

# The Crisis of European Christianity: Any Prophetic Message in Philip Jenkins' Trilogy?

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**Abstract:** *Jenkins is the author of a trilogy: *The Next Christendom*, *The New Faces of Christianity*, and *God's Continent*. A major theme of these publications is the "death" of Christianity in Europe and the shift of the centre of gravity of World Christianity to the global South: Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While some scholars disagree with his thesis others agree with him. This article discusses some scholars who agreed with him.*

**Key Words:** African Christianity, Apologetics, Crisis, Globalization, Jenkins, Secularism.

## **Introduction**

In his book *Next Christendom*, Jenkins pointed out that the Christian story is replete with conflicts. Therefore, to make any meaningful assessment about world Christianity, one should consider a holistic dimension of the geo-politics and religio-socio-economics of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Comparing demographic data with those of the Euro-American context, Jenkins posited that currently, the heartlands of world Christianity have changed in favour of the South, creating new challenges and opportunities. For example, in Africa Christianity is rapidly spreading through the explosion of population growth and conversions, contending 'space' and relevance with an equally growing Islam.

In the last twenty years, many historians, theologians, demographers have interacted with Jenkins, applying his theories to different contexts. The article analyses the debate from an African perspective. To introduce the discussion, the operational definitions of two relevant terms, globalisation and crisis, are discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

## Operational Definitions of Terms

### A. Globalization

Easy travel and information technology have created a “global village” with missiological implications. The universal or global Church needs approaches that will effectively influence millions who are crisscrossing the globe. As Stackhouse stated,

The process that we call globalisation seems to be creating the conditions for a new super-ethos, a worldwide set of operating values and norms that will influence most, if not all, peoples, cultures, and societies. It is quite possible that most of the contexts in which humans now live, and their roots in particular sets of values and norms, will be modified by a new comprehending context that owes its allegiance to no particular society, local ethos, or political order.<sup>2</sup>

Stackhouse offers a comprehensive description of globalisation as connected with global socio-cultural-politico-economic dynamics. Nevertheless, it exhibits the lack of any reference to biblical, theological, and missiological realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For Johnson, “this reductionist tendency can ignore or confuse our vital concern for Christian identity amidst vast demographic shifts.”<sup>3</sup> On these premises, he endorsed Steger’s definition which stated, “Globalisation is best thought of as a multidimensional set of social processes (economic, political, cultural, technological, and ecological) that resists being confined to any single thematic framework.”<sup>4</sup>

Writing under the sub-topic, “Globalization and Christian Identity,” Johnson posited,

At its core, then, globalisation is about shifting forms of human contact...First, increasing contact between Christians around the world sparks reflection on identity. Christians see ways in which they differ (ethnicity, language, denomination) as well as ways in which they are the same (practice, core theology, creeds). Second, lack of contact between Christians and non-Christians hinders the frontier

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<sup>2</sup> Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, eds., *God and Globalization: Religion and the Powers of the Common Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), I: 19.

<sup>3</sup> Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-12. See Todd M. Johnson, “Globalization, Christian Identity, and Frontier Missions,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27, no. 4 (2010), 166.

<sup>4</sup> Steger, *Globalization*, 1-12.

mission because crucial information on the latter's lives and religions is not widely understood and discussed.<sup>5</sup>

As Johnson added, "it is this complexity in globalisation that has strong implications both for Christian identity and for frontier missions... At its core globalisation is about shifting forms of human contact."<sup>6</sup>

Johnson suggested that Steger offered relevant tools for comprehending global Christian identity (or identities), presenting four distinct characteristics of globalisation. These characteristics included:

- a) The *creation* of new and the *multiplication* of existing social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries.
- b) The *expansion* and *stretching* of social relations, activities, and interdependencies.
- c) The *intensification* and *acceleration* of social exchanges and activities.
- d) The subjective plane of human consciousness. Thus, globalisation refers to people becoming increasingly conscious of growing manifestations of social interdependence and the enormous acceleration of social interactions.<sup>7</sup>

Elaborating on the last instance, Steger stated, "Their awareness of the receding importance of geographical boundaries and distances fosters a keen sense of becoming part of a global whole. Reinforced daily, these persistent experiences of global interdependence gradually change people's individual and collective identities, and thus dramatically impact the way they act in the world."<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, globalisation should necessarily be discussed in connection with a couple of issues: frontier mission and urbanisation. First, globalisation increases contact between humans, resulting in tension between the local and the global, the particular and the universal

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, "Globalization, Christian Identity," 166.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, "Globalization, Christian Identity," 166.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, "Globalization, Christian Identity," 166.

