

Is The World Getting Worse?

A former colleague disclosed his anxiety about the violence in the Middle East. Of particular concern for him were the brutal onslaughts against Christians by an organization known as ISIS. This terrorist organization that began as part of al Qaeda in Iraq has spread throughout Arab world. It has beheaded and brutally opposed anyone who differs from their fierce form of Islamic Fundamentalism.

Reflecting on some of the frightening news reports, he said,

“It is obvious to anyone with half a brain that the world is getting worse and worse. Evil is rising all around us and the Christian Church is losing ground. I can’t believe how bad things are getting.”

This acquaintance wasn’t the only one that I’ve heard this kind of rhetoric from. Many have voiced a similar apprehension. You can hear it in the checkout lines, sports stadiums, and in the pews of our local churches. Multitudes are convinced that the world is presently in “freefall” and it’s only a matter of time before everything falls apart.

Yet, is this true? Is evil actually growing throughout the earth? Is humanity descending into greater chaos and destruction?

Based on social media and television news reports, multitudes are convinced that the world is growing worse and worse. Yet, there’s absolutely no evidence of this. By every measurable standard, life is improving around the globe. Darkness is fading and the goodness of God’s Kingdom is truly taking root.

This statement isn’t just a matter of opinion, but a reflection of verifiable statistics. Some of which I would like to share with you in the following article. Stay with me as I attempt to show how the world is actually getting better and better.

War And Violence?

One way that the world is improving is through the diminishment of violence and brutality. Despite what is suggested by the media, violent deaths and bloodshed are currently the lowest ever recorded. Dr. Steven Pinker, Pulitzer prize-winning author and Harvard psychology professor noted that *"Today we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species' existence."*^[1]



Prior to the Second World War, nations were continually in bloody conflict. Many Western European nations initiated war every two to three years. However, since the peak of the Cold War in the 1980s, civil wars, genocides, and terrorist attacks—have significantly diminished throughout the world.

Pinker declares:

"By any standard, the world is nowhere near as genocidal as it was during its peak in the 1940s, when Nazi, Soviet, and Japanese mass murders, together with the targeting of civilians by all sides in World War II, resulted in a civilian death rate in the vicinity of 350 per 100,000 per trend lines for genocide and other civilian killings, fortunately, point sharply downward. After a steady rise during the Cold War until 1992, the proportion of states perpetrating or enabling mass killings of civilians has plummeted." ^[2]

We're not just seeing a reduction in war and civil conflict, there is also a remarkable drop in homicides and violent crimes around the globe. Pinker writes,

"England, Canada, and most other industrialized countries have also seen their homicide rates fall in the past decade. Among the 88 countries with reliable data, 67 have seen a decline in the past 15 of rape or sexual assault and of violence against intimate partners have been sinking for decades, and are now a quarter or less of their peaks in the past."^[3]

Archeologists and anthropologists have surmised that over 15% of society died violently in previous centuries. More recently this number has dropped down to 3%. In the Twenty-First Century less than 1% have died a violent or war-related death.^[4]



With this surprising developments in mind, Pinker argues that,

“Violence has been in decline for thousands of years, and today we may be living in the most peaceable era in the existence of our species.”^[5]

Pinker acknowledges that many are inclined to dismiss his observations. It contradicts what the news anchors and talking heads have presented. Nevertheless, the data actually reveals that the world is becoming a much safer place. Summarizing his findings, Pinker writes that,

“The world is not falling apart. The kinds of violence to which most people are vulnerable—homicide, rape, battering, child abuse—have been in steady decline in most of the world. Autocracy is giving way to democracy. Wars between states—by far the most destructive of all conflicts—are all but obsolete. The increase in the number and deadliness of civil wars since 2010 is circumscribed, puny in comparison with the decline that preceded it, and unlikely to escalate.”^[6]

Watch Steven Pinker share some of his insights on the reduction of world violence at the 2007 TEDTalk in Monterey, California.

Sadly, violence and bloodshed remain a part of our world, but it is much less pronounced than it was in previous eras. Things are clearly getting better. While many Americans are busy yelling and screaming, amazing things are quietly being established around the world.

