

BRICS OF FAITH: NEW CATEGORIES IN RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY

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It is no surprise to anyone in this audience that in the past century or so, worldwide Christianity has definitively moved South. In 1900, Christianity firmly rooted in Europe and North America, while by the mid-21st century it will find by far its greatest strongholds in Africa and Latin America. But while so much is familiar, it's still tempting to position North and South in the familiar terms of a generation ago, as rich and poor spheres, of developed and developing worlds. Arguably, such views no longer make much sense, as the world's economic and political arrangements have moved far beyond such simple dualities. Alongside the traditional developed world are now a series of rising nations that should by 2050 or so be matching or overtaking the familiar Euro-American leaders. So much is well known to global observers, but no commentators, to my knowledge, have absorbed the religious implications of this new geography. Most tellingly, we are not here studying a stark dichotomy between advanced, wealthy North and impoverished South, but rather the categories inbetween.

My goal here is limited: briefly, I would like to describe a new category for research; to outline an agenda for approaching it; and to suggest why the emerging economic order matters so much for students of global Christianity.

MOVING SOUTH

The modern transformation of the Christian world needs little emphasis. In the year 1900, about one-third of the world's people were Christians, and that proportion remains more or less unchanged today. Moreover, if we project our estimate forward to the year 2050, that proportion should still be about one third. The Christian proportion of the world's population therefore seems strikingly stable. In other ways, though, the changes are far more striking. For one thing, the vast increase of global population means that the number of Christians has grown steeply in absolute terms. Global population in 1900 stood at 1.62 billion, compared to 6.9 billion today, and probably rising to 9.2 billion by 2050. As a result, the number of Christians alive today is about four times greater what it was in 1900. Just by retaining a constant share of the world's population, then – that constant third - Christian numbers have swollen at a rate unimaginable to most eras of Christian history.

Far more significant, though, is the geographical distribution of these believers, which is sketched in Table 1, and which draws from the extraordinarily valuable resources supplied by the World Christian Database (WCD). As I will explain, I have difficulty in accepting the exact validity of these numbers, especially in certain regions. But as a broad guide to the overall picture, the Database is reliable. In 1900, the world had around 558 million Christians, a third of the world's total population. Of these Christians, a very large majority – some 82 percent - lived in Europe and North America.

**TABLE 1
THE CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS**

	CHRISTIANS (millions)			
	<i>1900</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2050</i>
AFRICA	10	143	493	1,031

ASIA	22	96	352	601
NORTH AMERICA	79	211	286	333
LATIN AMERICA	62	270	544	655
EUROPE	381	492	588	530
OCEANIA	5	18	28	38
TOTAL	558	1,230	2,291	3,188

SOURCE: World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>

Since that point, the proportion of the world's Christians living amidst what has been termed the Church's North Atlantic Captivity has declined steadily, to around 38 percent today. That figure, moreover, assumes that all those Europeans labeled as believers by their state and official churches have any link whatever to the faith – a wildly optimistic assertion. By 2050, Europe and North America will be home to just 27 percent of the world's Christians. Actually, even those figures gravely understate the scale of the change, because the Christians listed as "European" or "North American" today include large communities from the Global South. By 2050, for instance, perhaps a quarter of the people of the USA will have roots in Latin America, and fifty or sixty million Americans will claim a Mexican heritage. Another eight percent of Americans will have Asian ancestry, and usually those communities – Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese – have strong Christian elements. In Europe also, those enduring Christian populations will include sizable immigrant communities – African, Asian and Afro-Caribbean. In 2050, therefore, even our "Euro-American" Christians will include Congolese believers living in Paris, or Koreans in Los Angeles.

