

GLOBAL SOUTH CHRISTENDOM: IS IT INEVITABLE?

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Many Christians have, I think, taken heart from the recent book by Prof. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford UP, 2002), a popularized version of which has appeared in the October *Atlantic Monthly* as “The Next Christianity.” Jenkins’s thesis is that regions of Africa, South America and Asia are growing simultaneously in population and in the spread of the Christian faith. Jenkins concludes that despite fears of an Islamicization of the “Global South,” the great untold story is “the potential political role of ascendant Southern Christianity.”

In particular, Anglican Christianity is growing in parts of Africa. While many talked about the 1990’s as the Decade of Evangelism, the Anglican Church in Nigeria walked the walk and multiplied from about 6 million members to as many as 20 million. The Episcopal Church in the Sudan likewise grew exponentially and did so during a period of intense persecution and civil devastation. The Anglican Church in Uganda, where I live, is the beneficiary of earlier waves of evangelism and revival, and the churches are still full and vibrant, at least by Western standards.

So there is much to remind us that the Acts of the Apostles continue to this day. As Jenkins points out, the stellar growth of the South seems to go hand in hand with the fading of faith in the former “Christendom,” i.e., Europe. (According to Jenkins, the Church in the U.S.A. teeters in-between these two trends.)

Finally, Jenkins notes that the character of Global South Christianity is much more “conservative” than its Western counterparts in terms of belief in the supernatural and in the authority of the Bible. At the same time, the Church is more “radical” in being a Spirit-movement and a people-movement more than an institutional entity – a challenge, I might add, to Anglican traditionalism.

For three years now, I have served as the head of a new Christian university in Uganda. My time here leads me to issue one caveat to the optimism which Jenkins’s book engenders. Christianity may be winning the numbers game in the Global South over against Islam and Secularism, but it is not consolidating these gains at the leadership level.

The Muslims in Uganda, for instance, are outspending the Christians many times over in higher education. The Organization of Islamic States recently opened “King Faud Plaza” in downtown Kampala, a \$10 million high-rise which houses the downtown campus of the Islamic University. By contrast, the Anglican Church has been attempting without success to raise even \$1 million for a Church House to help fund pensions for the clergy, who presently retire penniless.

Muslims are also sent overseas for higher degrees and return home to receive key positions in academia, government and society. Muslim businessmen here are far more ready to invest in overtly Islamic enterprises than Christians. Muslim heads of state like Muammar Qaddafi openly court political figures here, whereas leaders from the “Christian” West like Colin Powell and Paul O’Neill scrupulously maintain religious neutrality.

I agree with Philip Jenkins that social and religious trends in the Global South are more encouraging than many Christians in the West might have thought. But I would warn against any sense of inevitability about the Next Christendom. There is a battle being fought out here, and we need the prayers, the interest and the support of brothers and sisters in the stable and affluent North.

In particular, I am pleased to announce the formation of the Global South Institute for Mission, Leadership and Public Policy at Uganda Christian University, which will be officially launched in mid-2003. It is our hope that this Institute will provide a venue for Christian leaders of Church and society to meet, consult and prepare for their role in the development of the African continent. In particular, the Global South Institute will feature an Anglican Identity and Mission track, which will assist Anglicans from Africa to plot their own course in the new millennium.

For more information on the Global South Institute and Uganda Christian University, visit our websites at www.ucu.ac.ug and www.ugandapartners.org.