Poverty?

Another incredible sign of the astounding advancement is

global economics. It's counter-intuitive, but prosperity and economic opportunity are spreading throughout the nations. There has never been a time in world history where the masses have been escaping poverty like they have in our present generation.



Moving back in time, we observe severe oppression and impoverished conditions throughout the world. In 1820, it is estimated that somewhere between 84% to 94% of the world lived in poverty. However, according to the World Bank, in 2010, only 21% reside in the same conditions.^[7] In an astounding development, from 1980 -2000, over 700 million people moved out of extreme poverty. Reflecting on this, Max Roser writes:

"Before modern economic growth the huge majority lived in extreme poverty and only a tiny elite enjoyed a better living standard. With the onset of industrialization world poverty started its decline and slowly but steadily a larger share of the world population was lifted out of poverty. And since 1980 world poverty declined from 50% to 21% – at the fastest rate in history."^[8]

The Oxford Poverty And Human Development Initiative looked at the trends and made following prognostication for the world's poorest nations:

"If the current pace of poverty reduction continues to the end, then half of the countries would eradicate MPI poverty within 20 years, 18 of the 22 within 41 years, and the remaining four countries within 95 years."^[9]

Reflecting on this data, Jon Berkley of the Economist, noted the following:

"If developing countries maintain the impressive growth they have managed since 2000; if the poorest countries are not left behind by faster-growing middle-income ones; and if inequality does not widen so that the rich lap up all the

cream of growth—then developing countries would cut extreme poverty from 16% of their populations now to 3% by 2030. That would reduce the absolute numbers by 1 billion. If growth is a little faster and income more equal, extreme poverty could fall to just 1.5%—as near to zero as is realistically possible. The number of the destitute would then be about 100 million, most of them in intractable countries in Africa. Misery's billions would be consigned to the annals of history.”^[10]

The data is absolutely clear. The world is truly becoming more prosperous and much more opportunity is being experienced. Poverty's fierce hold on the world is lessening.

Health And Life Expectancy?

Another amazing thing that is currently taking place is that people are living much longer and becoming healthier. In fact, data shows that people have continued to have a longer life expectancy over the centuries. In 1720 the average man in England only lived to be about thirty years of age. Currently most are living past the age of eighty. In just one hundred years, the average American's life expectancy has gone from forty to seventy-five. What is taking place today is considerably different than it was centuries ago. Consider the following chart:



Another aspect of this worldwide advancement is seen in the the change in child mortality rates. In the Eighteenth Century around 33% of the children in the Industrialized West died. Those rates improved slightly in the Nineteenth Century with around 25% of children dying. Currently less than 1% of the children in Industrialized nations are dying. While the child mortality rate has remained relatively high in Third-World countries, even this figure has been going down dramatically. Globally, infant mortality has fallen from 46 per 1000 in 2004

to 34 per 1000 in 2013. Worldwide the child mortality rate is now less than 4%.

In addition to all this, smallpox, malaria, and other diseases have either been eradicated or greatly diminished. Terminal diseases are still wrecking havoc around the world, but health conditions are significantly better than anytime in history. The earth is unquestionably a healthier place in the Twenty-First Century.

Spread of Christianity

People keep talking about how things are becoming worse and worse, but they are greatly mistaken. Which brings me to the underlying point of this article. The earth is constantly improving because the gospel of Jesus Christ is taking root in every corner of the globe. The Kingdom of God is advancing and things are truly reflecting the Lord's great kindness and love.

Many aren't ready to accept this, but the number of those who claim to be Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last century, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2.3 billion as of 2011, representing roughly 33% of the world population. So, approximately one in three people around the globe now identify with Christianity

Evaluating the vast numerical and statistical data that is currently being tabulated, Roman Catholic researcher George Weigel recounted the following:

"There will be, by mid-2011, 2,306,609,000 Christians of all kinds in the world, representing 33 percent of world of mid-2011, there will be an average of 80,000 new Christians per day." ^[11]

To the surprise of many, Christian conversions have been outpacing the growth that is taking place through the violent expansion of Islam. The bulk of Muslim growth is taking place through multiple childbirths, or bloodshed. Meanwhile, Christianity's growth is being fueled with healing, deliverance, and interpersonal engagement.