<sup>8</sup> Steger, *Globalization*, 12. See also "Globalization, Christian Identity," 166.

within world Christianity. These tensions are relevant to frontier missions.<sup>9</sup>

The second issue is the connection between globalisation and urbanisation. Global demographic study has indicated that by 2050, between 60-80% of the world's population will live in urban areas. The creation of cities, cosmopolitan, and metropolitan centres is a 21<sup>st</sup>-century phenomenon with significant missiological implications.

## B. Crisis

Three significant events have culminated into a crisis in the North:

- The decline of Christianity and the growing presence and influence of Islam in Euro-America.
- The secularisation of the western Church,<sup>10</sup> which Hunter III defines “The withdrawal of whole areas of life, thought, and activity from the control or influence of the Church. The Church lost influence in several Western society's lives—from education to government...personal morality, and community life.”<sup>11</sup>
- The worldwide migration. Many young Africans, Asian and South Americans travel dangerously to seek greener pastures in the ‘developed world.’ The international media have shown many footages of such migration attempts by young Africans, including women and children; a significant number die in the process; many of whom fall in the hands of human traffickers and end up as slaves, sex workers, or in refugee camps.

Against this background, the following section examines the opinion of some scholars on Jenkins’ position to ascertain the veracity of his claims.

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, “Globalization, Christian Identity,” 169.

<sup>10</sup> A combination of three positions contributes to the definition of secularism: atheist, agnostic, and functional atheist. The atheist claims that God does not exist; the agnostic states there are insufficient evidence to know whether or not God exists. The functional atheist is apathetic concerning God's existence. Dean C. Halverson, ed, *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 182.

<sup>11</sup> George G. Hunter III, *How To Reach Secular People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 26.

## Scholars who Disagreed with Jenkins

### *Richard Neuhaus: Three Unconvincing Contentions from Jenkins*

In his article, “The Much Exaggerated Death of Europe,” Neuhaus submitted that there are seven unconvincing arguments from Jenkins’ God’s Continent. Two significant problems are:

- a) Understating the religio-ideological challenge of Jihadism;
- b) European Christianity accommodating itself as creative minority.

According to Neuhaus, Jenkins seriously underrates the religio-ideological challenge of Jihadism. The belief that every Muslim has an obligation to employ whatever means necessary to advance the Sharia law into that nation is a pointer to Islam hegemony. Jenkins places high hopes in the emergence of version of ‘moderate’ Islam. His confidence in Tariq Ramadan and his version of Euro-Islam in a ‘religiously pluralistic’ Europe is not reassuring. For Neuhaus, Jenkins rightly reminds the world’s Christians of the force of historical contingencies that can be neither anticipated nor controlled.

Second, Jenkins believes that European Christianity must accommodate itself to being “creative minority.” Neuhaus objects that Jenkins operates within a concise time frame when, for example, he suggested that by 2050, there will be 30 million Muslims in Europe. Neuhaus rejects this projection accusing Jenkins of not taking into consideration the factors on the ground.

### *Jonathan Bonk: Contention for European Christian Laboratory*

Another scholar who wrote against the propositions of Jenkins is Jonathan Bonk. Writing under the topic, “Europe: Christendom Graveyard or Christian Laboratory?,” Bonk debunked Jenkins’ propositions about the neo-Christendom in Europe. To focus his critique, Bonk cited the works of three other scholars. First, he refers to Ratzinger’s book entitled *Europe Today and Tomorrow*<sup>12</sup> to argue that Europe’s

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007). Cf. Johnathan Bonk, “Europe: Christendom Graveyard of Laboratory,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31, no. 3 (2007): 113.

moral and political disintegration is inevitable if it did not return to its spiritual foundation.

Second, Bonk challenged Jenkins' argument that while the collapse of mainstream European religion may well mark the death of Christendom, closer scrutiny suggests that instead, observers may be witnessing a prolonged and growingly uncomfortable gestation, a necessary prelude, that could birth spiritual regeneration, though perhaps not in a wholly familiar form. Bonk then posed the question, "Is Christendom being born again? So to speak, to the faith that combines Christian beliefs with Christian behaviour?"

