

The Baptist World:

Part 2: Where are We?

As one of the most decentralized Christian denominations with innumerable independent bodies as well as a zeal for maintaining our autonomy, Baptists are prone to experiencing a sense of disconnectedness, both from our historical roots and from the greater family of Baptists worldwide. This article serves as an introduction to the Baptist World—men, women, and children with whom we share a kinship of identity, historical experience, foundational beliefs, practices, and church polity. In the first part, we primarily focused on *foundational identity* and answered the question “who are we?” In this second part, the Baptist family will be analyzed in terms of our *geographical distribution* to answer the question “where are we?” The facts may surprise you and hopefully also encourage and impart a sense of being knitted together with fellow believers around the world in God’s grand tapestry.

Data & Analysis

Baptists Among Every Tribe, Language, People, and Nation

Following the beautiful imagery expressed in the Book of Revelation regarding the entire family of God’s redeemed children, Baptists too come from among every tribe, language, people, and nation. We are found in virtually every country of the world, and nearly every ethnic group is represented.

Baptists total 87 million people in 2010 and growing.* The pie chart below displays the distribution of Baptists among the five continental regions—North America, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The bar graph, in turn, illustrates the size of the Baptist family in each continental region as a percentage of its respective Christian community.



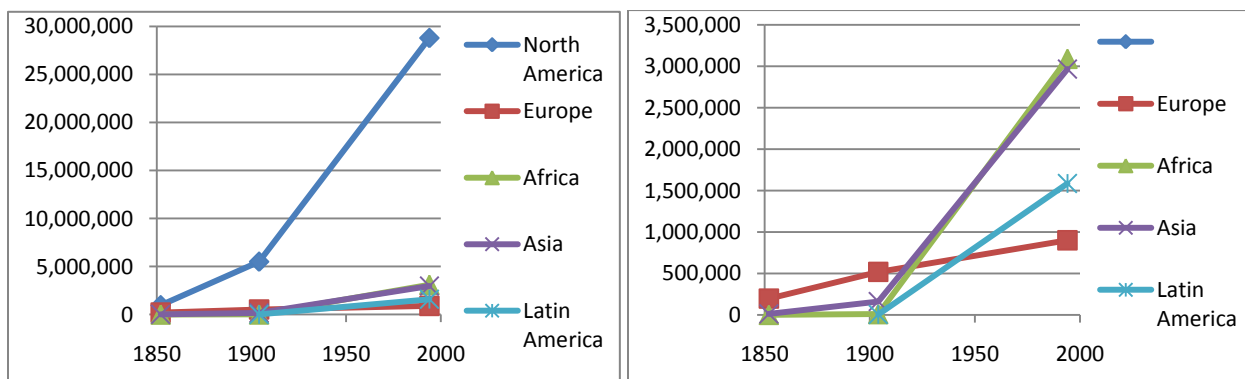
* Baptist churches only regard baptized adults as church “members,” which greatly underestimates their true worshipping community. Therefore, an inclusive membership is reported here instead, consisting of adult baptized members as well as regular attending non-baptized adults along with all of their children. Inclusive membership is a more accurate representation of the entire Baptist community. It also allows for comparative analysis with other denominations that practice infant baptism and consequently include their children in church membership statistics.

Two-thirds of all 87 million Baptists are found in North America, almost all of them specifically in the United States. Not only do most Baptists live in North America, but they also have a strong presence within its Christian community, constituting 18% of all Christians there. North America is without question the heartland of the Baptist world.

Africa, Asia, and Latin America together comprise one-third of the world Baptist family. These three continental regions—often collectively referred to as the Global South—are recognized as the emerging part of the world in terms of demographic, political, economic, as well as religious strength. Baptists make up 3%, 2%, and 1% of all Christians in these regions, respectively. For comparison, it should be noted that 4% of all Christians worldwide are Baptist.

