

World Christianity and Religions 2022: A Complicated Relationship

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Abstract

This article marks the thirty-eighth year of including statistical information on World Christianity and mission in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. This year it includes details on the growth of world religions, increasing religious diversity, and personal contact between Christians and people of other religions. The world is becoming more religious, and the world's countries have become more religiously diverse, yet Christians have inadequate personal contact with members of other religions. Solidarity, including friendship, love, and hospitality, is posited as the way forward in addressing these trends.

Keywords

World Christianity, global Christianity, mission, statistics, demography, religions, religious diversity, personal contact, solidarity

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., Edinburgh University Press, 2019). Its purpose was to lay out, in summary form, an annual update

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of the most significant global and regional statistics relevant to understanding the current status of global Christianity. The following tables in this article continue the tradition of the 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, 2022, 2025, and 2050. 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.

This article represents the thirty-eighth year of providing annual statistics in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. This year's article provides details on the growth of world religions, increasing religious diversity, and personal contact between Christians and people of other religions. The world's population is becoming more religious, and the world's countries are becoming more religiously diverse, but Christians have inadequate personal contact with members of other religions. Solidarity, including friendship, love, and hospitality, is posited as the way forward in addressing these trends.

The world is becoming more religious

Despite the prognostications of leading academics in the mid-twentieth century, the world is becoming increasingly religious. For example, in 1968 Peter Berger forecast a dire future of religious communities in the twenty-first century. He stated, "Religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture."¹ In 1970 the percentage of people worldwide who professed affiliation to religion in some way stood at 80.8. By the year 2000, however, this figure had jumped to 87.0 percent, and it has continued to grow, reaching 88.7 percent by 2022. The demographic pivots were the collapse of Communism in the late twentieth century and the opening of China to the rest of the world. China, the world's largest country, has experienced a resurgence of religions of all kinds since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. China's religious population increased dramatically from 39.8 percent in 1970 to 61.2 percent in 2022. Russia has reclaimed its national Orthodox heritage (82.4 percent Christian in 2022), as have other former Soviet republics in eastern Europe. Like Russia, some post-Soviet states are majority Christian, such as Armenia (94.7 percent Christian) and Belarus (79.0 percent). Others are majority Muslim, such as Tajikistan (97.9 percent Muslim), Turkmenistan (96.5 percent), and Uzbekistan (95.6 percent). Many other countries have experienced an increase of religious affiliation in the last thirty years as well, including Albania (formerly the world's only official atheistic country), Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Moldova, all of which are over 96 percent religious.

Besides these changes in religious demographics, it is also significant that Christians and Muslims together represented only 33 percent of the world's population in 1800, rising to 47 percent by 1900. By 2022 Christians and Muslims together represented 57 percent, which is expected to exceed 63 percent by 2050. Consequently, the importance of improving global and local Christian-Muslim relations—including mutual understanding and reciprocal compassion—will only become increasingly pressing in local, national, and international contexts.

The world has become more religiously diverse

The countries in the world became more religiously diverse over the twentieth century, especially when measured at the national level. This is especially true in Asia (which has always been the most religiously diverse continent), where immigration has transformed previously homogeneous societies into more diverse communities. Han Chinese, for example, are found in the millions throughout Southeast Asia and the world, including Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the United States, bringing their unique East Asian religions with them.

Some of the most profound increases in religious diversity are in Germany and the United States. Measured by the Religious Diversity Index, Germany's religious diversity jumped from 0.3 in 1900 to 5.2 by 2022.² Likewise, the United States increased from 0.6 in 1900 to 4.6 in 2022. On one measure, Singapore remained the world's most diverse country in 2020, as it was home to seven religions, each of which claimed at least 1 percent of the country's population (all figures percentages): Chinese folk-religion (36), Christianity (21), Buddhism (15), Islam (15), agnosticism (5), Hinduism (5), and New Religions (1).³ At the same time, however, some regions were becoming less religiously diverse, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where Christianity and Islam were both growing because of converts from African Traditional Religions. Christianity in the region grew from 9.1 percent in 1900 to 59.1 percent in 2022; Islam grew from 14.2 percent to 30.0 percent over the same period.

Christians have inadequate personal contact with people in other religions

Broadly speaking, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians around the world, a fact that has not changed much in the last two decades. Measuring personal contact focuses on the importance of friendship across religious boundaries and challenges Christian missionary efforts that see people as mere targets of evangelization instead of human beings living, working, and operating in specific social contexts.⁴ The terms "personal contact" and "personally know" imply more than a casual or superficial relationship. An estimated 87 percent of Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims do not personally know a Christian. Except in Asia, the nonreligious are in closer touch with Christians, which is not unexpected, since many agnostics and atheists in the West are former Christians. Ethnic religionists have more contact with Christians as well, likely because ethnic religionist peoples were a major focus of Christian mission efforts in the twentieth century.