But how do we characterize the newer Christian worlds? Because we are so accustomed to the notion of Euro-American Christianity, it's tempting to consign the rest of the world to one general category, in which all subtler distinctions are lost. This approach is of course troubling: imagine a South-East Asian scholar using a very broad brush to paint much of the planet as "the non-Buddhist world". It was Jorge Luis Borges who offered perhaps the most potent and subversive pseudo-list, as a warning against creating categories that make sense to the writer, but to no external reader. In a famous essay, he described an imaginary Chinese encyclopedia that classified all the world's animals under fourteen headings, which included: those that belong to the Emperor, embalmed ones, those that are trained, suckling pigs, mermaids, those included in the present classification, those that have just broken a flower vase, and of course, those that from a long way off look like flies. After reading Borges, I defy you to read any list or table in an academic work without silently adding "and those that, from a long way off, look like flies".

TABLE 2
AN ALLEGED CHINESE TAXONOMY OF THE WORLD'S ANIMALS

1. those that belong to the Emperor,
2. embalmed ones,
3. those that are trained,
4. suckling pigs,
5. mermaids,
6. fabulous ones,
7. stray dogs,
8. those included in the present classification,
9. those that tremble as if they were mad,
10. innumerable ones,
11. those drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,

12. others,
13. those that have just broken a flower vase,
14. those that from a long way off look like flies.

Jorge Luis Borges, allegedly taken from the Chinese *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*

With those flies in mind, let us look at some of the recent categories that have been created to describe the newer centers of Christianity. The best known of course is the “Global South”, a term that I claim some responsibility for popularizing. The concept of a rising global South is fairly recent in historical terms. In the 1950s, emerging African and Asian nations tried to distinguish themselves from what then seemed the rigid separation of the globe between capitalist West and communist East, proclaiming their membership in a nonaligned Third World. Tragically, that term soon became synonymous not with prosperous neutrality but with grinding poverty and uncontrollable population growth, and that fact led some observers to see the critical global division as one of economics, rather than political ideology. In 1980, at the height of a renewed Cold War, the Brandt Commission portrayed the world enmired in a Common Crisis that involved both global North (Europe, North America, Japan) and global South, a term that comprised the remaining societies—by no means all of which are located in the Southern Hemisphere. In this context, the term “South” is characterized less by geographical location than by relative access to wealth and resources, by poverty and dependency.

Even in 1980, the “Southern” category was overbroad, including as it did some very heavily developed regions, like South Korea, and many countries characterized by cataclysmic poverty and under-development, such as the Congo. Over time, these distinctions have grown still greater as so many nations once characterized as Third World have now become prosperous and influential. Just a year after the Brandt Commission, fund manager Antoine van Agtmael created the more optimistic term “emerging markets” to characterize rising nations such as China and Brazil, and that emergence has been impressive. In the 1970s and 1980s, the world’s economic powerhouses comprised the so called Group of Seven or G7, which included the four largest European economies in addition to the US, Canada and Japan. Today, the equivalent elite club is the G20, in which Euro-American nations share the table with such countries as China and India (of course) but also Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Indonesia.

TABLE 3 THE MEMBERSHIP OF G-20

The original members of the world's regular gathering of economic powers - G7 – were:

- o Canada
- o France
- o Germany
- o United Kingdom
- o United States
- o Italy
- o Japan

The present G20 includes all those, in addition to:

- o Brazil
- o Russia
- o India
- o China
- o South Korea

- o Indonesia
- o Mexico
- o Saudi Arabia
- o South Africa
- o Turkey
- o Argentina
- o Australia
- o The European Union

Clearly, the Southern category is problematic, but as I have argued, in terms of classifying religious patterns, the concept of the South does have its value.

For present purposes, let us focus on those emerging nations that are not part of the traditional West, but neither are they marked by the hopeless poverty that is associated with term Third World. They are, in fact, those parts of the Global South that have every prospect of rivaling the traditional West, and which in some ways are already doing so. Just this last year, China's economy officially surpassed that of Japan.