Surprisingly, the vast majority of Church growth is currently taking place in difficult environments that have been historically opposed to the gospel. Locales in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and even the Middle East are now experiencing unprecedented advancement. Ironically, this kind of expansion has defined Christianity from the very beginning.

Let's consider some of the encouraging statistics about what's happening around the world. I must admit that I become incredibly excited when I hear these accounts.

Africa

What has been transpiring throughout the continent of Africa has been utterly amazing. Africa is increasingly becoming a *"Christian land."* Reflecting on the reality of Christianity's unparalleled growth over the last century, Catholic researcher George Weigel declared,

"Africa has been the most stunning area of Christian growth over the past century. There were 8.7 million African Christians in 1900 (primarily in Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa); there are 475 million African Christians today, and their numbers are projected to reach 670 million by 2025. Another astonishing growth spurt, measured typologically, has been among Pentecostals and charismatics: 981,000 in 1900; 612,472,000 in 2011, with an average of 37,000 new adherents every day – the fastest growth in two millennia of Christian history."^[12]

Weigel's observations are backed up by the research of the Pew Research Forum. Their data also points to the amazing changes that have been transpiring in Africa. They report that,

"The share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9 percent in 1910 to 63 percent in 2010,

or from 8.5 million to 516 million during that time.”^[13]

In less than one century, Christianity has moved from margins to the center of sub-Saharan Africa life.

There are evidences all over the continent of these monumental shifts. For example, missionaries Heidi and Roland Baker, with 2,700 church plants, have made a significant impact in the nation of Mozambique. The province they operate in was 99% Muslim before their arrival, but a little over ten years later those figures are remarkably different. Kelly Head writes,

“The Bakers are now based full-time in Pemba, Mozambique, in an area where Heidi says was once called a ‘graveyard to missionaries.’ But recently the government announced publicly that it’s no longer a Muslim providence; now it’s a Christian providence.”^[14]

The continent of Africa has been utterly transformed by the goodness and grace of the gospel.

Latin America

It’s not just “darkest Africa” experiencing this unprecedented advancement, but a similar impact is being felt throughout Latin America. According to the Pew Forum, since 1900 the number of Latin American Christians has grown by an incredible 877%.^[15] This growth is evidenced in a number of diverse South American nations. For example, over 40% of Guatemala now identifies with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. The numbers are even more significant in Brazil. A majority of that nation is currently part of the same global “Spirit-filled movement.” Paul Strand observes that,

“Christianity is increasing in Brazil. If the trend continues, it is predicted that more than half of all Brazilians (109 million Christians out of 209 million citizens) will be evangelical Christians by is a land in ‘s a place where belief in miracles and healings are high.”^[16]

What is taking place in Brazil is even more astounding when, prior to 1970, less than 3% of the Brazilian population was “Evangelical.” To go from 2.5% to over 50% of the population in a rigidly Roman Catholic nation in less than 50 years is unprecedented.

Latin America is literally exploding with the flames of revival.

Asia

Perhaps the growth of Christianity is most astounding in the vast continent of Asia. The People’s Republic of China only had about one million Protestants in 1949. Now there are conservatively *“more than 58 million Protestants in China.”*^[17] Prof Yang, a leading expert on religion in China, believes that number will swell to around 160 million by 2025. He declares,

“By 2030, China’s total Christian population would exceed 247 million, placing it above Mexico, Brazil and the United States as the largest Christian congregation in the world.”^[18]

Other journalists and unbiased observers are also acknowledging this incredible expansion of Christianity in China. One noted English newspaper published the following,

“Estimates of the number of Christians in China today vary between 60 million and 120 million, which would suggest as many as one in 10 of the population are already believers. It has been predicted that by 2030 there could be almost a quarter of a billion Christians in China making it the biggest Christian population in the world.”^[19]

If the house church participants, and those spread throughout

the rural stretches of China are considered, perhaps as many as 30% of the Chinese are now associated with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Those numbers may be high, but there is little doubt about Christianity's significant inroads into this once closed-off nation.