Personal contact between Christians and non-Christians varies regionally. In Northern America, for example, it is estimated that 56 percent of Muslims know a Christian, whereas in Europe the figure is less than 18 percent. Buddhist communities, in contrast, appear to be more integrated in Latin America (66 percent know a Christian) than they are in Northern America (35 percent) or Europe (28 percent). The greatest challenge is found in Asia, partly because the Christian community is relatively small and, in many places, separated from adherents of other religions by geography or

culture. In Asia, only 12 percent of all non-Christians personally know a Christian (13 percent for Buddhists, 13 percent for Hindus, and 10 percent for Muslims).

The Pew Research Center regularly polls interreligious knowledge among Americans. In 2019 they reported that the average US adult answered 14.2 out of 32 questions correctly about religious facts.⁵ Education is an important factor in encouraging positive interreligious relationships. Considering Singapore again, the most religiously diverse country in the world, one might suspect substantial tension living within so much religious difference. To the contrary, Singaporeans live in relative harmony among their religious family members and neighbors. The 2018 International Social Survey Program Study of Religion survey in Singapore reported that nine out of ten respondents believed it was unacceptable or very unacceptable for religious leaders to hinder religious harmony, including making insensitive comments and inciting violence or hatred toward others.⁶

It might seem counterintuitive that Christians are out of touch with people of other religions, given that the world has become more religiously diverse. That diversity, however, is often stifled by a lack of knowledge at best and, at worst, by fear of the religious “other,” causing a ghettoization of religious and ethnic communities.

Conclusion

What do Christians do in this global religious context? An important Christian virtue is solidarity—a shared vision of valuing one another and working together for the common good, despite religious differences. To that end, Christians face at least three relational challenges. First, Christians need to learn how to get along well with Christians from other traditions. This has generally been referred to as the “ecumenical challenge,” one that is emphasized every year in the number of denominations in the world, currently over 46,000! Second, Christians need to get along well with other religionists, as well as the nonreligious—the “interfaith challenge.” These annual tables provide demographic context for the importance of religious beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, which are growing in size and influence over time. Third, working toward solidarity also includes relating well to people out of respect for our global human family without primary reference to religious identity—the “common humanity” challenge.⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, institutional racism, the lack of education for girls, the urban poor, and a host of other serious and systemic challenges all require strong Christian engagement, which is bolstered when Christians intentionally work across differences.

Christians might generally agree with the idea of getting along well with others, but questions linger: How do we hold fast to a strong Christian identity while engaging with others who are different? What does true solidarity look like? How do we achieve solidarity in light of such a plurality of beliefs? By “solidarity” we are not encouraging Christians, or any other religionist, to renounce their core beliefs. Solidarity is an attitude toward others characterized by love, respect, friendship, and hospitality.⁸ Our demographic examination of the growth of religions, religious diversity, and personal contact highlights significant factors of the social well-being of our planet.

Table 1. Global Population, Global Cities, and Urban Mission, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2022	2025	2050
Global Population							
Total population	1,619,625,000	3,700,437,000	6,143,494,000	1.18	7,953,953,000	8,184,437,000	9,735,034,000
Adult population (over 15)	1,073,646,000	2,311,830,000	4,295,344,000	1.49	5,951,861,000	6,170,710,000	7,667,890,000
Adults, % literate	27.6	63.8	76.7	0.43	84.2	84.3	88.0
Global Cities and Urban Mission							
Urban population (%)	14.4	36.6	46.6	0.92	57.0	58.3	68.4
Urban poor	100 million	650 million	1,400 million	3.10	2,740 million	3,000 million	4,100 million
Slum dwellers	20 million	260 million	700 million	3.37	1,450 million	1,600 million	1,900 million
Global urban population	232,695,000	1,353,126,000	2,865,449,000	2.11	4,533,667,000	4,774,968,000	6,656,283,000
Christian urban population	159,600,000	660,800,000	1,216,948,000	1.50	1,687,465,000	1,735,445,000	2,412,250,000
Cities over 1 million	20	145	371	2.27	608	653	950
Under 50% Christian	5	65	226	2.20	365	396	500
New non-Christians per day ¹	5,200	51,100	138,000	0.90	168,000	173,000	132,000

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

*Column % p.a. trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2022, as % per year.

Sources: *World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2019); *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 2021).

Table 2. Global Religion, 1900–2050.

