

The Present and Future of World Christianity

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It is a great honor to be invited to speak in Norway, and particularly to deliver a lecture in honor of Olav Guttorm Myklebust.¹ The two subjects are in fact intimately related, in that Professor Myklebust was born in 1905, the same year as the creation of the new Norwegian state.

I also claim a small link with the theme of the talk, in that my own university, Baylor, is located just a few kilometers from the town of Clifton, Texas, which boasts the title of the Norwegian capital of the United States. During the nineteenth century, when Norway was sending so many missionaries around the world, it also produced religious visionaries like Clifton's founder Cleng Peerson, who led those other pioneer migrants. Although they represented different generations, Peerson was alive at the same time as such legendary missionaries as Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder and Lars Skrefsrud. While Peerson found a communal haven in Texas, Schreuder established his mission among the Zulus of South Africa, and Skrefsrud among the Santhal of India.

In his very long career, Professor Myklebust worked with such care and diligence on the development of the missionary project represented by such heroic figures. It is an irony, though, that most of his scholarly work was completed before the 1980s, when the epochal scale of the new Christian expansion became apparent. When he was writing, missionaries

could still be pleased at the solid foundations laid for Christian growth, but they could have little sense of the explosive expansion that was about to happen. Nor could even the greatest scholars of the time predicted just how or why the new movement would develop.

I will describe the recent growth in broad outline, but more particularly, I will emphasize some explanations that do not usually receive the attention they deserve, especially in terms of the demographic background. Without that demographic element, moreover, we will fail to understand some of the future trends that will shape the world's religions for decades to come.

In human terms at least, it almost seems as if the new Christian growth has happened almost independently of the missionary efforts lauded by Professor Myklebust. I will show that such a view would be completely untrue. Virtually everything we see in the new Christian world rises on foundations laid by those pioneers.

Making Global Christianity

The most significant theme in the history of Christianity over the past century has been the huge expansion of the faith worldwide, and the decisive shift of its center of gravity outside Europe.

A century ago, Christianity was still clearly a Western religion. Combining Christian numbers in Europe and North America, these continents accounted for 82 percent of all believers in 1900, and even by 1970, that figure had fallen only to 57 percent. Since that point however, change has been very marked. Today, Euro-American Christians make up 38 percent of the worldwide total, and that figure could reach a mere 27 percent by 2050. Back in 1914, Africa and Asia scarcely featured on the global Christian map. By 2050, though, by far the largest share of the world's Christians will be found in Africa, which should have a billion or more believers. About a third of the world's Christians by that point will be African, and those African Christians will outnumber Europe's by more than two to one.

Let me stress these figures as absolute numbers rather than

relative proportions. The most important trend we notice from these figures is the precipitous relative decline of North America and Europe as Christian heartlands. This does not mean that Christian numbers in these regions have shrunk, quite the contrary. Rather, Europeans have been overwhelmed by the relative growth of Christian numbers elsewhere, above all in the Global South: that is, the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

According to the evidence presented by the World Christian Database, between 1900 and 2010, the number of Christians in Europe grew by 29 percent, a substantial figure.² In Africa, though, the absolute number of recorded believers grew in the same period by an incredible 4,930 percent. The comparable growth in Latin America was 877 percent. The growth for particular denominations was even more startling. During the 20th century, Africa's Catholic population grew from 1.9 million to 130 million—an increase of 6,708 percent.

The number of African believers soared, from just 10 million in 1900 to 500 million by 2015 or so, and (if projections are correct) to an astonishing billion by 2050. Put another way, the number of African Christians in 2050 will be almost twice as large as the total figure for all Christians alive anywhere in the globe back in 1900.

Even the figures I have cited gravely understate the scale of the change, because the Christians listed as “European” or “North American” today include large communities from the Global South. By 2050, for instance, perhaps a quarter of the people of the United States will have roots in Latin America, and fifty or sixty million Americans will claim a Mexican heritage. Another eight percent of Americans will have Asian ancestry, and usually those communities – Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese – have strong Christian elements. In Europe also, those enduring Christian populations will include sizable immigrant communities – African, Asian and Afro-Caribbean. In 2050, therefore, even our “Euro-American” Christians will include Congolese believers living in Paris, or Koreans in Los Angeles.