Although the Baptist faith had its beginning in Europe, it has clearly had its greatest impact elsewhere. Less than 2% of all Baptists are found in Europe, and only 0.3% of all European Christians are Baptist.

The following graphs depict the growth of the baptized membership of Baptists among the five continental geographies at three time periods: 1852, 1904, and 1994. The graph on the left includes all five regions, while the one on the right excludes North America in order to clarify the minor differences between the remaining four regions.



Baptist growth in North America has been unparalleled in sheer magnitude, especially after the Civil War (1861-1865). On the opposite side of the spectrum, Europe's growth has been least impressive.

Both Africa and Asia skyrocketed during the twentieth century, far surpassing Europe. Latin America was the last mission field with the smallest Baptist membership before 1900, however it has also grown significantly in such a short period of time.

The following series of tables lists the countries with the most Baptists in each of the five continental regions. The countries profiled are those with the largest number of Baptists. However, some small countries also made the list if their Baptist population has a strong presence within its respective Christian community. Thus, both total *number* and *relative strength* were considered.

North America	Baptists	Baptists/Christians
USA	54,850,000	22.2%
Canada	410,000	1.7%
Haiti	330,000	3.4%
Bahamas	119,000	36.4%
Jamaica	108,000	4.8%

North America: The United States is unmatched with the greatest number of Baptists in North America (~55 million). Despite the sizeable number of Baptists in Canada, their relative strength (1.7%) is below the global average of 4%. It may be surprising to note that the Bahamas have very high relative strength (36%) within their own Christian community—in fact, even greater than the United States (22%).

Africa	Baptists	Baptists/Christians
Nigeria	6,553,000	8.1%
Congo (DRC)	2,381,800	3.6%
Kenya	1,150,000	3.4%
Tanzania	910,000	3.7%
Rwanda	632,700	6.9%
Malawi	500,000	4.2%
Angola	436,200	2.4%
Central African Republic	435,250	12.6%
Mozambique	415,000	3.8%
Cameroon	400,000	3.7%
Zambia	351,000	3.0%
Zimbabwe	289,000	2.9%
Liberia	138,000	8.1%

Africa: Baptists are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. They are most numerous in Nigeria (6.5 million), which is the largest African nation and the most influential. And their relative strength in Nigeria (8%) is also twice the global average. Other nations with Baptist populations over a million include Congo, Kenya, and nearly Tanzania. Other nations with relative strength above the global average of 4% include Central African Republic, Liberia, Rwanda, and Malawi. And many others are not far behind.

Asia	Baptists	Baptists/Christians
India	5,000,000	7.0%
Myanmar	1,777,800	39.2%
South Korea	970,000	6.5%
Philippines	830,000	1.0%
Indonesia	295,300	0.8%
Bangladesh	140,000	12.9%
Japan	63,200	3.2%
Thailand	53,800	7.2%
Nepal	27,000	3.2%
Singapore	26,100	3.4%
Cambodia	14,600	3.1%

Asia: The nation with the largest number of Baptists in Asia is India (5 million), which is also the world's second most populous country. Moreover, their relative strength in India (7%) is nearly twice the global average. Other Asian nations with Baptist populations greater than a million include Myanmar (Burma) and nearly South Korea and the Philippines.* Interestingly, Myanmar tops the list with the greatest relative strength (39%) within its own Christian population. Additional nations with relative strength above the global average include Bangladesh, Thailand, and South Korea.

Bangladesh and Thailand are predominantly Muslim and Buddhist, respectively, and have been historically difficult countries to penetrate with the Gospel.

Latin America	Baptists	Baptists/Christians
Brazil	2,784,000	1.6%
Mexico	380,000	0.4%
Argentina	177,000	0.5%
Peru	134,000	0.5%
Nicaragua	115,000	2.0%
Venezuela	100,000	0.4%
Guatemala	90,000	0.7%
Chile	74,000	0.5%
Colombia	57,000	0.1%

Latin America: As the largest country in Latin America, Brazil boasts the most Baptists (2.8 million). Although their relative strength (1.6%) is below the global average, it's still quite strong relative to other countries in this part of the world. The country with the greatest relative strength is Nicaragua (2%), although it too falls below the global average.