Some of the labels used for these emerging blocs are fascinating in their own right. A few years ago, a South African journal published an article titled "Gondwanaland Revisited: Toward a South African Strategic Concept?" Gondwanaland was the ancient supercontinent that broke up to form the present continents of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. Originally proposed as almost an academic joke, the Gondwana concept has since been much discussed in South African government and business circles, where it offers the basis of a kind of South–South dialogue, a natural global alliance led by South Africa, India, and Brazil. Something very like this has already appeared at global conferences, especially on matters of climate and environment. On climate issues, a powerful global bloc is the BASICs (Brazil, South Africa, India, China). In Japan, meanwhile, businesses have identified key emerging markets that they wish to target as MINTS, a label applied to Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Although these various names can seem ludicrous, as well as bewildering, their proliferation does point to a fundamental fact of global life, namely that we are seeing the emergence of a vital group of economically potent nations that does not fit the traditional constraints of "the West". Observers are struggling to name this phenomenon in order to comprehend it.

THE BRICS

By far the most popular new term, though, is the BRICs, an abbreviation for Brazil, Russia, India and China. The BRIC concept emerged in 2001, when Goldman Sachs analysts sought to identify the leading economic powers of the 21st century, those nations that would, by 2050, be challenging the United States for global economic dominance. The result was the influential analysis titled *Building with BRICs*. Implied in this model was the suggestion that these emerging nations might well be political and strategic rivals to the US, and that the world of 2050 would see a multi-player game of shifting great power alliances reminiscent of the early 20th century. The BRIC concept now features almost obsessively in US government projections of the global future, to the extent of providing *the* standard analytic framework for the State Department and intelligence agencies.¹ Hillary Clinton has listed these four "major and emerging global powers" as vital partners in any future attempts to solve the world's problems.

I quote from a recent *Economist* study:

The BRICs matter because of their economic weight. They are the four largest economies outside the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the rich

¹ See for instance the recent report by the National Intelligence Community, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, at http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html.

man's club). They are the only developing economies with annual GDPs of over \$1 trillion (Indonesia's is only half that). With the exception of Russia, they sustained better growth than most during the great recession and, but for them, world output would have fallen by even more than it did. China also became, by a fraction, the world's largest exporter. Meanwhile, the BRICs are also increasing their trade with one another: Chinese-Indian trade has soared and is likely to reach \$60 billion this year. ... The most striking sign of the BRICs' significance to the world economy, though, is probably their share of foreign-exchange reserves. All four are among the ten largest accumulators of reserves, accounting for 40% of the world's total. ... If the BRICs were to set aside one-sixth of their reserves, they could create a fund the size of the IMF.²

The Chinese term these four *jinzhuan siguo*, or four golden brick nations.

I should add here a point that rarely receives the attention it deserves, namely that the final list of BRIC's was the result of much compromise and editing, and the list originally proposed was longer. Later writers have argued that Russia's horrible demographic realities undermine any claim it may have to inclusion. Besides the four prime candidates, moreover, the Goldman Sachs team originally proposed to include three other nations, namely South Korea, Indonesia and Mexico, the KIM's. (And indeed, both BRICs and KIMs are already represented in the G20). As I will explain, this addition raises important questions for any kind of religious analysis.

TABLE 3
Some Leading Global Economies
(purchasing power parity)

	<i>GDP 2009</i> <i>(\$ trillion)</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>
USA	14.2	\$46,000
China	8.75	\$6,600
India	3.57	\$3,100
Russia	2.11	\$15,100
Brazil	2.01	\$10,100
Mexico	1.47	\$13,200
South Korea	1.36	\$28,100
Indonesia	0.96	\$4,000

SOURCE: *CIA Factbook*

Whether we are including the four BRICs or the larger sample, these nations will make up a very large proportion of the world's people in coming decades, quite apart from their economic clout. By 2050, the BRICs and KIMs combined will account for around 44 percent of the world's people.