If we envisage the Christianity of the mid-21st century, then at least in numerical terms, we have to think of a faith

located much nearer the Equator. Again according to WCD statistics, by far the largest share of the world's Christian population in 2050 will be African, with 32 percent of the global total. Latin Americans will make up 21 percent of the whole, a number that grows if we include people of Latino origin in North America. In short, well over half of all Christians alive in 2050 will be either African or Latin American. When we recall the distribution of Christians as recently as 1970, that is an incredible global change to occur in basically just two or three generations.

In terms of raw numbers, Latin America and Asia will both be outpacing Europe. By 2050, the nations with the world's largest Christian populations will be: the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, the Congo, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and China. The Christian world will have turned upside down, and much of that epochal story has taken place just in the past half-century.

Conversion

Naturally enough, much of that story is the result of conversions, which followed evangelism and mission work. To take the African example again, Christians represented just ten percent of the population in 1900, rising to some 46 percent by the end of the century. In some countries particularly, the Christian share of the population boomed. In the lands that became Nigeria, Christians accounted for one percent of the population in 1900, but 45 percent by 1970. Taking the continent as a whole, the main African story of the twentieth century was that about half the population moved from primal, animist, religions to one of the great monotheist faiths, and by a four to one margin, they chose Christianity over Islam.

Reasons for such conversions were complex, but much of the story involved rapid and tumultuous social change in the form of mass urbanization and migration, and that is equally true in Asia and Latin America as well as Africa. From the 1960s onwards, all these societies were changed radically by the mass migration to cities, and the uprooting of old village communities. The emerging megacities offered little in the way of welfare, education or health, beyond what people

could provide themselves, or what they found in religious institutions, whether Christian or Muslim. Those social ministries did much to attract migrants to their faiths. Of their nature, the groups running those outreach efforts tended to be more passionate and even fundamentalist in character, creating an open door for evangelical and charismatic communities. Much of their evangelism is associated with the vast revival meetings and miracle crusades that are so absolutely standard a fixture of urban life across the global South.

The nascent churches exercised a special appeal for groups that had been excluded in traditional society, but who could now claim a full share in participation and leadership. In different settings, this usually meant women and ethnic or racial minorities. In the new communities, they gained the power to speak publicly, to find what David Martin famously called "Tongues of Fire."³ Many observers of Latin American religion remark on the great material improvement that Pentecostal (evangélica) women find in their domestic lives, particularly when their menfolk are induced to give up alcohol and drugs, and acquire habits of thrift. In a fine phrase coined by Elizabeth Brusco, Latin American Pentecostalism is a Reformation of Machismo.

At higher social levels, upwardly mobile professional and technically-oriented groups were drawn to churches that interpreted the world in modern and Westernized forms, and this has commonly meant Western-style megachurches.

Asian Churches

Asia has only one Christian majority nation, which is the overwhelmingly Catholic Philippines, and in most countries, Christian populations are very small minorities. Even so, the vast numbers in this region mean that those minorities represent quite substantial populations in their own right, and here too, evangelical and charismatic churches have grown dramatically, chiefly from the 1970s.

In terms of sheer numbers, the heart of the Asian story is of course China, which now has a Christian population of perhaps 75 million, substantially larger than any European country. Much the largest growth has occurred among unregistered

churches beyond the scope of government control, and these are overwhelmingly charismatic or evangelical in nature.

We are on much firmer ground in South Korea, which over the past century has seen its Christian population grow from one percent to around one-third of the whole. Although both Catholics and Protestants are both growing, many of the main congregations are evangelical or charismatic in nature. Some of Seoul's spectacular megachurches regularly appear in listings of the world's largest congregations, and they are virtually denominations in their own right. The best known is the Yoido Full Gospel Church, affiliated to the Assemblies of God, and currently claiming 900,000 members, spread among many satellite congregations. The Myung Sung Presbyterian Church is the world's largest congregation in that tradition: Korea has more Presbyterians than the United States itself. After the United States, South Korea is the world's largest supplier of Christian missionaries. And all this is happening in a global industrial and financial powerhouse, with huge media assets.

Other centers are less familiar. Although Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim state, it also has perhaps thirty million Christians, with another eight or nine million in Vietnam. Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan all have solid Christian minorities. The nations bordering the South China Sea – China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Taiwan – are home to a combined population of well over two hundred million Christians, a number not far short of the US total. When we read the phrase “Pacific Rim”, we might just as well use the term Christian Arc.

And that is all separate from the sizable Christian communities of the Indian subcontinent, at least forty million strong. Perhaps three hundred million Christians now live in Asia, about an eighth of the global total, and most projections see the continent playing a growing role in the churches.

