

The Rise of Modern Global Christianity

Instructor: Dr. Timothy Wadkins

Preliminary Course Syllabus:

Modern Global Christianity

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**Worship at the Redeemed Christian Church of God,
Lagos Nigeria**

Course Description

It may come as a surprise to some that Christianity is no longer primarily a western religion. In 1900, 82 percent of all Christians lived in Europe and North America. Today, that percentage has shrunk to 30 percent. For those scholars who believe that modernization erodes religious faith and practice, such decline seems like fulfilled prophecy. But for Christian believers in the west, this decline is alarming. Churches from all traditions and denominations are in decline, many have closed, and some have been repurposed as community centers or condominiums. Recent polling confirms that this decline is most conspicuous among younger generations, and Church leaders are trying to figure out how best to minister to rapidly shrinking congregations of mostly senior citizens.

Equally surprising however, is the fact that across the world Christianity has not actually shrunk. There are just as many Christians across the world today as there were in 1900. But geographically, Christian allegiance has shifted southward. What has taken place is a dramatic movement toward the less economically developed world, primarily in the southern hemisphere. In areas like Latin America, East and South Asia, and especially Africa, Christianity now accounts for two-thirds of the world's Christians. In these areas this religion has become a rapidly growing and vibrant tapestry of faith and practice, characterized by a complicated mix of traditional churches, alongside a diverse array of very large, supernaturally oriented, and politically diverse congregations and movements.

This course will feature a combination of lectures, slides, video clips, and discussion. It will chart the geographical and cultural shift in modern Christianity throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and analyze its complex causes. It will then illustrate the vibrant and diverse nature of global south Christianity through case studies of Christian communities in different countries. Finally, it will probe the complex challenges and widespread implications of this religious shift for the future of Christianity.

Course Calendar

Part 1: The Decline of Christianity in the Western World Since 1900

One Session: January 28

In this introductory session we will first explore the expansion and ultimate dominance of Christian faith and practice in Europe and the Americas up to the twentieth century. Second, we will show statistically how this religion began to wane throughout the twentieth century, first in Europe and later in North America. Finally, we will analyze the cultural forces of modernization and secularization and ask the extent to which these forces have contributed to the decline of Christian faith and practice in the West.

Part 2: The Rise of Christianity in the Global South throughout the Twentieth Century

Two Sessions: February 4, 11

In this second part of the course, we will explore polling that documents the rapid growth and expansion of Christianity in Latin America, Africa, and East and South Asia during the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century. Following this, we will highlight the complex causes for this explosive growth in such things as western imperialism and the accompanying missionary movement, cross cultural transmission and translation of the western gospel message, the importance of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, indigenous actors and revivals, the role played by poverty, the importance of indigenous actors and revivals, and the impact of technology and globalization.

Part 3: Spirit-filled Faith and Practice in the Global South: Case Studies

Two Sessions: February 18, 25

We will overview the rich variety of Christianity in the Global South and delve more deeply into this variety through four case studies of churches and movements in different locations: Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul South Korea; El Shaddai Catholic Charismatic Movement in

Manila, the Philippines; The Redeemed Church of God in Lagos, Nigeria; Elim Mission International Church in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Part 4: Global Christianity in the 21st Century and Beyond

One Session: March 4, 2025

In this concluding session we will assess the implications of the global shift in Christianity toward the global south. We will particularly focus on the impact of non-western Christian migration on western Christianity, and assess the theological, moral, and political challenges involved in the modern cross-cultural nature of Christian faith and practice.

Finally, we will revisit the complicated issue of secularization and ask whether modernization always produces secularization and leads to consequent religious decline. Will Christian faith in the Global South go the way of the west? Will it find ways to adapt to or challenge the increasingly potent forces of secularization? Or will it be swallowed by them?

Required Reading List

Books: (Available from on-line book sellers. All are available as Kindle eBooks)

Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Articles: (Provided Virtually)

David W. Bebbington, "Introduction: The Parameters of Evangelical Identity," In David W. Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral* (Baylor University Press, 2021): pp. 1-27

Steve Bruce, *Secularization: in Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford, Reprint Edition, 2013): Chapters 1-3.

Scott Thumma, Warren Bird, "Mega Faith for the Mega City: The Global Megachurch Phenomena" in Stanley D. Brunn, ed. *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices, Politics* (Springer, 2015) 2331-2352.

Katherine L. Wiegele, "Populist Movement to Mega church: El Shaddai in Manila, Philippines," in Jonathan D. James, ed. *A Moving Faith: Mega Churches Go South* (Sage Publishers, 2015): 127-142

Philip Jenkins, "Throgs of the Redeemed in Lagos and Beyond," *Christian Century*, November 21, 2018)

Timothy Wadkins, "From the Blood of the Martyrs to the Baptism of the Spirit in Modern El Salvador" *Religion Compass*, 2018

Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," in Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Orbis books, 1996, pp. 3-15