TABLE 4
THE MOST POPULOUS NATIONS IN THE WORLD, 2025 AND 2050

Nations are listed in order of their projected rankings as of 2050 (all figures are in millions)

<i>National Population in:</i>				
<i>Nation</i>	<i>1975*</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2025</i>	<i>2050</i>

² "The Trillion-Dollar Club," *Economist*, April 15th 2010

1	India	619	1,006	1,396	1,657
2	China	918	1,264	1,395	1,304
3	United States	215	282	358	439
4	Indonesia	135	214	279	313
5	Pakistan	76	152	228	291
6	Ethiopia	33	64	140	279
7	Nigeria	64	123	197	264
8	Brazil	109	176	231	261
9	Bangladesh	76	132	198	250
10	Congo (Kinshasa)	25	52	110	189
11	Philippines	44	81	129	172
12	Mexico	61	100	130	148
13	Egypt	37	65	104	138
14	Uganda	11	24	57	128
15	Vietnam	48	79	102	111
16	Russia	135	147	128	109
17	Turkey	41	67	90	101
18	Iran	33	69	90	100
19	Sudan	16	34	63	97
20	Japan	112	127	118	94

- 1975 Figures for Russia refer to the RSFSR, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, and not to the Soviet Union of which it then formed part.

SOURCE: <http://sasweb.ssd.census.gov/idb/ranks.html>

COMPARING BRICS

Although the BRIC concept grew out of economic concerns, the theory raises fundamental questions about the world's religious future. Although the four nations have such very different historical and cultural foundations, each in its way is experiencing unsettling religious transformations, which to my mind demand scholarly comparison.

I need make no apology for the virtue, even the necessity, of comparative studies, particularly of wide-ranging surveys that trace common themes across national or even continental boundaries. Although such books demand a broad background of interdisciplinary scholarship, the results are often highly praised. One model commonly cited for the potential of comparative history is George Frederickson's classic *White Supremacy*, which compared the racial histories of the USA and South Africa. Grace Davie's book *Europe: The Exceptional Case* traced global patterns of religious faith and adherence, and sought to determine why one continent alone runs contrary to global trends. Ian Buruma's *Taming the Gods* compares the relationship between religious belief and political decision-making in Europe, East Asia and North America. Some valuable comparative research explores countries divided by historical and legal tradition rather than geography. In the context of modern Europe, political leaders differ greatly on how to cope with the religious and cultural diversity associated with the large-scale influx of Muslim immigrants. In such controversies, comparative cross-national studies prove vital.³

³ George Frederickson, *White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002); Joel S. Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents* (Princeton University Press, 2010)

Of course, the question then arises of whether the different elements have enough in common to permit any kind of valid study, or whether they are, shall we say, four objects that, from a distance, look like bricks. Yet having said this, I do believe that the four nations – and perhaps the seven – do have enough issues and trends in common to support cross-national comparison, and have at least as much in common as nations united, say, by common location on a single continent.

Each of the emerging economies is marked by explosive but very patchy growth, resulting in vast disparities of wealth and economic development. Urban elites second to none in ambition and prosperity coexist uneasily with peasant populations living in virtually medieval conditions. For each group, in different ways, religion supplies a critical support and rationale. The emerging economic powers must address very similar questions about the upsurge and containment of new religious forms and movements; about coexistence and rivalry between faiths; about the proper relationship of religion with state power; and conceivably, about the use of religious rhetoric to justify military expansion. Religion is the missing dimension in the BRIC theory, and in all analyses based upon it.

However great their disparities, the kinds of Christianity that are emerging and growing most successfully in the BRIC nations have very distinct characteristics from what the Euro-American world regards as familiar or mainstream. Some of these differences might reflect the influence of the older and hitherto dominant cultures in regions of Christian growth, for instance the continuing impact of Chinese patterns in that country.