Europe	Baptists	Baptists/Christians
Germany	440,000	0.8%
Ukraine	275,000	0.8%
United Kingdom	265,000	0.7%
Russia	160,000	0.2%
Romania	140,000	0.7%
Moldova	40,000	1.5%

Europe: The nation with the most numerous Baptists is Germany (nearly half a million), Europe's second largest country. The United Kingdom, the birthplace of the first Baptists, also has a relatively strong standing in this part of the world. The remaining countries that made the list are Eastern European nations of the former Communist bloc. Moldova tops the list in Europe with the greatest relative strength (1.5%), although it is below the global average.

* China did not make the list because the vast majority of its Christians are within non-denominational networks of house churches. So despite China being the world's largest country with a sizeable and growing Christian community, very few are self-identified Baptists or any other historically European or American denominations. However, it should be noted that the majority of Chinese believers practice adult baptism and hold evangelical beliefs.

The following table reorganizes the same 44 countries already discussed in two complete lists. The list on the left is ranked according to the total number of Baptists. The list on the right is ranked according to the relative strength of Baptists within their respective Christian communities.

World	Baptists
USA	54,850,000
Nigeria	6,553,000
India	5,000,000
Brazil	2,784,000
Congo (DRC)	2,381,800
Myanmar	1,777,800
Kenya	1,150,000
South Korea	970,000
Tanzania	910,000
Philippines	830,000
Rwanda	632,700
Malawi	500,000
Germany	440,000
Angola	436,200
Central African Rep.	435,250
Mozambique	415,000
Canada	410,000
Cameroon	400,000
Mexico	380,000
Zambia	351,000
Haiti	330,000
Indonesia	295,300
Zimbabwe	289,000
Ukraine	275,000
United Kingdom	265,000
Argentina	177,000
Russia	160,000
Bangladesh	140,000
Romania	140,000
Liberia	138,000
Peru	134,000
Bahamas	119,000
Nicaragua	115,000
Jamaica	108,000
Venezuela	100,000
Guatemala	90,000
Chile	74,000
Japan	63,200
Colombia	57,000
Thailand	53,800
Moldova	40,000
Nepal	27,000
Singapore	26,100
Cambodia	14,600
Other countries	2,300,000
All Baptists	87,049,750

World	Baptists/Christians
Myanmar	39.2%
Bahamas	36.4%
USA	22.2%
Bangladesh	12.9%
Central African Rep.	12.6%
Liberia	8.1%
Nigeria	8.1%
Thailand	7.2%
India	7.0%
Rwanda	6.9%
South Korea	6.5%
Jamaica	4.8%
Malawi	4.2%
Mozambique	3.8%
Tanzania	3.7%
Cameroon	3.7%
Congo (DRC)	3.6%
Kenya	3.4%
Haiti	3.4%
Singapore	3.4%
Japan	3.2%
Nepal	3.2%
Cambodia	3.1%
Zambia	3.0%
Zimbabwe	2.9%
Angola	2.4%
Nicaragua	2.0%
Canada	1.7%
Brazil	1.6%
Moldova	1.5%
Philippines	1.0%
Germany	0.8%
Indonesia	0.8%
Ukraine	0.8%
United Kingdom	0.7%
Romania	0.7%
Guatemala	0.7%
Chile	0.5%
Argentina	0.5%
Peru	0.5%
Venezuela	0.4%
Mexico	0.4%
Russia	0.2%
Colombia	0.1%
Other countries	-
All Baptists	3.9%

The three Baptist heavyweights are the United States, Nigeria, and India. These nations top the list of largest Baptist populations and have impressive relative strength within their own Christian communities. Even beyond our specific focus on religion, these three countries are free democracies, growing economies, and geopolitical leaders with substantial regional influence. The United States, Nigeria, and India are the centers of gravity of the Baptist world.