Third, he suggested that Sanneh echoes his hopeful idea in the essay, "Can Europe be Saved?", which is an extended review of his *God's Continent*.<sup>13</sup> Bonk stated that in the historicity of Christianity, Christendom found it impractical in its earliest days to follow Christ's ways—to actually reflect the mind of Christ—as demonstrated by its violent politics, aggressive and self-centred economics, and fierce militarism. As Alan Kreider pointed out in his essay on violence and mission in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries:

Christendom—the conjunction of serving state and ostensibly self-giving church—almost at once succumbed to the use of both social and military compulsions in the course of its mission efforts. Christendom constructed an ethic that permitted, applauded, and at times compelled killing in Jesus' name.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, today, the armies of powerful but anxious neo-Christendom launch rockets, scatter bombs, and demolish cities on piously rationalised causes.

Bonk raised questions on the issue of neo-Christendom in Europe. First, what, then, does Europe—or for that matter, its giant neo-Christendom offspring— need to be saved from within? For Bonk, as Ratzinger argued, she needs to be saved from cultural and spiritual amnesia, from the self-inflicted partial lobotomy that has removed the memory of its Christendom past. Europe has lost its way; as any traveller knows, to be 'lost' makes arrival at the desired destination a matter of implausible chance. Is it reasonable to think that Europe might

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<sup>13</sup> Bonk, "Europe," 114.

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traverse the present and arrive at a hopeful future if it rejects its memory of where it has recently been?

Fourth, according to Bonk, further troubling questions arise. If it be granted that a people is defined primarily by shared memory, does it follow that mere recollection of its Christendom past will be sufficient for the salvation of Europe? What if Europe had never been “saved” in any gospel sense of that word? What if real clash of civilisations, from a strictly gospel point of view, is not and has never been between Islam and the West but between European self-serving states and followers of the self-giving Christ within their borders?

Perhaps with all the socio-economic development, Europe might embrace some kind of unembarrassed belief in Christ, the Saviour of the world. After all, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures teach that humans need to be saved, above all, from ourselves. The Bible offers no scheme for rescue from outside enemies, but it has much to say about the enemy within. Such rescue could come too for both Christendom and its Islamic enemies.

Bonk concluded that the old Christendom was violent and powerful. Neo-Christendom still prefers violence as an effective means of insisting that its will be done on earth. While old Christendom, since World War II, has enjoyed a relative moratorium on war, time and circumstance will doubtless change that situation, perhaps in the not-too-distant future. As for neo-Christendom, it is disheartening to observe how utterly reliant on violence and its terrible instruments this great society and its institutions have become. For example, 43% of the global trafficking of weapons originates in Europe. Operating out of more than 700 military bases scattered across the globe, and with virtually every state somehow benefitting from the weapons trade, there appears to be no way-out Neo-Christendom is no mere victim but the primary beneficiary of violence around the world.

Bonk cited Newbiggin by stating, “Suppose instead of trying to understand the gospel from the point of view of our culture, we tried to understand our culture from the point of view of the gospel?”<sup>15</sup> For

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<sup>15</sup> Leslie Newbiggin, “Can the West Be Converted?,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11, no. 1 (1987): 2-7; cf. Bonk, “Europe,” 114.

Bonk, the way scholars choose to answer this question may contain the key to one of the most important concerns of our time.

*Wilbert Shenk: Christian Missions and the "Clash of Civilisations"*

Shenk argued that too much audience and acclaim has been given to Jenkins. In his opinion, Jenkins was not saying anything different from what many missionaries had stated for the past fifty years. According to Shenk, the reason for the recognition given to Jenkins' theories may lie in their being issued from a secular academy more than the originality of his thoughts.<sup>16</sup>

In an article titled, "Christian Mission and the 'Clash of Civilisations,'" Shenk posits that Jenkins' demographic approach reiterates Huntington's approach to religion in civilisation terms. This aligns again religion with geography, as done from the Ecumenical and Mission Conference of Jerusalem in 1928. For Shenk, the shift in World Christianity is not from a European to Latino or African centre but to a polycentric religion.

With a language of Christendom, Jenkins continued to think of a monolith of religion and culture. This is a continuation of Western understanding of the relationship between religion and culture and the corresponding institutional necessities. The shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity speaks of a change in the relationship between religion and culture where the relationship is not between religion and a single culture but between religion and the many cultures of the South.

Another dimension that Shenk raised is on the theological response to Christianity in the non-Western world with reference to the Chinese context. According to Shenk because carrying the Christian name became a burden especially in China, Christian Asians drew open the idea of 'Contextual theology' to make the case for a naturalised Christianity in Asian culture. The first face of this take was to strip Christianity of its Western trappings and its reputation to cultural betrayal before moving to the second phase which was the constructive one; to rehabilitate the gospel in the idiom and priorities of indigenous societies.

