



Christianity 2019: What's Missing? A Call for Further Research

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Abstract

This article marks the thirty-fifth year of presenting statistical information on world Christianity and mission. This year, we report on three gaps in the literature, concerning women in world Christianity and mission, the status of short-term mission (STM), and missions and money. There are few quantitative studies on women in world Christianity; there remains a dearth in the literature on the magnitude and impact of STM (which is particularly US-centric); and Christian finance, now \$60 trillion in personal income, is vastly under-researched in global studies.

Keywords

world Christianity, mission, statistics, demography, women, money, short-term mission, Christian finance, global studies

In 1985 David B. Barrett produced the first statistical table in this series in the January issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. He produced this table three years after publishing his comprehensive and highly popular *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982; 2nd ed., 2001; 3rd ed., forthcoming). Its purpose was to lay out, in summary form, an annual update of the most significant

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global and regional statistics relevant to understanding the current status of global Christianity. This year, the following tables continue the tradition of this series, presenting the most recent overview of statistics related to global Christianity and mission. The data appear in comparative perspective and offer estimates for the years 1900, 1970, 2000, 2019, 2025, and 2050. In addition, an average annual rate of change for each category is calculated for the period 2000–2019. Each set of tables since 1985 has provided a brief commentary to help situate the data, provide further context, and elaborate on implications of the data. In this year's report, which marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of featuring quantitative data on world Christianity and mission in the *IBMR*, we take a slightly different approach.

Historically, we have naturally reported on what we know about world Christianity, and the core of what we know has been reported in the *IBMR* table. This year, however, we report on what we *don't* know—or, rather, what we want to know *better*. The study of world Christianity as an academic discipline has grown substantially since Barrett's first *IBMR* statistical table. It now has its own tenure-track professors, PhD-level researchers, scholarly journals, and professional guilds. Despite the numerous books and research projects being released seemingly daily on Christianity as a world religion, there are significant gaps. This year, we briefly highlight three of these gaps, concerning women in world Christianity and mission, the status of short-term mission, and missions and money.

Women in world Christianity and mission

Demographers, social scientists, historians, and scholars of religion have stated for decades that women are “more religious” than men. In 2016 the Pew Research Center conducted a study “Gender Gap in Religion around the World,” which concluded that indeed Christian women reported higher rates of church attendance, prayer, and religious self-identification than Christian men.¹ Many scholarly studies have also indicated this gender imbalance in religious identity, belief, and practice.² Historian Dana Robert described world Christianity as a woman's movement and estimated that roughly two-thirds of practicing Christians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were female.³ Others have also noted that Christianity has always been majority female: from the first century (women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb) till today, women constitute the majority of Christians. Despite these assertions, there exists very little hard data on women in global Christianity. There have so far been few quantitative studies on women in global Christianity and mission.

In 2007 our annual statistical table in this journal reported on male and female “Christian workers,” but little hard evidence was available for an ongoing analysis of gender in mission.⁴ Gender, however, remains an absolutely critical variable that needs to be taken into serious consideration in any study of the worldwide Christian missionary movement. We have good data on gender enrollment in theological education institutions, and there is a significant amount of data from the Vatican on Catholic

Table I. Global Population, Global Cities, and Urban Mission, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2019	2025	2050
Global Population							
Total population	1,619,625,000	3,700,578,000	6,145,007,000	1.20	7,714,577,000	8,185,614,000	9,771,823,000
Adult population (over 15)	1,073,646,000	2,311,829,000	4,295,756,000	1.53	5,734,949,000	6,168,588,000	7,689,005,000
Adults, % literate	27.6	63.8	76.7	0.44	83.4	84.3	88.0
Global Cities and Urban Mission							
Urban population (%)	14.4	36.6	46.7	0.93	55.7	58.3	68.4
Urban poor	100 million	650 million	1,400 million	3.10	2,500 million	3,000 million	4,100 million
Slum dwellers	20 million	260 million	700 million	1.20	880 million	940 million	1,200 million
Global urban population	232,695,000	1,354,213,000	2,868,301,000	2.15	4,296,446,000	4,774,652,000	6,679,764,000
Christian urban population	159,600,000	660,800,000	1,222,046,000	1.58	1,644,989,000	1,789,476,000	2,509,510,000
Cities over 1 million	20	145	371	2.24	565	653	950
Under 50% Christian	5	65	226	1.96	327	383	500
New non-Christians per day ¹	5,200	51,100	134,000	0.45	146,000	150,000	130,000

1. New non-Christians per day migrating to urban centers.

* Column % p.a. Trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2019, as % per year.