Some of the most sensational growth has occurred among charismatic and evangelical churches, usually in the largest cities, and often appealing to upwardly mobile professional groups. The Pentecostal Church of Indonesia has grown from perhaps half a million members in 1980 to three or four million today. In 2008, the Indonesian Reformed Evangelical

Church opened its Messiah Cathedral in Jakarta, a classic megachurch seating six thousand, and a grandiose structure that would not look out of place in Seoul or Singapore. Other megachurches flourish in Jakarta and in Surabaya, the country's second city. Despite the enormous power of Islam in that country, such urban Christians show no concern about hiding their activities out of fear of provoking persecution. We find similar manifestations in India's high tech heartlands. Chennai's New Life Church claims a membership running into the tens of thousands, as do the Full Gospel and Bethel churches in Bangalore.

The Mission Inheritance

Looking around the world, we see flourishing churches initiated and organized by local believers, by Asians in Asia, Africans in Africa, and it is tempting to write history from this perspective. We often assume that present realities have always existed, and backproject our modern assumptions into the historical past. In the global Christian context, that means that we so often underplay the role of European missions, and of missionaries like Lars Skrefsrud and Hans Schreuder. And unless we are careful, future historians will do so to an even greater degree.

In Africa, for instance, we hear a great deal about the native churches, usually led by prophetic or messianic figures. These groups became known as African Independent Churches, AIC's, although that term has varied in meaning, not least because of its implication that such mainstream denominations as Anglicans or Catholics are somehow not independent. Today, the term is usually understood to represent African-Initiated Churches.

In the past half-century, such movements have attracted a disproportionate share of scholarly attention, with a heavy focus on those that draw on traditional practices. We have valuable accounts of such AIC's as South Africa's Shembe movement or its Zion Christian Church, the ZCC. In retrospect, we know that Hans Schreuder's successes among the Zulus would be dwarfed by the enormous growth of independent churches like the ZCC, which today is something like the

Zulu national religion.

While not diminishing the role of such groups, though, it would be wildly misleading to suggest that African church life is focused on such groups, with their distinctive practices that outsiders can find odd or troubling. Far more representative of African Christianity are more familiar evangelical or charismatic churches, or indeed mainline denominations that have usually become strongly charismatic in tone. Most are rooted firmly in recent missionary precedent.

A typical example of such a thriving and wholly respectable church is ECWA, the Evangelical Church of West Africa, more recently retitled the Evangelical Church Winning All. Although by no means the largest or most significant denomination of its type, it epitomizes many familiar themes. ECWA claims some five thousand congregations, across Nigeria and neighboring lands, where it has three million active members, with another three million regular attenders. Although originally founded by Euro-American missionaries, ECWA has for many years been strictly an African church in its leaders and members, and it bows to no external or colonial authority. It is in fact so entirely African and independent as to raise serious questions about the whole "AIC" label.

ECWA's story begins in the 1890s with the Soudan Interior Mission, SIM, with "Soudan" referring not to the modern nation but rather to the broad belt stretching across Africa below the Sahara. As the European empires began to break up after the Second World War, SIM began transferring its operation to the new ECWA church, which officially dates from 1954. By 1976, the new entity formally inherited all remaining SIM operations, including its educational, medical and publishing activities, and at that point it began its swift expansion.

ECWA soon produced a roster of creative and influential leaders, including influential theologian Byang Kato, who urged the contextualization of the gospel in Africa, but at the same time warned of the syncretistic tendencies he saw among other thinkers of the day. From 1970, the church's Evangelical Missionary Society was headed by Panya Dabo Baba, an early pioneer of mission from Africa to the rest of

the world. However familiar we might today find the notion of African missionaries traveling the world, much of the impetus for that South-North mission came from Panya Baba's enterprising vision of the 1970s. ECWA now has some 1,200 missionaries active outside Nigeria, spread across Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the United States.

Apart from any individual, ECWA exercises its influence through its two key Nigerian seminaries. Since 1980, the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) has offered theological training and higher education not just to its own clergy but to a wide range of denominations, including Anglicans. It is a key presence in a nation that currently has some 75 million Christians, a number that could increase to 180 million by 2050.

ECWA lacks so many of the features that would attract the notice of Western academics. It was not founded by flamboyant messianic prophets, and it has no rituals that bear the traces of shamanic or magical origins. Instead, it is immediately recognizable as a sober evangelical church. Of course, some of its features separate it from Western equivalents, not least in its firm belief in the reality of spiritual healing and exorcism. The church's claimed success in defeating spiritual evils accounts for a major part of its evangelistic success. But this mission always operates within the framework of church order, avoiding anything that might look like Pentecostal excesses.