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<sup>16</sup> Wilbert Shenk, "Christian Mission and the Coming 'Clash of Civilizations.'" *Missiology* 28, no. 3 (2000): 291-304. doi:10.1177/009182960002800303



Having submitted the arguments of these three scholars who disagree with Jenkins, the tone is now set for the submission of other scholars who support Jenkins' views because they resonate issues in Western academia they hold.

### **Scholars who supported Jenkins' Contentions**

Five dominant and recurrent themes running through Jenkins's trilogy:

1. Spatial gravitational shift of the centre of gravity for Christianity.
2. Constant Christianity-Islamic conflict.
3. Human sexuality.
4. Reformation metaphor.
5. Cosmological warfare.

Statistically, within the first decade of the third millennium—about 48% of Africans are professing Christians. Currently, Christianity has become the major type of African religiosity on the continent, except the northern part which is basically Islamic. Demographic information offered by African and non-African scholars support the current position of the shift of the centre of gravity of World Christianity.

Seven scholars, both Western and African, who agreed with Jenkins' contentions are Walls, Mbiti, Bediako, Martin, Didea and Horrell, and Gustavsson. While Walls and Mbiti supported Jenkins based on his first volume, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, others supported him based on the second and third volumes, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, and *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*, respectively.

*Andrew Walls: Determination of the Shape of the Church in Cross-Cultural Shift*

Walls, in a cross-culturally analysis, supported Jenkins' and Barret's demographic provisions. He posited that "What happens within the

African churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come.”<sup>17</sup>

He noted that the 1910 Edinburgh conference saw the world divided between “missionised” and “not yet missionised” areas. The fully “missionised” areas were Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The rest of the world, including the whole of Africa—save for a small section of South Africa—was deemed “not yet fully missionised.”<sup>18</sup>

The tendency to look eastward probably also reflected the balance of missionary effort; it had long been the practice to send the missionaries with superior academic or intellectual credentials to India or China, leaving the celestial cannon fodder for Africa.<sup>19</sup>

According to Walls, there has been simultaneously a major recession from Christianity and a major ascension to it. The recession has been centred in those parts of the world that the Edinburgh World Missionary conference recognised as fully ‘missionised,’ so that much of Western Europe, for instance, is best described as post Christian. The accession has been centred in the Southern continents and most noticeably, in Africa. It is not simply that there has been a massive increase in the number of professing Christians in Africa in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There has been such a degree of change of religious adherence as to alter completely the relative positions of European and African Christianity. In 1910, Europe was part of the Christian heartlands and typically a Christian territory. At end of the century, Europe was moving towards the Christian margins.<sup>20</sup>

Second, in his volume *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, missionary optimism tended to centre on Asia as regards the foreseeable future. The 1910 Edinburgh conference noted that it was in Asia that Christianity appeared to have caught the currents of the time. It was in Asia that the most striking human products of the

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Walls, “Toward an Understanding of Africa’s Place in Christian History,” in John S. Pobee ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Fs. C.G. Baëta (Studies on Religion in Africa, 2; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 180-189.

<sup>18</sup> Walls, “Towards an Understanding,” 181. Latin America situation was not discussed in order to avoid splitting the conference on the issue of whether Latin America was really Christian.

<sup>19</sup> Walls, “Towards an Understanding,” Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 64.

<sup>20</sup> Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 49-71.

missionary process appeared. Walls has stated: “There was not a single African, and no one seems to have thought it strange... The immense Christian significance of Africa was still not visible. In no way has the demographic shift within Christian Church been so dramatic as the emergence of Africa as a continent of Christian heartland.”<sup>21</sup>

Third, discussing the final report of the 1910 Edinburgh conference in an afterword title “Christian Mission in a Five-Hundred-Year Context,” Walls stated, “On Africa, the report strikes a sober note. The gist of what it says is that the situation is not as discouraging as might have been expected. But it adds that the evangelisation of the interior had hardly begun. And another part of the report offers a ‘world-case’ scenario of Africa as a Muslim continent.”<sup>22</sup> For Walls, the religious situation in Africa changed beyond recognition since 1910. There has also been a demographic transformation of the situation in Christianity within the world as a whole. Walls, therefore, supported Barret and Jenkins, indicating that by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—AD 2000—there will be 350 million African Christians.<sup>23</sup> This directed scholars and students of world Christianity to the fact that there is a changing centre of gravity for World Christianity.

*John Mbiti: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Demographic Explosion of African Christianity*

Mbiti observed that Christianity has exploded in Africa since the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> He argued that in the 1900s, the religious landscape of Africa consisted of the figures in table 1.

