



CENTER FOR THE STUDY
OF **Global Christianity**

AT GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Glossary

This glossary contains terms that are unusual, technical, or related to a special area of knowledge. It is designed to offer brief, definitive definitions of all such terms that occur throughout these dossiers. Many additional glossary items are found in the *World Christian Database*. This glossary is adapted from a longer treatment in Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

adherents Followers, supporters, members, believers, devotees of a religion.

affiliated Followers of a religion enrolled and known to its leadership, usually with names written on rolls.

affiliated Christians Church members: all persons belonging to or connected with organized churches, whose names are inscribed, written or entered on the churches' books, records or rolls.

African Indigenous Churches Denominations indigenous to Africans, founded without outside help; also termed African Independent Churches, African Initiated Churches.

Ahmadiya (Ahmadiyya) Ex-Shia Muslim messianic movement, pronounced heretical by Pakistan, following 1889 founder Ghulam Ahmad.

animism The attribution of consciousness and personality to natural phenomena such as thunder and fire, and to objects such as rocks and trees.

Bible This term is always used to describe only the whole or complete Bible of 66 books (sometimes plus deuterocanon).

Christians Followers of Jesus Christ of all kinds: all traditions and confessions and all degrees of commitment.

church (1) A building set apart for Christian worship, or the services that go on in it. (2) A local congregation or worshipping body.

complete Bibles Copies of the whole Bible with 66 books (sometimes plus deuterocanon).

congregation (1) A local church or grouping of worshippers. (2) A religious order, society or institute (mainly Catholic usage).

conversion Change in a person's allegiance or membership in one religion to allegiance or membership in another.

converts Persons who have become followers of a religion, leaving their former religion or nonreligion.

country Term covering both (1) sovereign nations and (2) non-sovereign territories (dependencies or colonies) that are not integral parts of larger parent nations.

denomination Group of congregations sharing doctrine, beliefs and practices and voluntarily united under a common name and administrative structure (and, often, governing hierarchy). As a statistical unit, a “denomination” always refers to one single country.

diaspora A people of one country dispersed to other countries; the migration, spread, scattering and exile of a people abroad.

distribution In Bible society usage, term for measuring annual circulation or sale of scripture copies.

doubly-affiliated Christians Persons who are baptized members of two or more denominations at the same time.

ethnolinguistic people Distinct homogeneous ethnic or racial group within a single country, speaking its own language (one single mother tongue). A large people spread across two, three, four or several countries is treated here as being two, three, four or several distinct ethnolinguistic peoples.

Ethnic religionists Followers of a pre-Christian religion tied closely to a specific ethnic group, with membership restricted to that group; usually animists, polytheists or shamanists.

evangelization (1) The process of spreading Christianity; (2) the extent to which Christianity has been spread; (3) the extent of awareness of Christianity; (4) access to Christianity evangelism. The church’s organized activity of spreading Christianity, in circumstances it can control, in contrast to witness, which is the normal term for the informal, spontaneous, unorganized sharing by individual Christians in circumstances they do not control.

folk-religionists Adherents of local traditions or religions, often rural, in which elements of major world religions are blended with local beliefs and customs.

foreign missionary Full-time Christian workers who work in countries in which they are not citizens but foreigners, for at least two years.

foreign missions Christian outreach carried out in any other countries than where a sending church or mission is based.

fundamentalist Relating to or characterized by extreme conservatism, especially religious conservatism.

Hidden believers in Christ Members of non-Christian religions with faith in Christ who choose not to join Christian denominations but to remain in their religious and cultural contexts.

home missionaries Full-time Christian workers sent by their churches to missionary areas within their own countries.

immigration The movement of migrants into a destination country in which they are not native.

independency The ecclesiastical position rejecting control of churches by centralized denominationalist headquarters; organizing churches and missions independent of historic Christianity.

Independents Churches or individual Christians Separated from, uninterested in and independent of historic denominationalist Christianity.

indigenous Christianity In a particular region, that type of Christianity which, in contrast to imported or foreign types, is evolved or produced by populations indigenous to that region.

Islamic schismatics Followers of Islam, in other than its two main branches of Sunni or Shia. Islamic schismatics include Kharijite and other orthodox groups; reform movements (Sanusi, Mahdiya), also heterodox groups (Ahmadiya, Druzes, Sabbateans).

Ismailis Followers of Ismailiya (also known as Seveners). Second largest part of Shia Islam and itself divided into Nizari Ismailis (Khojas) and Mustali Ismailis (Bohras).

isolated radio/TV churches Indigenous house churches or groups composed of isolated radio/TV believers, brought into being solely through Christian broadcasting and/or Bible correspondence courses by mail; isolated from existing Christians.

itinerant Adjective describing an evangelist, missionary or other church worker whose ministry involves being continually on the move from one city or people or country to the next.

members Affiliated (which usually means enrolled with names recorded) church members.

mission The dimension of Christian witness concerned with outreach to the world.

missionary societies Local, denominational, national or international religious organizations dedicated to starting and supporting missionary work.

mother tongue Main language of a person's home or childhood; the first language spoken in an individual's home in early or earliest childhood

nation (1) A politically-organized nationality with independent, self-governing existence as a sovereign country or nation-state; (2) a synonym for country; (3) A people or people group.

native language Mother tongue.

nondenominational Unrelated to any denomination or denominations, nor accountable to any.

p.a. Per annum, per year, each year, every year, annual, yearly, over the previous 12 months.

parachurch An agency closely associated with the churches, often fulfilling a particular function on behalf of the churches.

people, people group Grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation or combination of these.

polytheists Ethnic religionists who worship several or many gods and deities.

Portions Copies of a complete Book of the Bible, usually one of the four Gospels.

radio/TV believers Persons (with their dependent adults and children, and other adherents) who derive their ongoing corporate Christian life primarily from isolated radio/TV churches or isolated Bible correspondence course student groupings.

religion Grouping of persons with beliefs about God or gods, defined by its adherents' loyalty to it, by their acceptance of it as unique and superior to all other religions, and by its relative autonomy.

religionists Persons professing adherence to any religion, as contrasted with atheists or nonreligious persons.

religious liberty Freedom to practice one's religion with the full range of religious rights specified in the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Scripture (with capital 'S') Holy Scripture, the Christian Scriptures, the Bible.

shamanists Ethnic religionists with a hierarchy of shamans and healers.

short-term missionaries Persons serving as foreign missionary personnel for a single period between one week and two years only.

syncretism The blending of beliefs from different sources.

tradition An ecclesiastical family or type of denominations sharing historical and/or many common features.

traditional religion Often used of the dominant pre-Christian religion in a country, sometimes described as tribal religion.

tribal religionists Ethnic religionists.