Upon a regional analysis, Africa and Asia are quickly recognized to dominate the lists. They boast the most countries tallied overall (13 in Africa, 11 in Asia). They comprise 8 of the top 10 countries in the first list (4 in Africa, 4 in Asia)—with another 7 in Africa among the next 10 countries. And of all 13 countries with relative strength above the global average, Africa and Asia comprise 10 of them (5 in Africa, 5 in Asia).

The weakest geographies for Baptists are Europe and Latin America. In fact, 11 of the 15 total European and Latin American countries are clustered at the very bottom of the second list, meaning that they have the smallest proportion of Baptists relative to their respective Christian populations. Latin America has been the last mission field for Baptists to enter. Another likely explanation for the relative weakness in Europe and Latin America is that both have had long histories of state religion, predominantly Catholicism, which has maintained a monopoly on religion and suppressed all forms of competition. Whereas, Africa and Asia are relatively new mission fields that have seen more free competition between missionaries of different Christian persuasions.

The following chart contains a selection of the major Baptist denominations found within these countries. They are ranked in order of the growth rate of their baptized membership since 1995 over a 10-15 year period, depending on the data available. This is not an exhaustive list, and it certainly has its limitations, but it can be illustrative of trends in Baptist growth in recent years.

Nepal Baptist Church Council	209.3%
Bangladesh Tribal Baptist Church	120.5%
India Orissa Baptist Evangelical Crusade	94.8%
Rwanda Union of Baptist Churches	62.4%
Tanzania Baptist Convention	40.8%
Cambodia Baptist Convention	38.7%
Congo (DRC) ECC Baptist River	33.5%
Bangladesh Free Baptist Churches (New Life)	27.1%
Kenya Baptist Convention	22.5%
Central African Republic Association of Baptist Churches	22.4%
Zambia Baptist Union	22.0%
India Karnataka Baptist Convention	21.2%
India Tripura Baptist Christian Union	19.1%
Central African Republic Federation of the Union of Baptist Churches	17.9%
Thai Baptist Convention	16.6%
Baptist Conference of the Philippines	13.4%
Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship	13.3%
Nigeria Baptist Convention	13.3%
Peru Independent Baptist Church	12.6%
Angola Baptist Evangelical Church	11.5%
Nicaragua Baptist Convention	11.4%
Mexico National Baptist Convention	11.0%
Guatemala Baptist Convention	10.7%
Venezuela Baptist Convention	8.3%
Brazil National Baptist Convention	7.3%

Rwanda Association of Baptist Churches	6.7%
Colombia Baptist Convention	6.4%
Thailand Karen Baptist Convention	6.1%
Argentina Baptist Convention	5.9%
Congo (DRC) ECC Baptist West	5.3%
Angola Baptist Convention	5.2%
Malawi Baptist Convention	5.1%
India Nagaland Baptist Church Council	4.7%
India Assam Baptist Convention	4.0%
Singapore Baptist Convention	4.0%
India Manipur Baptist Convention	3.7%
Peru Baptist Convention	3.7%
Zambia Baptist Convention	3.6%
Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches	3.4%
India North Bank Baptist Christian Association	3.3%
India Convention of Baptist Churches of Northern Circars	3.2%
India Garo Baptist Convention	3.2%
Cameroon Baptist Convention	3.2%
South Korea Bible Baptist Fellowship	2.9%
Malawi African Baptist Assembly	2.8%
Brazil Baptist Convention	2.8%
Canadian Baptist Ministries	2.7%
Bangladesh Garo Baptist Union	2.4%
Bahamas National Baptist Convention	2.4%
Bangladesh Baptist Sangha	2.1%
South Korea Baptist Convention	1.1%
Moldova Baptist Union	1.0%
Philippine Baptist Convention	0.9%
Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention	0.8%
USA Southern Baptist Convention	0.4%
India Baptist Church of Mizoram	0.3%
National Baptist Convention USA	0.3%
USA Progressive National Baptist Convention	0.0%
United Kingdom Baptist Union of Great Britain	-0.2%
Russia Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists	-0.3%
American Baptist Churches USA	-0.7%
National Baptist Convention of America	-0.9%
Ukraine Union of the Association of Evangelical Christian Baptists	-1.3%
Romania Baptist Union	-1.3%
United Kingdom Baptist Union of Scotland	-1.4%
USA Baptist Bible Fellowship International	-1.9%

