hope Books, 2016), 59–64.

Church and its message on the continent. Taking advantage of the possible opportunities provided by the general trends is important for the strength and future prosperity of the church in the region.

Conclusion

In this article, I have used the concept of global South Christianity to show and evaluate some trends in Christianity in general and Seventh-day Adventism in particular. I have demonstrated that Christianity is in decline in the global North and that it is on the rise in the global South. These global trends in Christianity have turned the global South into the new center of Christianity and the African continent into the new center of Seventh-day Adventism, numerically. I have also noted that even though Africa is the continent with the largest number of Adventists (over seven million members representing 39 percent of the worldwide Adventist membership), Adventism in Africa makes up about 1.3 percent of the entire African Christian population and only 0.6 percent of the general African population. While the gains the Adventist church has made in Africa in the last hundred years are phenomenal, looking at it against the backdrop of the enormous general population growth and the growth of other religions, the numbers only call for better strategies to reach more Africans with the message of the soon return of Jesus.

The shift of the center of Adventism to the global South calls for an urgent response. On the one hand, there must be fresh thinking about the challenges the church in Africa is facing as the result of these developments. On the other hand, there is need to be intentional and launch a strategic exploration of the opportunities the global South phenomenon provides for the fulfilment of the mission of the Adventist church. It may be necessary for individual territories/countries to conduct their own research to determine the best course of action in their respective countries, since it is likely that each country is being impacted by the global South phenomenon in a unique way. The church must boldly face up to the challenge and bring the message of hope and salvation to more millions of sons and daughters of God, not only in the global South, but in all the regions of the world.