Sources: *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2017); *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2018); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2005–13) and Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2018). *IBMR 43(1)*

Table 2. Global Religion, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2019	2025	2050
Global Religion							
Religious diversity ¹	0.27	0.43	0.45	-0.06	0.45	0.44	0.43
Religionists	1,616,370,000	2,991,131,000	5,347,218,000	1.32	6,860,417,000	7,346,164,000	8,943,979,000
Christians	557,755,000	1,229,448,000	1,987,471,000	1.27	2,528,295,000	2,718,782,000	3,466,927,000
Muslims	200,318,000	570,773,000	1,292,178,000	1.95	1,864,141,000	2,064,072,000	2,806,270,000
Hindus	202,973,000	462,981,000	822,392,000	1.30	1,051,375,000	1,099,886,000	1,222,227,000
Buddhists	126,956,000	234,958,000	452,314,000	0.93	539,516,000	567,793,000	590,493,000
Chinese folk-religionists	379,974,000	238,027,000	431,921,000	0.25	452,765,000	465,063,000	400,080,000
Ethnoreligionists	117,313,000	169,430,000	223,872,000	0.93	267,124,000	267,938,000	279,453,000
New religionists	5,986,000	39,382,000	62,605,000	0.21	65,202,000	64,460,000	60,568,000
Sikhs	2,962,000	10,668,000	19,973,000	1.66	27,318,000	29,484,000	34,705,000
Jews	12,292,000	13,500,000	13,745,000	0.32	14,617,000	15,000,000	15,900,000
Nonreligionists	3,255,000	709,447,000	797,789,000	0.36	854,160,000	839,450,000	827,844,000
Agnostics	3,029,000	544,291,000	660,722,000	0.42	716,124,000	707,248,000	698,128,000
Atheists	226,000	165,156,000	137,067,000	0.04	138,036,000	132,202,000	129,716,000

Note: Religions do not add up to the total because smaller religions are not listed.

1. (0–1, 1=most diverse). The Religious Diversity Index methodology is described in Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), chapter 3.

* Column % p.a. Trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2019, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2018).
IBMR 43(1)

Table 3. Global Christianity by Tradition, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2019	2025	2050
Total Christians, % of world	34.4	33.2	32.3	0.07	32.8	33.2	35.5
Affiliated Christians	521,307,000	1,117,440,000	1,888,111,000	1.30	2,414,698,000	2,600,912,000	3,342,666,000
Roman Catholics	266,263,000	658,556,000	1,025,922,000	1.02	1,243,532,000	1,305,290,000	1,599,608,000
Protestants ¹	133,274,000	251,654,000	422,423,000	1.61	571,926,000	616,454,000	861,617,000
Independents	8,859,000	95,692,000	297,666,000	2.19	449,424,000	512,411,000	712,435,000
African	40,000	17,531,000	76,313,000	2.37	119,019,000	137,263,000	198,476,000
Asian	1,906,000	16,265,000	95,054,000	2.79	160,230,000	186,483,000	280,081,000
European	185,000	8,222,000	16,275,000	1.99	23,670,000	26,873,000	36,392,000
Latin American	33,000	9,129,000	29,301,000	2.29	45,053,000	52,108,000	76,256,000
Northern American	6,673,000	44,014,000	79,775,000	1.20	100,084,000	108,125,000	119,089,000
Oceanian	22,000	531,000	950,000	1.94	1,369,000	1,559,000	2,142,000
Orthodox	115,481,000	142,139,000	256,737,000	0.58	286,395,000	291,745,000	304,139,000
Unaffiliated Christians	36,448,000	112,007,000	99,359,000	0.71	113,597,000	117,869,000	124,261,000
Evangelicals ²	80,912,000	105,599,000	234,210,000	2.19	353,677,000	399,950,000	581,065,000
Pentecostals/Charismatics ³	981,000	60,944,000	453,934,000	2.26	693,820,000	794,474,000	1,089,199,000
Denominations	1,600	18,100	33,200	2.07	45,000	49,000	64,000
Congregations	400,000	1,395,000	3,300,000	3.14	5,500,000	6,300,000	9,000,000

