

Becoming Global Christians in the 21st Century

Eastern Christianity beats Western Christianity hands down. For the last century, according to the World Christian Encyclopedia, Christianity in the West has grown mainly through births to Christian households—not through conversions.

During the same period of time, Africa and Asia added new members through both conversions and births. The result: Though Christianity's share of the Western population has declined—from 88 percent to 78 percent of the population—its share of Africa and Asia has increased dramatically, from 3 percent to 14 percent.

Eastern Christianity also reigns supreme in the spiritual character of the church. The people are radical in their commitment to Christ. Though there are numerous traditional mainline churches (Catholic, Protestant and so on), much of Christianity in the 10/40 Window is found in independent churches—tightly knit, committed communities of believers who are aggressively evangelistic.

“Song” (not her real name) is an example of one such believer. She spends every day sharing the gospel in the streets of China. At the start of the day, she prays to meet someone who will supply her financial needs by that evening. She has no home, no money and no consistent support except Christ.

“Timothy” is another. He took the New Testament into a nation

where evangelism is punishable by death. Not knowing whom he should give the books to, he prayed until the Holy Spirit led him to a village where the residents had been waiting for someone to bring them the “Holy Book.” They threw a party, and everyone came to Christ.

In spite of its lack of growth and vitality, however, Western Christianity does have some things to offer the rest of the world, and I believe God is calling us to expand our borders.

What Can We Give?

Most of what the West has that the 10/40 Window lacks are tools that have been developed and improved through the years. These can readily be put to spiritual use.

One is the capability to print Bibles—a result of the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg about 1444. Today, more than 53 million Bibles, 120 million New Testaments, 323 million Gospels and 4 billion Scripture selections are distributed annually by organizations such as the Gideons, Open Doors with Brother Andrew, The Bible League and the United Bible Societies. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these are distributed in areas where there is already a strong Christian presence.

Of the 53 million Bibles, for example, only 11 million are distributed among non-Christians—and of these, fewer than 1 million are given to people with very little access to the gospel. Scripture distribution needs to take on the radically evangelistic character of Africa and Asia and shift its distribution emphasis to those who need Bibles desperately—new Christians and non-Christians in the 10/40 Window, many of

whom have never held a whole Bible before.

Another tool is the ability to produce films. Thomas Edison invented the motion picture camera in 1888, and the first theaters opened in 1905. Films were rapidly put to evangelistic use.

Jesus, one of the best known evangelistic films, opened in 2,000 theaters in the United States in 1979. Since then, it has been shown in virtually every country to more than 3.3 billion people, with 108 million new converts as a result.

Other films have been similarly used. Unfortunately many of them are now dated and less appealing to the next generation. New writers and directors, radically committed to Christ, need to begin reclaiming media to use for redemptive storytelling.

Radio is another means we have to reach people. Radio waves were discovered in 1887, and the world's first radio factory was opened on Hall Street in England in 1898.

The first continuous wave voice transmitter was invented in 1905. On Christmas Eve 1906, wireless operators on banana boats owned by the United Fruit Company heard the very first voice broadcast over the North Atlantic.

Today there are more than 2.5 billion radios and 1.3 billion televisions in the world, mostly in the West. Television and radio broadcasts carry the gospel across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

In fact, some 20 million hours of programming were broadcast

yearly this decade. Christian programs were aired in more than 300 languages, with responses from 200 countries. As a result, there were an estimated 150,000 isolated radio churches with 4.7 million believers.

But in spite of our track record, we are falling short in our ability to reach people through this medium. We need to produce radio broadcasts in more languages and develop ways to use the Internet to carry these broadcasts.

Since 1961 the Internet has grown to its current global status: 327 million users who send 3.4 trillion e-mails yearly, visit more than 1 billion Web sites and trade millions of files. Much of the Internet is dominated by sin, yet there are Christians at work in the domain, developing new methods of evangelizing its users. We need even more of these radical "virtual evangelists" who can create new methods for reaching the lost.

If we want the Holy Spirit to move around the world, the key is in the biblical principles of gospel, community and service.

We are commissioned to preach the gospel, make disciples, love one another and serve the world. Our community of faith must be a global one in which Americans, Europeans, Middle Easterners, Africans, Asians and Latins offer one another mutual edification, correction, teaching, protection, encouragement and life.

Each of us must make a conscious attempt to connect with the body of Christ globally. One way to do this is to share in the labors of the global church by supporting a ministry in

another part of the world. Together, we continue to seek a radical devotion to the one who died for us. As we draw close to Him, we draw close to those He has redeemed and receive His heart for the lost.

Christians everywhere are frail and broken. Yet when we humble ourselves before God and give our frailties to Him, He becomes strong in our weakness, perfecting us through His mercy.

It is in this way that the Holy Spirit moves in each of us. And as He moves in us, so He moves in the world. If we make ourselves available, He will increase our vitality and show us how to use our resources to further His kingdom. *

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