Table 1: The Religious Landscape of Africa in the 1900s

Religious Adherents	Number	Percentage
Christians	10 million	9.2%

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 49-71

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Walls, “Afterword: Five-Hundred-Year Context, in *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 200.

<sup>23</sup> David Barret, “AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59 (1970): 39.

<sup>24</sup> See Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 14-20. Also see John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 256-271.

Muslims	34.5 million	32%
African Traditional Religion (ATR) Adherents	63 million	58%
Other Religions like Judaism and Hinduism	1 million	0.8%

In 1900, the total estimated population of Africa was 107.5 million of which Table 1 represented the religious landscape. Ninety years later—in 2000—the total estimated population which was supposed to have increased to almost 814 million showed the following religious landscape as represented in Table 2.

Table 2: The Religious Landscape of Africa in 2000

Religious Adherents	Number	Percentage
Christians	394 million	48.7%
Muslims	339 million	41.4%
African Traditional Religion (ATR) Adherents	72.4 million	8.9%
Others	8.5 million	1%

Reflecting on such statistics made it an overstatement to argue that there had been significant changes in the spatial base of World Christianity.

Apart from Walls, Barret, and Mbiti who on the basis of demographic analysis agreed with Jenkins, some other scholars concurred with him on the basis of general content of his trilogy. Five of such scholars include Bediako, Martin, Didea and Horrell, and Gustavsson.

*Kwame Bediako: The Gospel Resounds in African Mother-Tongue Voices*

Two profound legacies of the late Kwame Bediako for African evangelical Christian heritage are oral and mother-tongue theology and hermeneutics. Bediako expounded oral theology in African Christology. He proposed “Jesus of the deep forest: theology from where the

faith must live, the evidence of a theological articulation within Ghanaian Christianity.”<sup>25</sup> He called it “grassroots theology” or a “reflective theology,” while others may call it oral, spontaneous, or implicit theology.

He borrowed from the eulogy or poetry of Afua Kuma, an illiterate Kwahu woman from Obo, who converted to Christianity and became a member of the Church of Pentecost (CoP). Her prayers and praises of Jesus in *Twi*, her mother tongue, use metaphors from her *Akan* experience in adulation of Jesus as: *Okatakya Birempon*—Hero Incomparable; *Nsenkyerene Wura*—Wonderworker; *Tutugyagu*—Fearless One (literally means, “fire-killer”); *Adubasapon*—Strong-armed One (literally means, “ten arms rolled into one”).<sup>26</sup>

To examine theology and culture, Bediako explained culture as “the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings... Central to culture is language.”<sup>27</sup> For Bediako, since language is the cultural pivot around which mission is done, the Word of God has to be translated into the languages of the receptor cultures. This points to the issue of African relational paradigm and translatability of the Bible impact on culture.

Jenkins extensively cited Bediako in his book *New Faces of Christianity*, stating that the history of African missionary Christianity is the history of Bible translations because “a translated Bible defies conventional images of missionary imperialism. Once a Bible is in a vernacular, it becomes the property of that people.”<sup>28</sup> The consequence is that “...with the Bible in their own tongue, Christians can claim not just the biblical story, but their own culture and lore in addition...Reading this book opens the door to real inner power.”<sup>29</sup>

Notably, both Bediako and Jenkins quoted from Afua Kuma’s eulogies of Jesus, the Messiah. While Bediako quoted Afua Kuma extensively from Kirby’s booklet *Afua Kuma’s Ayeyi ne Mpaebo*

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<sup>25</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religion,” in *Sharing Jesus in Two-Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies from the Context of Poverty, Powerlessness, and Pluralism*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 60-81.

<sup>26</sup> Bediako “Biblical Christologies,” 81.

<sup>27</sup> Bediako “Biblical Christologies,” 81.

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 25.

*Kwaebirentuw Ase Yesu* (Afua Kuma’s Praises and Prayers for Jesus of the Forest), Jenkins’ Afua Kuma’s eulogies mostly came from Bediako’s *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*.