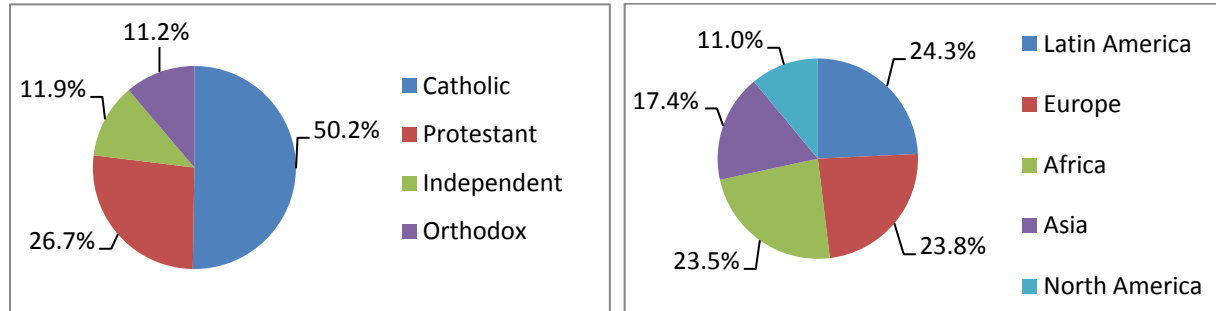
The most spectacular growth rate among Baptists in the last 10-15 years is found in Asia with over 200% growth rate in Nepal, over 100% among the tribal people of Bangladesh, and nearly 100% in Orissa state of India.

Of the 18 Baptist bodies at the top of the list, all of them are found in Asia and Africa (10 in Asia, 8 in Africa). Then 8 of the next 11 Baptist bodies on the list are found in Latin America. The next 15 Baptist bodies are again dominated by Asia and Africa (9 in Asia, 5 in Africa). There is astounding church growth in the Global South.

On the other hand, churches in the West are waning or shrinking. All of the bottom 8 Baptist bodies on the list, recording negative growth rate, are found in Europe and the United States.

Baptists Among Other Christian Denominations

The following pie charts provide a summarized overview of world Christianity. The pie chart on the left categories Christianity into its four denominational megablocs—Catholic, Protestant, Independent*, and Orthodox. The pie chart on the right illustrates the geographical distribution of all Christians among the five continental regions—North America, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

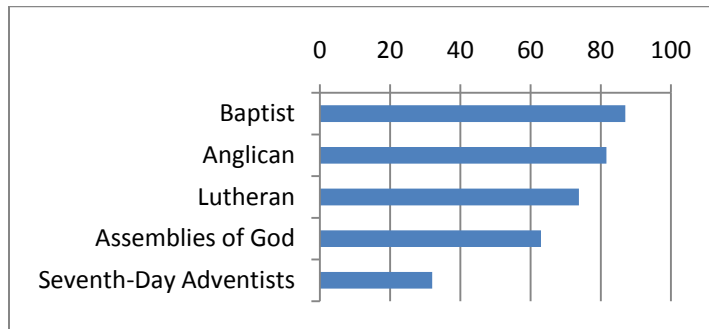


Catholic and Orthodox are the oldest Christian denominations, however both are in decline. Their share of world Christianity is expected to further decrease. On the other hand, the proportion of Protestants and Independents is expected to rise.