Protestant churches of various shades have also been very successful in Ethiopia, a country that in some ways seems to be recapitulating the original Reformation of the sixteenth century. From the late nineteenth century, individual entrepreneurs translated the scriptures into native tongues, and new groups emerged outside the dominant Orthodox Church. The real explosion, though, came during the 1970s, when a Communist revolution all but swept away the old religious order. Although Protestants, had been a very marginal presence indeed before 1974, today they are seventeen million strong, around 18 percent of the population, and they are multiplying fast.

One very successful body is the Ethiopian Evangelical

Church Mekane Yesus, EECMY, which is Lutheran – appropriately enough, given the historical parallels to Luther’s own day. Originating among foreign missionary bodies, the church achieved its independence in 1969, only a few years before the revolution. Since the 1960s, EECMY has grown from a few thousand baptized members to some 5.5 million.

But the Mekane Yesus church is by no means the only force in the Protestant expansion. Even larger is the Kale Heywet (Word of Life) charismatic church, a thoroughly Biblecentered group with 6.5 million members. Smaller groups include the Meserete Kristos (Christ is the Foundation), which is Mennonite. Impossible to count too precisely are the congregations of the thriving but diffuse Mulu Wongel (Full Gospel) church. Mulu Wongel’s main congregation in Addis Ababa is one of Africa’s largest megachurches.

In some cases, old AIC’s became much more obviously evangelical in tone as they made conscious decisions to move towards the Christian mainstream. A century ago, native converts in what is now Nigeria developed a passionate spiritual movement committed to immediate spiritual experience, for prophecy, healings and visions. Fervent believers broke away to form societies for prayer and healing, and they attracted the name Aladura, “Owners of Prayer”. With their strict focus on healing, the believers received an enormous boost during the great epidemics that swept West Africa during and after the First World War.

One heir to that tradition was the Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim, which in turn spawned dozens of breakaways and new plantings. The most significant is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, which since the 1970s has come to look ever more Pentecostal in its worship style. The RCCG has also achieved a stunning global reach, with a fiery sense of mission, and it has enjoyed wide success across North America and Europe. The RCCG is in the process of becoming a new global denomination.

As future generations see these booming churches, they will rightly stress their independent origins. In every case, though, the churches could not have existed or taken root without the mission precedents – in the cases I have mentioned here,

Anglican, Methodist or Lutheran.

Demography

Contrary to the expectation of those missionary pioneers, though, the recent global transformation was only partially a matter of mass conversions. By far the most important reasons for the change were demographic. It is not just that a greater share of a population is Christian, but that the population itself grows massively.

Take for instance the continent of Africa. In 1900, Africa had around 100 million people, or six percent of the global population. In 2005, the number of Africans reached one billion, or fifteen percent of humanity. By 2050, Africa's population will be between two and two and a quarter billion, which will then be about a quarter of the world's people. Those numbers do not count African migrants in Europe and North America. If, therefore, a church was planted in an African nation in 1900, and it merely kept its share of the population, then it would in the subsequent years have grown by over tenfold, a spectacular return on investment.

But now set those numbers aside those for Europe. The 400 million Europeans alive in 1900 would grow to 730 million today, but in relative terms, as a share of global population, Europe was in steep decline. Europeans made up a quarter of humanity in 1900, as against 11 percent today, and falling to a projected eight percent by 2050. In 1900, Europeans outnumbered Africans by four to one. By 2050, Africans should have a three to one advantage over Europeans.

When we consider the world's religious picture, then, we have to consider differential demographics, namely that some parts of the world are growing much faster than others. Briefly, European numbers have been growing very slowly indeed in comparison with those of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In 1900, for instance, Nigeria had fifteen million people, but the population today is 181 million, perhaps rising to 300 million by the 2040s. And that is one typical story among many. Ethiopia in 1900 had around twelve million people, rising to forty million by 1980 and around a hundred million today. By 2050, the figure could be 190 million. If we assume

that Christians represent around half the total, then the number of Ethiopian Christians will have grown from six million in 1900 to almost a hundred million in 2050, and again, that assumes no conversion or evangelism. By 2050, both Ethiopia and Nigeria will be among the ten countries with the largest Christian populations.

Startlingly, the Ethiopian growth rate is actually modest when compared to some other lands. In the territory that would become Kenya, the population in 1900 was a mere one million, but that figure has now swollen to around 40 million, in little over a century. By 2050, Kenya could have 80 million people or more. To a greater or lesser degree, similar pictures could be presented for most African nations, and many more in the Middle East and South Asia.