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2022	2025	2050
Global Religion							
Religious diversity ¹	2.7	4.3	4.5	-0.07	4.4	4.4	4.4
Religionists	1,616,370,000	2,988,242,000	5,342,790,000	1.27	7,056,828,000	7,295,025,000	8,885,011,000
Christians	558,346,000	1,225,395,000	1,981,177,000	1.17	2,559,875,000	2,637,172,000	3,334,019,000
Muslims	200,301,000	568,912,000	1,288,687,000	1.93	1,961,323,000	2,073,639,000	2,842,753,000
Hindus	202,976,000	464,670,000	824,760,000	1.21	1,073,784,000	1,094,898,000	1,206,856,000
Buddhists	126,946,000	235,846,000	453,685,000	0.84	545,938,000	564,903,000	580,708,000
Chinese folk-religionists	379,974,000	238,258,000	433,310,000	0.43	476,543,000	490,432,000	459,195,000
Ethnoreligionists	117,313,000	169,334,000	223,863,000	1.01	279,035,000	270,788,000	282,022,000
New Religionists	5,986,000	39,557,000	62,899,000	0.22	65,971,000	64,914,000	61,031,000
Sikhs	2,962,000	10,668,000	20,033,000	1.52	27,891,000	29,640,000	34,914,000
Jews	11,725,000	13,866,000	12,813,000	0.70	14,945,000	15,111,000	17,137,000
Nonreligionists	3,255,000	712,195,000	800,704,000	0.52	897,124,000	889,412,000	850,023,000
Agnostics	3,028,000	547,039,000	659,225,000	0.59	750,045,000	745,662,000	707,144,000
Atheists	226,000	165,156,000	141,479,000	0.18	147,079,000	143,750,000	142,879,000

Note: Religions do not add up to the total because religions with fewer adherents are not listed.

1. (0–10, 10=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), ch. 3.

*Column % p.a. trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2022, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2021).

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

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2022	2025	2050
Total Christians, % of world	34.5	33.1	32.2	-0.01	32.2	32.2	34.2
Affiliated Christians	522,440,000	1,110,685,000	1,883,551,000	1.20	2,446,304,000	2,523,147,000	3,226,998,000
Roman Catholics	265,756,000	657,128,000	1,024,678,000	0.93	1,256,120,000	1,280,563,000	1,518,441,000
Protestants ¹	134,196,000	251,909,000	429,184,000	1.54	600,772,000	623,968,000	881,002,000
Independents	8,859,000	89,480,000	284,419,000	1.59	402,451,000	422,161,000	618,845,000
African	40,000	16,782,000	71,905,000	2.22	116,628,000	124,361,000	207,097,000
Asian	1,906,000	15,370,000	95,847,000	1.18	123,937,000	128,452,000	168,801,000
European	185,000	6,571,000	13,640,000	1.74	19,946,000	20,974,000	31,093,000
Latin American	33,000	8,963,000	27,949,000	2.29	46,030,000	49,297,000	85,137,000
Northern American	6,673,000	41,438,000	74,339,000	1.11	94,765,000	97,870,000	124,862,000
Oceanian	22,000	356,000	740,000	2.00	1,145,000	1,209,000	1,854,000
Orthodox	116,199,000	139,115,000	256,991,000	0.64	295,508,000	300,166,000	322,239,000
Unaffiliated Christians	35,906,000	114,710,000	97,626,000	0.69	113,571,000	114,025,000	107,021,000
Evangelicals ²	80,912,000	111,669,000	270,454,000	1.80	400,121,000	420,870,000	620,963,000
Pentecostals/Charismatics ³	981,000	57,636,000	442,607,000	1.88	667,216,000	703,639,000	1,031,500,000
Denominations	2,000	13,100	31,100	1.84	46,400	49,000	64,000
Congregations	400,000	1,329,000	3,000,000	1.54	4,200,000	4,300,000	5,400,000

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, 2000–2022, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2021).