The only difference between the two scholars is that while Bediako cited Afua Kuma as a great African illiterate “theologian”, Jenkins cited her as a scholar, writer, and musician who wrote hymns to eulogise the Lord Jesus. For instance, on the one hand, Jenkins stated, “Food shortages form the subject of modern Christian hymns and writings.” Ghanaian writer Afua Kuma declares,

The famine has become severe.  
Let us go to Jesus!  
He is the one who  
When he raises his hands  
Give even our enemies their share  
And our brothers bring head pans  
To carry the food away.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, describing Afua Kuma and her appellation for Jesus Christ properly, Bediako wrote, “There is perhaps no better way to bring this study to a close than to quote this simple, artless yet direct adoration of Jesus by Madam Afua Kuma. It expresses the refreshing sense of newness and fulfilment that comes from a real encounter with Jesus.”<sup>31</sup>

<i>Nkwagyese</i> afa yen kra nnom- mum <i>De yen akotra asase foforo so.</i> <i>Yene asofo di nhyiam,</i> <i>adom ne nhyira nko na yen nsa aka.</i>  <i>Yeaba wiase abebre yen ho,</i>  <i>Yesu mu na yeako home.</i>	Salvation has taken our souls cap- tive and carried us off to a new land. Along the way we met with asofo; grace and blessing alone have we received. we have come to this earth...to wear ourselves... But in Jesus we find our rest. <sup>32</sup>
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<sup>30</sup> Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in the African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers - Christian Council of Ghana, 1990), 46.

<sup>32</sup> Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest—Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981), 25.

*David Martin: Pentecostals: The World, their Parish*

Martin is an acclaimed writer on the phenomenon of Pentecostalism. In his book, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, he submitted four main observations on Jenkins' arguments. First, Martin strongly suggested that Jenkins deserved praise in that he had willingly tried to take on the realities on the ground rather than focusing on vague aspirations and righteous indignation. He, therefore, reiterated Jenkins' position that liberalism has been deep seated in Western Christianity on such issues as sexual morality. Martin added, "We have to recognise that we cannot be morally relativistic and at the same time lambast Southern Christians as backward people misled by Texans on the rampage. If we are going to be non-judgmental and sensitive to the values, choices, and creativity of others, then even fellow Christians should benefit."<sup>33</sup>

Second, Martin maintained that another point for the success of Jenkins' thesis resides in his pointing to the apparent dead-end-of Euro-American meta-narratives. The Western ideology of the "other" was not supposed to liberate the "other" to the position that the majority world of the South stops to listen to the minority world of the North. The fact is that the South no longer accepts Northern guidance regarding gender and sexuality, for example. Therefore, they are coming into self-confidence. This is where Martins' support for Jenkins ends, though, because he also proposed a couple of criticisms.

*Alex Didea and J. Scott Horrell: Christianity as a World Religion*

After summarising *The Next Christendom*, Didea and Horrell observed that Christianity has become a world religion and should no longer be seen as a Western religion of the Old Christendom. This suggestion of a new Christendom for Didea and Horrell was tenable. Giving an informed appraisal, they stated:

Jenkins does an exceptional job in educating the average reader in the West regarding the changing face of Christianity. Jenkins correctly indicts the West for ignoring this revolutionary change in the World Christianity. Jenkins demonstrated that no time in the history did the West have a monopoly on the Christian faith. Jenkins'

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<sup>33</sup> David Martin, "Living in Interesting Times," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* (2002): 63, 64 (accessed June 14, 2021). See, David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

appraisal of Christian movements in the South seem to be overly pragmatic. Throughout the book, the litmus test for success seems to be quantity than quality.<sup>34</sup>

As Didea and Horrell stated, “literally engaging, well researched and jolting, *The Next Christendom* has justly received wide acclaim by nearly all standards; this is an extraordinary volume.”<sup>35</sup> These were very objective observations, and they made Jenkins important and unique because hitherto Western scholars had been ignoring the obvious happenings around them in World Christianity, especially in the Christianity of the South.<sup>36</sup>

*Stefan Gustavsson: Religion is Very Important in My Life*

Gustavsson was one of the plenary speakers of the 2010 Tokyo Consultation to commemorate the 1910 Edinburgh Mission and Ecumenical Conference, which resulted in sending many missionaries in the Southern continents.<sup>37</sup> The title of his presentation was “Reaching Secular Europe.”<sup>38</sup> In his presentation, Gustavsson agrees with Jenkins that Christianity in Europe is “dead” and has embraced secularism due to several contextual factors. Writing on “Europe—the Prodigal Son,” he posited,

...Europe today has denied the gospel and replaced it with other convictions. [...] The Evangelical Church worldwide has seen enormous growth in the last 100 years: The Latin American Evangelical Church increased by over 5000 percent. The African Evangelical church increased by over 4000 percent. The Asian Evangelical church increased by over 2000 percent. On the other hand, the situation in Europe is very different: no one in 1900 expected the massive defections from Christianity that subsequently took place in Western Europe due to secularism, (and) in Russia and later Eastern Europe due to Communism.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alex Didea and J. Scott Horrell, “Book Review of *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (2005): 254-256.