Other differences derive from the very fact of newness: as sociologists of religion have long known, new and merging religious bodies tend to have particular characteristics, which mark them as sects rather than as churches. Neither of these terms, I hasten to add, has any derogatory sense, but is rather employed as a convenient label for a package of beliefs and characteristics. But sects, generally, tend to be more passionate and enthusiastic about their faith, more charismatic in tone, with a greater sense of the potential for miraculous intervention. They also encourage stronger lay and non-clerical involvement. The “sect” model does include many of the features commonly attributed to rising new churches whether we are dealing with new churches in India or China, rising sects in Russia, or Pentecostals in Brazil. But whatever the reasons, newer churches – and the churches that will increasingly dominate the global ecclesiastical scene – tend to focus on certain key issues of belief, theology and practice, which set them apart from the older bodies of the Global North.

BRICS AND CHRISTIANITY

As an exercise, let us think of the BRIC’s not in terms of economic power, but in the issues they raise for global Christianity and for prospects of mission. In each of the four nations, religion plays a critical role in political debate. Just from the Christian standpoint, the respected *World Christian Database* already lists Brazil, Russia and China among the nations with the world’s largest Christian populations (the US heads the list).

TABLE 5
THE LARGEST CHRISTIAN POPULATIONS 2010, ACCORDING TO THE WORLD CHRISTIAN DATABASE

<i>NATION</i>	<i>Number of Christians (millions)</i>
USA	260
Brazil	177
China	115
Russia	115

Mexico	106
Philippines	84
Nigeria	72
D.R. Congo	65
Germany	58
India	58
Britain	50
Ethiopia	50

SOURCE: World Christian Database, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>

I should add that I am skeptical of some of these figures, and would put the actual numbers somewhat lower – perhaps 70 million for Christians in China, 40 million for Indian believers. Even so, these are very large communities.

Each of these countries raises intriguing political issues, and suggestive cross-national parallels. Two of the countries, Brazil and Russia, are so deeply rooted in their Christian heritage that it will be difficult to avoid that religious dimension in their politics or their social ethos. Brazil already has one of the world's largest Christian populations, and the country has a flourishing tradition of confessional-based parties and ideologies. Judging the strength of Russian Christianity is a thorny business, with estimates for the number of Orthodox believers ranging from 20 to 80 percent of the population - anywhere from 30 million to 120 million faithful. Certainly the lower figure would be accurate in terms of committed church members or attenders, but even seventy years of homicidal secularism conspicuously failed to eliminate a deep core of Christian belief - of *vera*, faith - in the Russian people. Since the fall of Communism, the country has seen a stirring revival of monasticism, and some of the most ancient and cherished Christian landmarks have been restored. And as in Brazil, the old-established church faces unsettling competition from new upstart faiths, both from charismatic Protestantism and from new sects. To combat this menace, the Russian Orthodox Church has willingly sought the aid of the increasingly authoritarian Russian state, which in turn would be only too happy to invoke religion to justify state power. The great age of church-state politics - of Holy Russia, in fact - might not be entirely dead.

Very different issues arise in India and China, neither of which is likely to acquire a Christian majority any time in the foreseeable future. But both countries have substantial Christian populations. China has anywhere from 60 to 100 million Christians presently - more than any European country - and most observers forecast steady growth in years to come. And while nobody doubts that India will remain overwhelmingly Hindu, the country probably has forty million Christians. Both in India and China, Christians have to live in ways quite different from anything that has been known in the West for many centuries. They are small minorities, living among much larger populations holding very different religious and political beliefs, and having to negotiate the conditions of coexistence on a daily basis. Although persecution or violence are not common or inevitable, everyone knows that such conditions can break out with minimal provocation. While states normally exercise tolerance, that fact cannot be assumed.

These comments about Christian strength apply with added force if we also take account of the KIM nations. BRICs and KIMs together probably have a combined Christian population of around 550 million, or one-quarter of the global total. Put another way, plenty of recent scholars have studied the emerging Christianity of Africa, a topic in which I obviously have a great interest. But the BRICs and KIMs combined have a far larger Christian population than that of the whole continent of Africa. Indeed, these nations include five of the world's largest Christian populations – Brazil, Russia, India, China, Mexico. At the same time, the smaller South Korea is also a surging powerhouse of Christian activism and mission. The country's political and social development is, moreover, incomprehensible except in terms of very recent Christian expansion.