A land that was once opposed to the gospel, will likely be the center of it within a few decades.

The Middle East

This final report may surprise many, but Spirit-filled Christianity is also beginning to make advances throughout the violent Arab world.

In fact, it appears that more Muslims became Christians over the last 20 years than in the previous 1,500 years combined. Based on the observations of missiologists, journalist Audrey Lee suggests that *"more Muslims have committed to follow Christ in the last 10 years than in the last 15 centuries of Islam."*^[20]

In spite of the intense persecution, assassinations, and widespread church bombings, revival is exploding throughout North Africa and other parts of the Middle East. It has been conservatively estimated that at least *"2 to 7 million people from a Muslim background worldwide now follow Christ."*^[21] Other reliable reports suggest that there may be as many as 10 to 15 million undocumented Christians in Muslim countries.

Journalist George Thomas notes that,

"A Christian revival is touching the northernmost reaches of Africa. In a region once hostile to the gospel, now tens of thousands of Muslims are following Jesus. As the sun sets over the Mediterranean Sea, Muslims across Northern Africa are converting to faith in Jesus Christ in record numbers... What experts say is that there is a profound move of God in the predominantly Muslim nations of Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia."^[22]

Tino Qahoush, a researcher and filmmaker, has been traveling to various parts of the Arab region to document the Christian revival that has been taking place. Reflecting on what he observed, he noted the following,

"What God is doing in North Africa, all the way from actually Mauritanian to Libya is unprecedented in the history of missions. I have the privilege of recording testimonies and listening to firsthand stories of men and women, of all ages."^[23]

These abrupt changes are something that even the Muslim clerics are starting to recognize. In December 2001, Sheikh Ahmad al Qataani, the president of The Companions Lighthouse for the Science of Islamic Law in Libya, appeared on a live interview on Al-Jazeera satellite television. He declared the following:

"Islam used to represent, as you previously mentioned, Africa's main religion and there were 30 African languages that used to be written in Arabic number of Muslims in Africa has diminished to 316 million, half of whom are Arabs in North Africa. So in the section of Africa that we are talking about, the non Arab section, the number of Muslims does not exceed 150 million people. When we realize that the entire population of Africa is one billion people, we see that the number of Muslims has diminished greatly from what it was in the beginning of the last century. On the other hand, the number of Catholics [He means Christians in general] has increased from one million in 1902 to 329 million 882 thousand (329,882,000). Let us round off that number to 330 million in the year 2000. As to how that happened, well, there are now 1.5 million churches whose congregations account for 46 million people. In every hour, 667 Muslims convert to Christianity. Everyday, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity. Ever year, 6 million Muslims convert to Christianity. These numbers are very large indeed."^[24]

Stunned, the interviewer interrupted the cleric. *“Hold on! Let me clarify. Do we have six million converting from Islam to Christianity?”* Al Qataani repeated his assertion. *“Every year,”* the cleric confirmed, adding, *“a tragedy has happened.”*^[25]

While the expansion of Christianity in Islamic countries is modest compared to its growth in other regions, the Church is still making significant headway in a realm of deep opposition. Even the *“10-40 window”* is encountering the light of the gospel in an unparalleled manner.

There is little doubt that the Church is rapidly advancing around the globe. With the unfortunate exceptions of the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, and a few other isolated places, Christianity is actually outpacing population growth everywhere. Consider the following chart that was created from the data that has been compiled by *“Operation World:”*



There’s a tendency among American Christians to gravitate toward the “bad news,” but that typical outlook is grossly ill-informed. God is actually up to something incredible in our time. We might even catch a glimpse of it – if we took the time to look.

Conclusion

I’m aware that many don’t believe it, but unbiased analysis and a multitude of relevant statistics confirm that the world is actually getting better. There is greater prosperity, peace, and health than ever before in recorded history. The Kingdom of God is boldly advancing and it’s transforming everything in its wake.

I wish that many of many of my fellow Christians would gain a better grasp of what is going on in the nations. We need to

let go of our pessimistic, “*doom and gloom*” worldviews and truly embrace the good news of the gospel. Jesus is on the move and He is bringing His blessing and life to a world that has been ravaged by darkness.