<sup>35</sup> Didea and Horrell, “The Next Christendom,” 256

<sup>36</sup> Didea and Horrell, “The Next Christendom,” 256.

<sup>37</sup> Yong J. Cho and David Taylor, eds., *From Edinburgh 1910 to Tokyo 2010: Global Mission Consultation Celebration Handbook* (Tokyo: Global Mission Consultation Planning Committee, 2010), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Stefan Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 1-9. [https://www.amosministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Stefan-Gustavsson-Reaching\\_Secular\\_Europe\\_Tokyo\\_2010.pdf](https://www.amosministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Stefan-Gustavsson-Reaching_Secular_Europe_Tokyo_2010.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 1, 2.



Using further statistics, Gustavsson presented how his native country Sweden was Christian in 1910, but 100 years later, in 2010, it had become atheist.<sup>40</sup> Like Jenkins, Gustavsson identified three major causes of the ‘death’ of European Christianity. These are urbanisation, humanism, and postmodernism. As he stated,

Urbanisation is one key factor...The statistics for planet earth looks like this: People living in “urban areas”: 1800: 3%; 1900: 14%; 2000: 50%; 2050: 80%. Cities with more than 1 million inhabitants: Rome: 5 BC; London: 1811; it is estimated that 468 different cities had more than one million inhabitants by 2007...But urbanisation is not at the bottom of Europe’s problem; secularisation is.<sup>41</sup>

With regard to humanism and postmodernism, Gustavsson wrote, “Humanism...is the base for both modern and postmodern man. In both systems, man is at the centre: either his thinking or his feeling. But it is still man as the main point of reference; God and the supernatural is out of the picture.”<sup>42</sup>

Again like Jenkins, Gustavsson indicated that the Church in Europe had not responded well to its challenges. He suggested two inadequate responses from the Church: Compromise and Withdrawal. He stated, “The Church in Europe has not responded well with to this change; there is, therefore, an enormous need for church planting in the big cities; churches that meet the real needs of today’s city people; socially, existentially, culturally, intellectually and spiritually.”<sup>43</sup>

With regard to compromise, he observed that churches are “sadly high-jacked by secular philosophies and liberal theology.” He argues that many theologians and Christian leaders felt compelled to adjust their theology to the Enlightenment philosophy. The result is a liberal theology that denies the historicity of the gospel narratives. In his opinion: “This is the background for many ‘religious atheists’ of Europe; theologians and church leaders who deny the supernatural but hold on to religious language.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 2.

<sup>41</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 2.

<sup>42</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 2.

<sup>43</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 2.

<sup>44</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 4.

Gustavsson contends that the embrace of enlightenment philosophy has provoked a reaction from “more bible-believing people” that in order “to hold on to the whole Gospel ... by withdrawal from the culture, from Academia and from science.” Gustavsson indicates a series of dangerous weakness in their isolation from culture and in their neglect of the intellectual challenges: “... too little teaching on the worldview of Christianity. Often there has instead been a separation between mind and heart and between the mind and the Spirit.”<sup>45</sup>

To reinforce his argument that Christian Europe is ‘dead’ due to deeply rooted secularism, Gustavsson sounded a warning to World Christianity and the global Church by stating,

Europe today is a deeply secular culture, where God is absent in the public domains and where the underlying worldview is naturalistic humanism... Secularisation in Europe is not the scepticism of a few individuals, challenging the norm, but has become the norm. It is viewed as a positive liberation from superstition and from religious power play, which held people in bondage for centuries. [...] Here are important lessons to be learned for the global Church. Do not repeat the European mistake of compromise and withdrawal!<sup>46</sup>

Unlike Jenkins, Gustavsson, however, suggested a solution for the “resurrection” of the “dead” European Christianity, implemented by “...a generation of Christians in Europe who do not compromise with the gospel and who do not withdraw from the culture, ...who have a Christian mind and who engage and challenge the surrounding secular culture.”<sup>47</sup>

After summarising the scholarly debate on Jenkins’ Trilogy, we critique his methodology and position in the following section.

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<sup>45</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 6.

<sup>46</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 6

<sup>47</sup> Gustavsson, “Reaching Secular Europe,” 9. At the end of the presentation Gustavsson knelt down on one knee, placed the back of his right palm in the left and pronounced, “Come over to Macedonia to save Europe!” This pronouncement generated a spontaneous experiential reaction from the about 2,500 participants in the Nakano Plaza Hotel Auditorium. Everyone started praying, Whites, Blacks, Browns, Yellows, and the like, “O God raise up the Martin Luthers, John Calvins, John Knoxes, and John Wesleys, again in Europe. Bring back the Pietistic, Holiness, Evangelical, and Pentecostal Spirit and Movement again in Europe.” It was an awesome spiritual and humbling experience, never to be forgotten in one’s life.