Note: Categories below do not add up to affiliated Christians because of double-affiliation (between traditions).

1. Including Anglicans. Past tables have listed Anglicans separately.

2. Churches and individuals who self-identify as Evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to Evangelical alliances (e.g. World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls.

3. Church members involved in the Pentecostal/Charismatic/Independent Charismatic renewal in the Holy Spirit, also known collectively as “Renewalists”.

* Column % p.a. Trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2019, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2018).

IBMR 43(1)

Table 4. Christian Affiliation by Continent and Christian Mission and Evangelization, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2019	2025	2050
Christian Affiliation by Continent							
Africa (5 regions)	8,458,000	113,328,000	360,106,000	2.89	618,870,000	728,656,000	1,278,874,000
Asia (5 regions)	20,816,000	91,482,000	272,921,000	1.89	389,775,000	440,289,000	580,754,000
Europe (including Russia; 4 regions)	368,114,000	466,845,000	545,580,000	0.04	549,510,000	540,441,000	492,084,000
Latin America (3 regions)	60,027,000	262,823,000	480,685,000	1.18	600,443,000	630,698,000	699,747,000
Northern America (1 region)	59,570,000	168,479,000	207,656,000	0.56	231,064,000	234,584,000	258,653,000
Oceania (4 regions)	4,323,000	14,483,000	21,164,000	0.89	25,035,000	26,245,000	32,554,000
Christian Mission and Evangelization							
National workers (citizens)	2,100,000	4,600,000	10,900,000	1.01	13,200,000	14,000,000	17,000,000
Foreign missionaries	62,000	240,000	420,000	0.36	450,000	550,000	700,000
Foreign mission sending agencies	600	2,200	4,000	1.59	5,400	6,000	7,500
Christian martyrs per 10 years ¹	344,000	3,770,000	1,600,000	-2.98	800,000	700,000	1,000,000
% in Christian countries ²	95.0	76.0	59.1	-0.55	53.3	53.6	48.2
Non-Christians who know a Christian (%)	5.5	13.5	17.6	0.21	18.3	18.9	19.7
Unevangelized population ³	880,122,000	1,650,954,000	1,843,175,000	0.91	2,188,108,000	2,321,317,000	2,745,657,000
Unevangelized as % of world population	54.3	44.6	30.0	-0.29	28.4	28.4	28.1
World evangelization plans since 30 CE ⁴	250	510	1,500	2.73	2,500	3,000	4,000

1. Ten-year total for decade ending in the given year. World totals of current long-term trend.

See David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), part 4, "Martyrology."

2. Percentage of all Christians living in countries $\geq 80\%$ Christian.

3. Defined in *World Christian Trends*, part 25, "Macroevangelistics."

4. Grand total of all distinct plans and proposals for accomplishing world evangelization made by Christians since 30 CE. See *World Christian Trends*, part 27, "GeoStrategies."

* Column % p.a. Trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2019, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2018).