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

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2022	2025	2050
Christians by Continent							
Global North	459,901,000	703,126,000	814,418,000	0.13	837,809,000	828,804,000	772,759,000
Europe (including Russia; 4 regions)	380,647,000	491,638,000	560,871,000	0.06	568,559,000	560,458,000	496,682,000
Northern America (1 region)	79,254,000	211,489,000	253,547,000	0.27	269,250,000	268,347,000	276,078,000
Global South	98,445,000	522,268,000	1,166,759,000	1.79	1,722,066,000	1,808,368,000	2,561,260,000
Africa (5 regions)	9,640,000	138,004,000	379,758,000	2.77	692,094,000	749,081,000	1,280,641,000
Asia (5 regions)	21,966,000	95,644,000	280,074,000	1.50	388,777,000	404,809,000	559,973,000
Latin America (3 regions)	62,002,000	270,166,000	482,355,000	1.09	612,381,000	625,497,000	685,870,000
Oceania (4 regions)	4,837,000	18,454,000	24,571,000	0.73	28,814,000	28,981,000	34,776,000
Christian Mission and Evangelization							
National workers (citizens)	2,100,000	4,600,000	10,900,000	0.94	13,400,000	14,000,000	17,000,000
Foreign missionaries	62,000	240,000	420,000	0.16	435,000	450,000	600,000
Foreign mission sending agencies	600	2,200	4,000	1.62	5,700	6,000	7,500
Christian martyrs per 10 years ¹	344,000	3,770,000	1,600,000	-2.58	900,000	900,000	1,000,000
% in Christian countries ²	95.0	76.1	59.0	-0.43	53.7	53.9	49.6
Non-Christians who know a Christian (%)	5.4	13.3	17.4	0.23	18.3	18.6	20.0
Unevangelized population ³	879,998,000	1,653,520,000	1,845,839,000	0.85	2,223,554,000	2,295,524,000	2,756,702,000
Unevangelized as % of world population	54.3	44.7	30.0	-0.33	28.0	28.0	28.3

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), pt. 4, "Martyrology."

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

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

*Column % p.a. trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2022, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2021).

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

	1900	1970	2000	% p.a.*	mid-2022	2025	2050
Christian Media							
Books (titles) about Christianity	300,000	1,800,000	4,800,000	3.67	10,600,000	11,800,000	14,500,000
Christian periodicals (titles)	3,500	23,000	35,000	4.28	88,000	100,000	120,000
Bibles printed per year	5 million	25 million	54 million	2.52	93 million	100 million	120 million
Scriptures (including selections) printed per year	20 million	281 million	4,600 million	1.07	5,290 million	6,000 million	9,200 million
Bible density (copies in place)	108 million	443 million	1,400 million	1.05	1,760 million	1,800 million	2,300 million
Users of radio/TV/Internet	0	750 million	1,840 million	1.14	2,360 million	2,460 million	2,920 million
Christian Finance (in US\$, per year)							
Personal income of Christians	270 billion	4,100 billion	18,000 billion	5.03	53,000 billion	57,000 billion	75,000 billion
Giving to Christian causes	8 billion	70 billion	320 billion	4.79	896 billion	1,000 billion	2,200 billion
Churches' income	7 billion	50 billion	130 billion	4.74	360 billion	400 billion	900 billion
Parachurch and institutional income	1 billion	20 billion	190 billion	4.86	540 billion	600 billion	1,300 billion
Ecclesiastical crime ¹	300,000	5,000,000	19 billion	5.31	59 billion	70 billion	170 billion
Income of global foreign missions	200 million	3 billion	18 billion	5.01	52 billion	60 billion	120 billion

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

*Column % p.a. trend. Average annual rate of change, 2000–2022, as % per year.

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed July 2021).

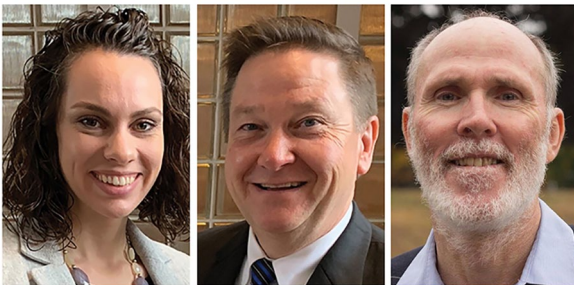
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Notes

1. Peter Berger, "A Bleak Outlook Is Seen for Religion," *New York Times*, April 25, 1968, p. 3.
2. The Religious Diversity Index, based upon the Herfindahl Index (used by economists studying market competition), describes the interreligious diversity of a particular country or region population using a scale from 0.0 (no diversity) to 10.0 (most diverse). See Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 963.
3. *Ibid.*, 713. New Religions are defined as twentieth-century Asiatic movements, Eastern or indigenous non-Christian syncretistic religions—for example, Japanese neo-Buddhist and neo-Shinto New Religious movements and Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indonesian syncretistic religions.
4. See Todd M. Johnson and Charles L. Tieszen, "Personal Contact: The sine qua non of Twenty-First-Century Christian Mission," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43 (October 2007): 494–502.
5. Becka A. Alper, "Six Facts about What Americans Know about Religion," Pew Research Center, July 23, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/23/6-facts-about-what-americans-know-about-religion/>.
6. Mathew Mathews, Leonard Lim, and Shanthini Selvarajan, "Religion in Singapore: The Private and Public Spheres," *Institute of Policy Studies Working Paper*, no. 33, March 28, 2019.
7. See Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu, *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).
8. On friendship, see Dana L. Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

Author biographies



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