Latin America, Europe, and Africa are virtually tied with the largest total number of Christians. Europe's share is decreasing due to defections and low birth rates. However, Latin America and Africa's proportions are expected to increase. Asia's Christians are also expected to rise. Although North America may have the smallest share of world Christians, they are the wealthiest, most educated, and most influential in the world. Therefore, we bear the greatest responsibility to advance the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

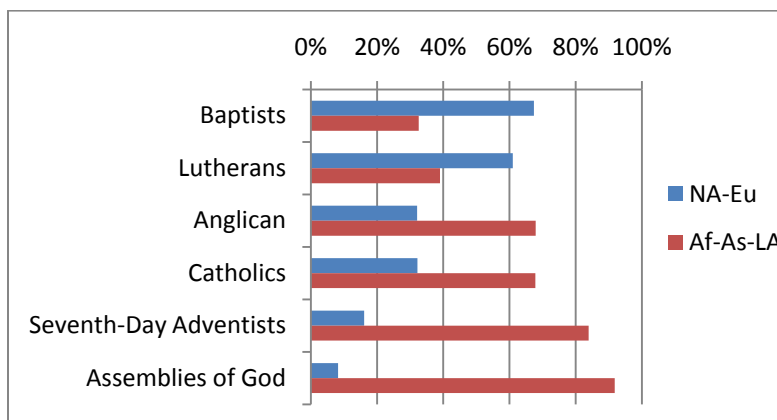
* Independents include Chinese house churches, African indigenous churches, American nondenominational churches, as well as other new Christian streams of organization predominantly found in the Global South.

The following bar graph compares the world populations of some of the largest Protestant denominations (in millions of people).



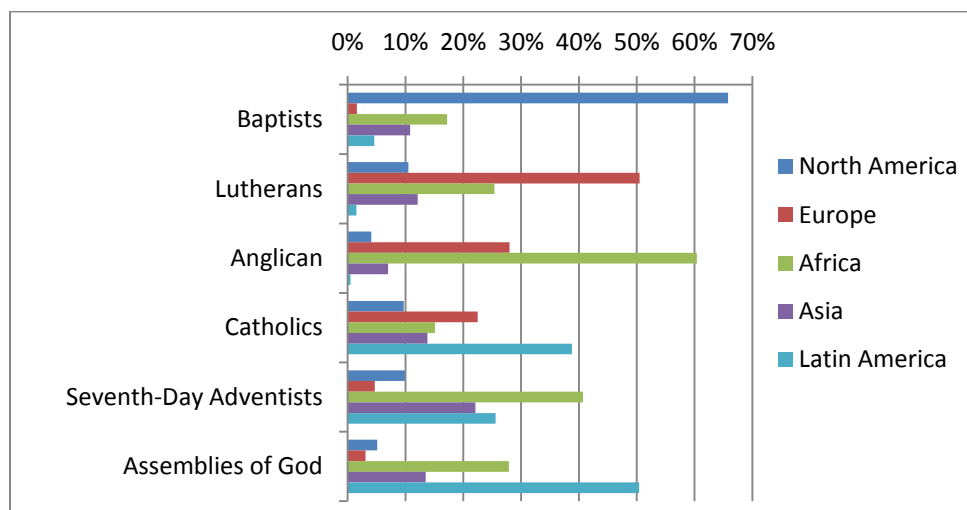
Baptists top the list with 87 million people, outnumbering Anglicans, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-Day Adventists...to name just a few. But it should be emphasized that the Baptist number combines scores of autonomous Baptist denominations, networks, and individual churches. Therefore, it should not be assumed that Baptists think, act, or make policy in unison. Conversely, Anglicans, Lutherans, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-Day Adventists comprise either a unified organized body or only a handful of autonomous bodies.

The following graph illustrates the geographical distribution of Baptists in comparison with five other denominations—Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Assemblies of God. The world is divided into two parts. The first consists of North America and Europe—the West—while the second consists of Africa, Asia, and Latin America—the Global South.