## **Critique for the Types of Resources Jenkins Used for His Contentious Trilogy**

Jenkins used sources judiciously to elaborate his trilogy. Three are noteworthy.

### *Demographic Statistics*

As a historian, this is very strong and laudable because it provided a lot of support for his propositions and predictions. Several parts of *The Next Christendom* has so much support that one can hardly find any fault in Jenkins' thesis.

One important fact about Jenkins' use of these demographic resources is that he did not base his arguments on only one source. His sources are from the *World Christian Encyclopaedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*,<sup>48</sup> the United States Government Information Services, and Global Christianity and Global Biblical Studies websites. Though Jenkins challenges some of the conclusions provided by the authors of the World Christian Encyclopaedia, he relies heavily on them for the tables that he provided in his works.

### *Reliance on Secondary Sources*

In *The Next Christendom*, his only cross-cultural experience was visiting an African congregation in Amsterdam. However, he cited almost all prominent African scholars such as Sanneh, Bediako, Mbiti, Mercy Oduyoye, and Magesa. These have major works on World Christianity, African initiatives in World Christianity, African Church history, and the gospel and culture encounter and engagements. As discussed earlier, Jenkins also appropriated "grassroots theology," such as Afua Kuma with her Christological eulogies. However, describing African Christianity without having first-hand experience is exposed when he described Afua Kuma's poetry as a hymn in *The New Faces of Christianity*. For this reason, Jenkins seems to describe

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<sup>48</sup> Barrett, "AD 2000," 39-54.

Africans from afar. “While Jenkins has a brilliant academic of Africans dancing, he has neither seen the dance nor danced himself.”<sup>49</sup>

Tennant, the editor of *Christianity Today* describes Jenkins as one who “looks for complexity in everything and (often sided by a group of research assistants) does the homework necessary to verify or challenge popular notions in his field.”<sup>50</sup> Tennant’s description indicated that Jenkins relied heavily on the works of his research assistants who provided him with the requisite resources from their research to use in his writings. However, in social scientific research, the researcher should test the conclusions for verification or falsification.

Jenkins became popular through dependence on the research of others. Most of his research was conducted by other scholars or his students. Over relying on secondary sources, Jenkins as a researcher may fall into the trap of subjectivity and biases of the original writers.

### *Reliance on Scriptural Resources*

Even though Jenkins is not a theologian but a historian and sociologist, he relied heavily on the Bible, especially, in *The New Faces of Christianity*, from both the Old and New Testaments to support his arguments. Writing about the Southern continents, Jenkins suggested a resonance between the biblical worlds and many other people groups and cultures related to questions of morality, power, poverty, the existence of evil spirits, ancestral veneration, blessings, and curses healing and deliverance, among others.

Jenkins drew commonalities between African and Asian traditional worldviews and the ancient and first-century biblical worldviews. These are the worldviews that include the Supreme Being or the Ultimate Reality, deities, ancestral veneration and cultic relationships, the existence of Satan and myriads of evil spirits, witchcraft, and divination. For example, African and Asian Pentecostals recognise the existence of constant warfare between God and Satan and the demons in their cosmologies. The most cited texts include Mark 16:15-18 and Ephesians 6:12.

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<sup>49</sup> Yaw Attah Edu-Bekoe, “Book Review of *New Christendom*,” *The Princeton Theological Seminary Forum* 20 (2008), 115.

<sup>50</sup> Anieszka Tennant, “Allah’s Continent? Not So Fast, Says Philip Jenkins,” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 8 (2007), 1-3.

However, Jenkins being a historian and sociologist, not a theologian, often lack the interpretive skills to analyse the text in their original context.

## **Conclusion**

The article started with operational definitions of terms to set the tone of the major contentions made by Jenkins. The paper dialogued with several scholars — historians, theologians, demographers — and researchers whose writings have engaged Jenkins and had refuted or supported his assertions. The article finally discussed the sources Jenkins used.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jenkins has been very popular in the Euro-American academia with his trilogy. Some authors consider him a prophet because some of his predictions have been confirmed in Western Europe.

Are there any prophetic messages from the contentions of Jenkins in his trilogy? Jenkins is a sociologist and historian, but his trilogy has been hailed as the most well-researched works in the field of Global Christianity and the History of Christianity. However, our opinion is that most of his predictions are sensationalised and exaggerated, and they need to be verified by further analyses.

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