Indonesia, meanwhile, although the world's largest Muslim nation, has a substantial Christian minority. Counter-intuitively, Indonesia actually has considerably more Christians – some 24 million – than does South Korea, with 15 million.

In its way, each of the four BRIC nations represents a case study of the relationship between new forms of religion and economic development, with the rise of new values of thrift, self-reliance and enterprise. A familiar sociological theory suggests that passionate religious forms will help create civil societies that potentially offer the base for viable consumer societies. In both India and China, Christians are influential, with strong representation in booming sectors of the economy. In both, Christianity is associated with social and individual progress - with literacy, education and social mobility.

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS

The seven emerging nations are critical to the future of Christianity, but also to the future of other faiths. The list also includes the world's largest Muslim nation, and the largest Hindu society. Muslim minorities add further to the religious complexity. Apart from its thriving Christian communities, India has the world's third largest Muslim population. Both Russia and China have substantial Muslim populations, which have close ties to neighboring Muslim nations. In each country moreover, activist and politicized Islamic reform movements have galvanized long-quiescent Muslim populations. Countries long used to near-monolithic religious establishments now face complex denominational and multi-faith rivalries.

Each BRIC/KIM nation is moreover marked by rapid religious changes that challenge existing religious and cultural orders. We see fast growing evangelical and Pentecostal; expansion, scenes of intense competition between older and newer forms of the faith - Pentecostals and new religions struggle against the orthodox in Russia, against Catholic hegemony in Mexico and Brazil. Adding to the perceived instability, many rising movements (both Christian and Muslim) have a strong transnational character, raising the specter of foreign subversion. In response, established orders seek to regulate their rivals by a mixture of legal restraints and social sanctions, which in some cases extend to active persecution and discrimination.

Both in Brazil and Russia, old-established Christian churches face alarming competition from upstart movements, both from charismatic Protestantism and Pentecostalism, and from new sects. Those changes provoke political conflict and reshape partisan divisions. Brazil now has a flourishing tradition of confessional-based parties and ideologies, to the point that it is impossible to understand that nation's politics without appreciating the Protestant-Catholic divide. In Russia, the Orthodox Church has willingly sought the aid of the increasingly authoritarian state to combat the menace of rival Christian sects, and the regime in turn invokes religion to justify state power.

In the other nations, religious transformation occurs in a very different cultural setting. Although India accounts for the vast majority of the world's Hindus, the nation has large religious minorities, Muslim and Christian. For thirty years, the question of how to cope with these non-Hindu populations has been central to Indian politics, a controversy that has repeatedly led to violent confrontations. The issue of religious minorities has been equally contentious in China, which for thirty years has broadly tolerated Christian growth. Recently, however, government policy has moved towards a deliberate cultivation of older Chinese traditions, especially Daoism and Buddhism, as a deliberate counter-attraction to the explosive growth of what are seen as foreign faiths.

FAITH AND FOREIGN POLICY

The growth of religious diversity has implications for foreign policy as well as domestic. Although the Asian BRICs are not going to "go Christian", at least in our lifetimes, religion could yet play a key political role. However different their religious histories, Russia and China share some common political and imperial views. Both countries aspire to control a vast sphere of

influence beyond their national borders, and in both cases, they can justify such outreach by claiming to protect their “own people”, their kith and kin. Many Russians have never accepted the loss of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, the “-stans”, where millions of Europeans of Christian heritage now live as minorities among mainly Muslim populations. The current Russian government has already been accused of wishing to restore the old Soviet Union. It would not be hard to imagine a future regime expanding its power into Central Asia, and justifying its move in terms of the protection of fellow-Christians who are presently under Muslim rule.