The geographical distribution of these six denominations is very revealing. Two-thirds of Baptists and Lutherans are found in the West. The exact opposite is true of Anglicans and Catholics with two-thirds of their populations found in the Global South. In the case of Seventh-Day Adventists and Assemblies of God, their populations are overwhelmingly in the Global South.

The following bar graph further elucidates the geographical distribution of each denomination by breaking down the data into the five continental regions.



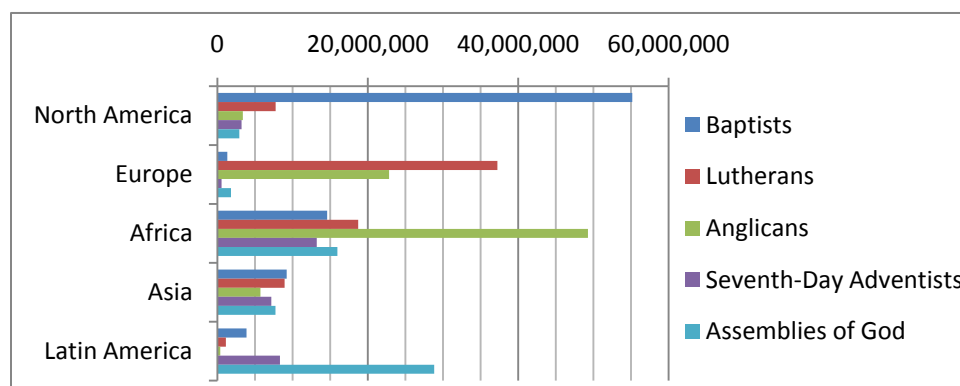
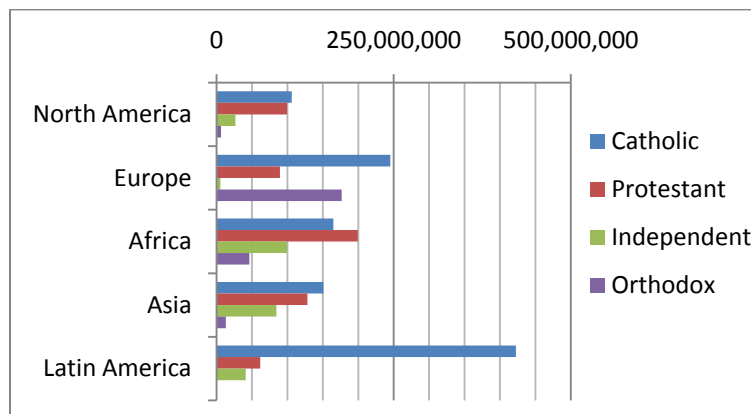
As stated earlier, Baptists and Lutherans are both numerically heavily weighted in the West. But this bar graph demonstrates that in the case of Baptists, the majority is found in North America, while in the case of Lutherans, the majority is in Europe. The remainder of their number is found in the Global South and follows a similar pattern—most in Africa, then Asia, and least of all in Latin America.

The Anglican family is undergoing an interesting ethnic transformation from British to African. Anglicanism originated in England, and so the denomination’s constituents have historically reflected their immigration pattern from Great Britain to the United States, Canada, and Australia. Incidentally, the great majority of Anglicans listed in Asia are simply white Australians with British ancestry. However, a dramatic shift is taking place in that the majority of Anglicans in the world today are Africans. The Anglican faith was appropriated by African people groups during and soon after British colonialism. The numerical trend is expected to grow, which will also translate into a shift of values within the Anglican family because African Anglicans are vocal opponents of gay ordination and liberal theology.

Among the six denominations analyzed, Catholicism is most evenly distributed geographically. The majority of Catholics are found in Latin America, followed by Europe, and the other regions not far behind. Catholicism has large numbers of adherents both in the West and in the Global South. Most Catholics in Latin America, Europe, and some parts of Asia derive their Catholic affiliation from wide-scale conversions of entire people groups many hundreds of years ago, while others mostly in Africa and Asia are part of a younger generation of Catholic converts.