What is now transpiring in the nations really shouldn't surprise any Bible-believing Christian. It's something that the Prophet Isaiah told us centuries ago:

“The government will be upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the growth of his government and peace there will be no end. He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore” (Isaiah 9:6b-7a).

J.D. King is a speaker, writer and director of the World Revival Network.

[1] CJ Werleman. “We’re living through the “most peaceful era” in human history – with one big exception.” Salon, Wednesday January 15, 2014.

[2] Steven Pinker and Andrew Mack. “The World Is Not Falling Apart: Never mind the headlines. We’ve never lived in such peaceful times.” Slate, December 2014.

[3] Steven Pinker and Andrew Mack. “The World Is Not Falling Apart: Never mind the headlines. We’ve never lived in such peaceful times.” Slate, December 2014.

[4] Steven Pinker. “Violence Vanquished: We believe our world is riddled with terror and war, but we may be living in the most peaceable era in human existence. Why brutality is declining and empathy is on the rise.” The Wall Street Journal, September 24, 2011.

[5] Steven Pinker. “Violence Vanquished: We believe our world is riddled with terror and war, but we may be living in the

most peaceable era in human existence. Why brutality is declining and empathy is on the rise.” The Wall Street Journal, September 24, 2011.

[6] Steven Pinker and Andrew Mack. “The World Is Not Falling Apart: Never mind the headlines. We’ve never lived in such peaceful times.” Slate, December 2014.

[7] Max Roser. It’s a cold, hard fact: our world is becoming a better place. Oxford Martin School, October 20, 2014.

[8] Max Roser. It’s a cold, hard fact: our world is becoming a better place. Oxford Martin School, October 20, 2014.

[9] James R. Rogers. “What’s Behind the Stunning Decrease in Global Poverty?” First Things, November 26, 2013.

[10] Jon Berkley. “Towards the end of poverty: Nearly 1 billion people have been taken out of extreme poverty in 20 years. The world should aim to do the same again.” The Economist, June 1, 2013.

[11] George Weigel. “Christian Number-Crunching reveals impressive growth.” Catholic Education Resource Center. February 9, 2011.

[12] George Weigel. “Christian Number-Crunching reveals impressive growth.” Catholic Education Resource Center. February 9, 2011.

[13] Pew Research Report. “Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population.” December 19, 2011.

[14] Kelly Head. “Living From His Presence.” The Voice. Christ For The Nations. March 13, 2014.

[15] Statistics referenced at

[16]Paul Strand; Spirit-Led Revival Movement Sweeps Brazil; . News; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Friday, March 11, 2011.

[17]Tom Phillips. “China On Course To Become ‘World’s Most Christian Nation’ Within 15 years” London Telegraph (April 19, 2014).

[18] Prof Yang quoted in Tom Phillips. “China On Course To Become ‘World’s Most Christian Nation’ Within 15 years.” London Telegraph (April 19, 2014).

[19] John Bingham. “Justin Welby ponders landmark China tour

to see explosion of Christianity:" The Telegraph, December 14, 2014.

[20] Audrey Lee. "Why Revival is Exploding Among Muslims." Charisma (December 2012).

[21] Timothy C. Morgan; "Why Muslims Are Becoming the Best Evangelists: Missiologist Dave Garrison documents global surge in Muslims leading Muslims to Christ. He calls it, 'Unprecedented.'" Christianity Today. April 22, 2014.

[22] George Thomas. "Revival Breaks Out In Land Once Hostile To Christianity." CBN News, April 22, 2014.

[23] Tino Qahoush quoted in George Thomas. "Revival Breaks Out In Land Once Hostile To Christianity." CBN News, April 22, 2014.

[24] Editor. "Al-Jazeera: 6 Million Muslims convert to Christianity in Africa each year." Muslim Statistics, December 14, 2012. (Al-Jazeera has since removed the interview and details).

[25] Editor. "Al-Jazeera: 6 Million Muslims convert to Christianity in Africa each year." Muslim Statistics, December 14, 2012. (Al-Jazeera has since removed the interview and details).