When the kingdom of Norway was established in 1905, the country had a population of around 2.3 million, which has risen to 4.8 million today – roughly, it has doubled. In the same period, Uganda's population rose from 1.7 million to 34 million, a rise of twentyfold. The Philippine population grew by a factor of thirteen, that of the Congo by sixteen.

Missions, then, played a decisive role in establishing a Christian presence in such countries, and they enjoyed some success in making conversions. But the explosive growth we have seen in modern times is to a much larger extent a product of demographic growth.

Coming Home

As Christian numbers have swelled in the Global South, so many of those new believers have moved to Europe or North America, bringing their characteristic forms of belief with them. In some cases, such as the RCCG churches, this was a matter of deliberate missionary endeavor. More commonly, families and individuals traveled seeking a better life, and in their new homes they formed churches offering familiar styles of worship and devotion. Whatever the reason, evangelical and charismatic churches of Global South origin are easy to find in any of the Western world's great cosmopolitan cities. In turn, completing the global cycle, those churches reached out to their original homelands.

Although it is an extreme example of the story, we might look at the story of Nigerian Sunday Adelaja, who in 1987 arrived in Minsk, in the former Soviet Union. Within four years, the Soviet Union itself had collapsed, and Adelaja moved to the newly independent nation of Ukraine. In 1994, with a few friends, he formed a Christian mission known as the Word of Faith Bible Church, which ultimately evolved into the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations. That circle of friends soon swelled to become one of Europe's most successful evangelical churches, claiming twenty thousand members at the main facility in Kiev (Kyiv), and hundreds of daughter and satellite churches around Ukraine. The Embassy also took its "all nations" title very seriously, with new plants across Western Europe and several of the former Soviet republics. Remarkably too, the membership was overwhelmingly white European in its composition.

Throughout Europe, we find African-derived megachurch pastors, such as Matthew Ashimolowo of London's Kingsway International Christian Centre. This has become a potent transnational ministry headquartered in London, with a strong health and wealth component. Apart from activities in Europe, his church uses television and radio to reach out to Central and Western Africa. In the 1980s, the Congo too became the scene of a charismatic revival that subsequently spilled across Europe. Today, Congolese-founded evangelical and Pentecostal churches abound in Paris, London, and Brussels, and these account for some of Europe's largest and most fervent mega-congregations.

As older churches have declined in Europe, they have been powerfully reinforced by these recent arrivals.

Limits to Growth

So astonishing has been the Christian upsurge over the past generation, that we must wonder how long it can be sustained. Theoretically, you cannot continue growth rates like those in Africa indefinitely without converting every last person within a generation or two, and that is precisely the future that some have foretold. If things go on as they are, we are told, then Latin America will be Protestant within a genera-

tion, and China will convert en masse to Christianity. We have learned to be very cautious about accepting such projections.

In reality, it is rarely safe to extrapolate trends into the indefinite future: things just do not go on as they are ad infinitum. In the case of Christianity, two obvious limits suggest themselves. In Africa especially, expansion over the past century was relatively easy because the target audience for evangelism was chiefly adherents of primal faiths. That market, so to speak, is now largely saturated, and today's Christians confront another fast-growing world religion with enormous popular appeal, namely Islam. For Muslims, apostasy from the faith is an exceedingly serious matter, and evangelistic efforts run the strong risk of inciting mass violence. This does not mean that the age of mass conversions is at an end, but the situation has become much more difficult and, likely, slower. In a country like China too, the government has clearly indicated that it will tolerate Christian expansion only as long as it does not pose a threat to the nation's political order. To adapt the old environmental slogan, Christians face severe Limits to Growth.

Less obvious a challenge, but arguably much more significant in the long run, are demographic factors. I have already shown how demographic changes explain the growth of Global South Christianity, but matters are changing fast, and in much of the world, future trends indicate rising secularization.

Several factors shape a country's religious outlook, and prosperity and the welfare net certainly play a role. A country's fertility rate also tells us much about its attitudes towards religion. When a country develops economically, women are urgently needed to enter the workforce, rather than remain in the home. Meanwhile, shifting religious values place less pressure on women to have large families. In turn, smaller families mean diminished links with religious structures - fewer children to put through religious education or First Communion classes. And couples that have decided to limit families tend to run up against church policies on issues of contraception and abortion. When sexuality is separated from conception and child-rearing, a society becomes more open to non-traditional

family structures, including gay unions. Whatever the reason, European experience indicates that countries where the fertility rate falls well below replacement (2.1 children per woman) is facing rapid secularization.