While both Seventh-Day Adventists and Assemblies of God are numerically heavily weighted in the Global South, there is a slight difference in their distribution. In the case of Seventh-Day Adventists, the majority is found in Africa followed by Latin America, while in the case of Assemblies of God, the reverse is true with the majority found in Latin America then followed by Africa.

The following bar graphs illustrate the numerical size of each denomination within the five continental geographies.



In North America, Protestants have a small lead over Catholics if one recognizes that Protestants and Protestant-like Independents could be combined into one common megabloc. For all practical purposes, there is no significant difference between Protestants and Independents in the United States. Of all the Protestant groups analyzed, Baptists have an overwhelming majority.

In Europe, the majority of Christians are Catholic, followed close behind by Orthodox. Of all the Protestant groups analyzed, Lutherans lead with Anglicans close behind.

In Africa, Protestants lead numerically with Catholics close behind. Independent denominations (i.e. new indigenous movements unrelated to European and American traditions) are also quite sizeable. Of all the Protestant groups analyzed, Anglicans are far in the lead with the rest clustered together further behind.

Asia is most evenly balanced between the four megablocs. Catholics are in the lead, but the other megablocs are not far behind. Independent denominations (e.g. Chinese house church networks) are also sizeable in Asia. All of the Protestant groups analyzed are clustered together with Baptists having a slight edge.

Latin America is the most uneven with Catholics having a substantial majority. However Protestants are steadily rising in number. Of all the Protestants analyzed, Assemblies of God have a strong majority, followed by Seventh-Day Adventists.

Conclusion

When we look into the faces of the world Baptist family, we see enormous ethnic diversity that should be celebrated. It is a testament to the Gospel's power to convict all people groups across all cultures, the evangelical zeal of our missionary forefathers, and the effectiveness of our decentralized democratized form of church polity.

Despite the birthplace of the Baptist faith in Europe, it is the United States that has become the heartland of the Baptist world, from which it has been propagated around the globe. Additional Baptist centers of gravity have risen in Nigeria and India, which reflect the broader trend of great Baptist success in Africa and Asia. These regional powers will each become an important nidus of further outreach.

Baptists constitute 4% of all Christians worldwide, and they hold a slight lead ahead of other Protestant denominations. However, a disproportionate majority of Baptists are found in the West, whereas Catholics and Anglicans are more evenly divided between West and Global South, and Assemblies of God and Seventh-Day Adventists are disproportionately found in the Global South. Given that Christianity is growing most vigorously in the Global South, it appears that Baptists are least well positioned to take advantage of this growth. A specific point of application would be that we need to redirect our missionary focus with greater attention to the Global South.

Latin America has been the last region to see Baptist church planting, but the last 10-15 years have been promising. On the other hand, Baptists have been growing substantially in Africa and Asia. Vast portions of sub-Saharan Africa have already undergone mass conversion to Christianity during the twentieth century, and Baptists continue to experience significant growth, most rapidly in eastern and central Africa.

However, Asia attracts special attention because of the fact that it remains the largest unreached mission field, and so the potential harvest is enormous. There are several encouraging signs for Asian Baptists. They currently hold a slight lead compared to other Protestant denominations, and among Baptist denominations worldwide, they are growing most rapidly. Consequently, Baptists have the potential to make a significant impact among unreached people groups in the most populated parts of the world. India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Thailand have had the greatest growth rate in the last 10-15 years.

I hope this survey of the geographical distribution of the world Baptist family has encouraged you and perhaps kindled a sense of belonging to a much larger family of brothers and sisters in Christ than you had first known. But more importantly, I hope that you have been left with a new awareness and indeed an earnest desire to reach the lost around the world. A great harvest is perhaps just around the corner, particularly in the strategic region of Asia.

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