IBMR 43(1)

Table 5. Christian Media and Finance, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2019	2025	2050
Christian Media							
Books (titles) about Christianity	300,000	1,800,000	4,800,000	3.66	9,500,000	11,800,000	14,500,000
Christian periodicals (titles)	3,500	23,000	35,000	4.31	78,000	100,000	120,000
Bibles printed per year	5 million	25 million	54 million	2.91	93 million	110 million	135 million
Scriptures (including selections) printed per year	20 million	281 million	4,600 million	1.07	5,190 million	6,000 million	9,200 million
Bible density (copies in place)	108 million	443 million	1,400 million	1.97	2,030 million	2,280 million	2,800 million
Users of radio/TV/Internet	0	750 million	1,840 million	1.16	2,290 million	2,460 million	2,930 million
Christian Finance (in US\$, per year)							
Personal income of Christians	270 billion	4,100 billion	18,000 billion	6.54	60,000 billion	70,000 billion	190,000 billion
Giving to Christian causes	8 billion	70 billion	320 billion	6.24	1,010 billion	1,200 billion	3,400 billion
Churches' income	7 billion	50 billion	130 billion	6.09	400 billion	480 billion	1,400 billion
Parachurch and institutional income	1 billion	20 billion	190 billion	6.33	610 billion	720 billion	2,000 billion
Ecclesiastical crime ¹	300,000	5,000,000	19 billion	6.97	68 billion	80 billion	260 billion
Income of global foreign missions	200 million	3 billion	18 billion	6.63	60 billion	70 billion	190 billion

1. Amounts embezzled by top custodians of Christian monies (US dollar equivalents, per year).

* Column % p.a. Trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2019, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2018).

IBMR 43(1)

sisters and brothers working in mission worldwide. But in the field of world Christianity as a whole, there are wide gaps when it comes to understanding the presence of women in the churches, in church and denominational leadership, and in mission.

Short-term mission

Short-term mission (STM) is a grassroots movement that organically developed starting in the 1960s with groups such as Operation Mobilization and Youth With A Mission—both youth ministries. The popularity of STM exploded in the 1980s and 1990s for a plethora of reasons, including a generation shift between Baby Boomers and Millennials (and continuing with gusto for Generation Z),⁵ ease of travel, improved technology, and a renewed emphasis on social justice in today's young people. The very language of “short-term” versus “long-term” mission is quite new, but the paradigm of short-termers appears to be challenging centuries of tradition in mission.

Despite the exponential rise in popularity of STM, there is a notable lack of scholarly research on it. No one knows how many short-term missionaries there are in the world—nor is there agreement on whether STM is really “mission” or whether these people are really “missionaries.”⁶ Studies—which are from over a decade ago—have reported between 1 million and 5.5 million people going abroad annually for short-term mission.⁷ Furthermore, no one is completely sure where these short-termers are going or where the threshold is between short- and long-term. Numerous books and online resources are available to help churches and Christians explore the pros and cons of STM, but there remains a dearth in the literature on the magnitude and impact of STM.⁸ Furthermore, these studies are strongly US-centric. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) tracks how many foreign missionaries, foreign mission sending agencies, and national workers there are in the world (see table 4, “Christian Mission and Evangelism”), but we have not included short-term missionaries in our figures.

Missions and money

Most variables in the *IBMR* statistical table are relatively straightforward to obtain and report, such as population figures, religious affiliation, Christian affiliation, and church organizations. Other areas, however, are also important to know for understanding the status of world Christianity and mission but are much more difficult to calculate. While the CSGC puts a substantial amount of effort into producing these figures, Christian finance represents an area that we simply do not know as much about as we would like. Jonathan Bonk's book *Missions and Money* remains the go-to resource on the subject, though it is now over ten years old.⁹ Our annual statistical table has many variables related to Christian finance: personal income of Christians, giving to Christian causes, ecclesiastical crime, and income of global foreign missions (see table 5, “Christian Finance”). Many of these figures are approximations that would be improved with further research.

For example, Christian income is calculated by multiplying a country's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita by the number of Christians from all traditions. Because data on giving patterns of Christians to secular causes, churches, denominations, and parachurch organizations are not available from organizational financial records, the percentage of Christian income that is donated must be estimated.¹⁰ Research has shown that 2.3 percent of Christians' income is donated to Christian causes in the United States.¹¹ This percentage is used as a reference point, with each country assigned a higher or lower percentage based on the 2013 World Giving Index (Charities Aid Foundation), with the lowest percentage set at 0.5 percent. Countries missing from the World Giving Index are allocated the weighted averages for their respective UN regions (except countries in Oceania are allocated the continental weighted average).¹²

In other words, we take available data and make estimates for variables that we are seeking to understand. A global dataset on Christian giving, including giving to churches, parachurch organizations, and mission, would vastly improve our knowledge of Christian finance. With over \$60 trillion in personal income, Christians worldwide have significant resources, and good research is needed to ensure that Christians' giving is directed to the appropriate destinations.