China too could well see a similar version of international religious politics. Perhaps sixty million ethnic Chinese live around the Pacific Rim, where many have become enthusiastically Christian. This ethnic-religious presence creates tensions with mainly Muslim societies in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where pogroms and persecution have erupted over the past fifteen years. A perceived need to protect overseas Chinese Christians could provide the grounds for a future Chinese government to justify expansion into South-East Asia. Whatever the political future might hold, religious ideologies will matter crucially in a BRIC-dominated world.

AGENDAS

With these remarks in mind, let me suggest some of the agendas that might be pursued within the emerging powers, whether the narrow four or the larger seven. I stress that this is only a bare outline of a list, and any one of the points can be developed at substantial length. I would divide the topics into five main categories

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

What is the role of Christianity as a force in economic development? How do new forms of Christianity promote thrift and enterprise? Do they help create civil societies that potentially can offer the base for viable consumer societies? How does Christianity assist the upwardly mobile to advance? How does it help society’s weaker members to cope with failure or immobility? In this category, I would stress the significance of education, a field in which Christians traditionally claim special prestige, particularly in India

Another profitable area for comparison is of course in politics. How far does the growth of new Christian movements enhance the development of democracy, and concepts of human rights? How do Christian sects and movements as the origin of political parties, an area in which Paul Freston has of course written so acutely?

How, in different ways, does Christianity provide a voice to marginal ethnic or tribal groups? Does such an appeal add to the unpopularity of new religious movements, in seeming to align them with dissident or separatist elements?

GENDER AND DEMOGRAPHY

No account of new forms of Christianity can ignore gender issues. Rapid modernization, of course, usually entails far-reaching transformations of gender and family roles, often resulting in confusion and displacement. In this process, religion can serve many functions, from providing a focus for reaction to giving women a vital arena for debate and self-assertion.

That gender theme leads to potentially one of the most critical matters in tracing the impact of religion, namely how different religious forms shape the demographic patterns of respective countries. How, in turn, do those demographic changes (eg reduced fertility) impact religious practice and belief?

RELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS

Western Christianity has usually had to battle the temptations of power, of an over-close relationship with the state. We much accustom ourselves to understanding the experience of Christians living as small minorities in hostile or at best barely tolerant societies. How does this impact the content of the Christian message and daily practice? The emerging nations offer

superb sites for such research, in terms of the world's largest Muslim and Hindu nations; and of countries sharply divided between older state churches and new insurgent denominations.

NEW RELIGIONS

Each of the emerging nations is characterized by emerging churches, and indeed new movements from other faiths. In each case, abundant case-studies allow us to trace emergence of wholly new sectarian and alternative new religions. We observe the confrontation of old and new forms of Christianity, as familiar state models confronting the new privatized marketplace. How does the rise of new religious forms change or destabilize this relationship?

TRANSNATIONALISM

One central theme throughout any such comparative study would be the role of transnationalism. All the Big Seven nations are sources of major global movements and migrant networks, often using innovative forms of media. How do migrants transform the host counties in religious terms? Less studied is the question of how returning migrants impact their original home societies.

As many have recognized, South-South mission is a vastly important, if understudied, aspect of global missionary enterprise – arguably the centerpiece in the emerging world order. As China and Brazil expand their economic grasp around the worlds, especially in Africa, it is very likely that faith will follow the flag.

We can also compare newer and emergent forms of transnational religion - Muslim missionary orders and Pentecostal missions. How do these networks create new global religious maps, especially around the Pacific Rim? Another valuable parallel is in Christian and Muslim use of new forms of media - how rival faiths borrow freely from each other's technologies.

Scholars of Christianity have struggled to escape from the traditional obsessions of the Euro-American churches, the world of the rich and powerful, to acquaint themselves with the very different realities of Africa, with the world of the poorest. Perhaps, now, we need to think of another set of unfamiliar circumstances: that of the almost rich, almost powerful, and increasingly Christian.