That is the precise situation now facing many countries in Asia and Latin America, and especially the most economically developed. A few decades ago, all had classic Third World population profiles, and very large families. In the 1960s, for instance, Brazil's fertility rate hovered around 6 children per woman, alarming those who warned of a global population explosion. By 2014, though, Brazil's figure was 1.79, far below replacement. Chile and Uruguay both record similar rates of 1.84. Argentina is still above replacement, but the rate is falling fast. On the Pacific Rim, such nations as South Korea, Singapore and China itself have even lower fertility rates, in fact some of the lowest ever recorded in human history: China stands at 1.55, South Korea at 1.25. Even in the Philippines, the rate since 1960 has fallen from 7.0 to 3.0, still above replacement, but declining rapidly. Worldwide, we are witnessing a social revolution in progress, and a gender revolution.

Arguably, the success of Christianity itself has contributed to these changes. In the new churches, women acquire greater self-confidence and a new ability to control their lives and personal relationships. They are also encouraged to seek education. Women in the workforce are more likely to define their role differently from their mothers, who had borne very large families. Smaller family size is a gauge of modernization and female empowerment.

But the consequences for institutional religion are damaging. In Latin America especially, we now see signs of secularization that would have been unthinkable not long ago. Nine percent of Brazilians now say they follow no religion, and the proportion of nones is much higher among the under-20s. As so often, Uruguay emerges as the region's most secular country, with 40 percent having no religious affiliation.

Same sex marriage offers a useful gauge of transformation, particularly as it has been so staunchly opposed by most churches, Catholic and Protestant. Nevertheless, Brazil

approved same sex unions in 2004, with gay marriages following subject to some local discretion. Argentina legalized same sex marriage in 2010. Although such countries are far removed a long way from European secularization, we can foresee the emergence of a triangular political set-up, with evangélicos, Catholics and seculars, and a constantly shifting balance of coalitions and alliances.

The one great exception to these demographic patterns is Africa, where classic Global South population profiles show no signs of dramatic change in the near future. As African migrants become ever more numerous in the West, it is likely that their religious ways will also spread, and become more commonplace.

The Future of Mission

As we watch these momentous changes around us, how do they affect our view of mission and missionaries? In most Western countries, missionaries usually receive a bad press as paternalists and often as agents of imperialism. Such views read oddly when set aside the loving tributes paid by modern-day Africans or Asians, who are proud of their cultural and ethnic heritage, but who deeply appreciate the Christian qualities of those pioneers. English archbishop John Sentamu was born in Uganda, and he recalls that “The missionaries and expatriates I knew brought with them qualities of selfless commitment and devotion to duty which I admired and still admire today. They introduced me to the idea of the church as a world-wide family, in St Paul’s words, ‘the body of Christ’, a community of people where all need each other and where everyone is of infinite worth in the sight of God.”⁴ Somebody remembers the missionaries, and fondly.

I have stressed the critical role of demography in understanding religious change and development. This study, though, perhaps demonstrates a still greater lesson, namely the vast and often unintended consequences of what might at the time seem like small decisions. When a nineteenth century agency like the Norwegian Missionary Society established a tiny operation in some remote land in Africa or Asia, it could have little idea of the investment it was making in the future.

Nor could it have conceived the critically important role that the once tiny presence would play when that land began to grow mightily in population and importance. Such a historical perspective must leave us with a sense of awe at what those European agencies accomplished. The story cries out to be told.

Noter

- 1 The Myklebust Memorial lecture held 24. Mars 2015 at the Norwegian School of Theology-Menighetsfakultetet, Oslo, Norway. Olav Guttorm Myklebust (1905-2001) is recognized as the founder of missiology as an academic discipline in Norway. He also founded *the Norwegian Journal of Missiology* as well as *the Egede Institute of Missiological Study and Research* (Ed. com)
- 2 I will be making considerable use of the valuable resources supplied by the World Christian Database (WCD). As a broad guide to the overall religious picture, the Database is reliable, although I have difficulty in accepting the exact validity of these numbers, especially in certain regions.
- 3 Dave Martin, *Tongues of fire. The explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford & Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993) (Ed. com.)
- 4 <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/being-an-anglican/archbishop-of-york-on-being-anglican.aspx>. (Ed. com.)