Conclusion

We hope that this article serves as a clarion call to the readership of the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. Whether layperson, pastor, missionary, or PhD student, Christians should know that while the scholarly community has made significant strides in understanding the world Christian movement, there are still enormous, significant gaps in our knowledge. Our appeal here is specifically directed to current and future scholars of world Christianity and mission. Academics: encourage your students to think outside the box of traditional world Christianity scholarship, and help them engage in the interdisciplinary work necessary to make ground-breaking discoveries. Church and mission leaders: identify the problems you see in your contexts, both locally and globally, and dedicate yourself to finding creative solutions to help the church function better in the world. It is of particular concern that much of the research produced by the academy is Western-centric, relating only to societies that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (i.e., WEIRD).¹³ But world Christianity cannot be characterized this way. The CSGC will continue to do our part in providing the best, most accurate relevant information on world Christianity and mission for as long as we are able, and we will continue to encourage others to break new ground in research and scholarship.

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Notes

1. Pew Research Center, "The Gender Gap in Religion around the World," March 22, 2016, www.pewforum.org/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world.
2. For example, Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, *Why Are Women More Religious than Men?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1975); Gemma Penny, Leslie J. Francis, and Mandy Robbins, "Why Are Women More Religious than Men? Testing the Explanatory Power of Personality Theory among Undergraduate Students in Wales," *Mental Health, Religion, Culture* 18, no. 6 (2015): 492–502.
3. Dana L. Robert, "World Christianity as a Women's Movement," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 4 (October 2006): 180–86. Robert also stated that "evidence on gender tends to be anecdotal rather than based on statistical surveys" (182).
4. Missionary statistician James Dennis included gender in his reporting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. See his *Centennial Study of Foreign Missions: A Statistical Supplement to "Christian Missions and Social Progress," Being a Conspectus of the Achievements and Results of Evangelical Missions in All Lands at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Revell, 1902).
5. Stan Guthrie, *Missions in the Third Millennium* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing), 2001.
6. For a brief literature review, see Don Fanning, "Short Term Missions: A Trend That Is Growing Exponentially," *Trends and Issues in Missions* 4, 2009, http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_missions/4. See also Robert J. Priest, Terry Dischinger, Steve Rasmussen, and C. M. Brown, "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology: An International Review* 34, no. 4 (October 2006): 431–50.
7. See, for example, Barna Research Group, *Teens and Evangelism Report*, commissioned by Mark Matlock and Wisdom Works Ministries (2001); Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Margaret Lyman, "Examining Short-Term Mission from a Globalization Perspective: Factors in the Emergence of Today's Mission Boom and Validity; Issues for a Global Church" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2004).
8. For example, David A. Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013); Robert J. Priest, ed., *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right!* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008).
9. Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem*, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006; orig. pub., 1991).
10. See Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, and Albert W. Hickman, "Embezzlement in the Global Christian Community," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 74–84.
11. Giving USA Foundation (GUSA), "Giving USA 2012: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2011: Executive Summary," <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/giving-usa-2012.pdf>.
12. Technically, the percentage of their income given by Christians in a particular country is calculated as $0.5 + (\text{Donate pct} \times ((2.3 - 0.5) / 62))$, expressed as a percentage of Christian GNI (= Christian population \times GNI per capita). The allocated lower limit is 0.5 percent; "Donate pct" is the donation percentage of the country from the World Giving Index; 2.3

percent is the US donation percentage, and 62 percent is the US donating money score in the World Giving Index.

13. See Joseph Henrich, Steven J. Heine, and Ara Norenzayan. "The Weirdest People in the World?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33 (2010): 61–135.

Author biographies



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