

From Christendom to Global Christianity

Rediscovering the Western Church through the Missio Dei

Ignatius Wilhelm Ferreira

School of Christian Ministry and Leadership,

Northwest University  Potchefstroom, South Africa

Abstract

This article provides a theological and missiological reassessment of the historical decline of Western Christianity into Christendom. Instead of simply recounting history, it uses the framework of the missio Dei to critique how political alliances, cultural assimilation, and institutional interests have distorted the Church's identity and witness. Viewing the Constantinian establishment, medieval Christendom, Protestant confessionalism, Enlightenment secularisation, and the modern epistemological crisis as phases of a theological drift, the article suggests that the fall of Christendom is a providential Kairos moment. Drawing on missiological insights from Bosch, Walls, Newbiggin, and Bediako, it encourages the Western Church to embrace theological humility, intercultural understanding, ecclesial reform, and eschatological hope. In this way, the article offers a renewed vision for the Church in the West, not as the protector of Christendom but as a cruciform participant in God's ongoing global mission.

Keywords: Christendom; missio Dei; missiology; Western Christianity; global Christianity; ecclesiology; secularisation; theological humility; intercultural theology; mission and empire

1. Introduction: The End of an Era and the Call to Discern

The decline of Western Christianity is no longer speculative but observable. Mainline churches in Europe and North America face sharp reductions in attendance, theological institutions are shrinking or closing, and Christianity's public voice is increasingly marginalised within secular discourse (Guinness, 2022; Noll, 2012:246). Yet these trends are not merely sociological; they reflect a more profound theological crisis. They invite a serious missiological reflection on the regression of Western Christianity into Christendom, a movement that signals not growth, but deviation (Bass, 2012:14).

Historically, the Christian faith began as a cross-cultural, eschatologically urgent movement rooted in the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. However, over the centuries, the Church's original missionary posture was gradually replaced by institutionalism, political involvement, and cultural assimilation. This change was not only structural but also theological. Christendom, seen here as the merging of Christian identity with political power and cultural dominance, marks a significant departure from the Church's cruciform and missional calling.

Douglas Hall (1997:1) describes this shift as the start of a "theological regression," where the Church abandoned its prophetic marginality and adopted an imperial confident stance. The effects of this change are now evident in the West's epistemological, spiritual, and institutional crises. However, instead of viewing this moment as simply a decline, this article suggests that we see it as a provident Kairos, a divinely appointed time for repentance, recalibration, and renewal.

Drawing on historical insight and missiological scholarship, this article critiques the Christendom paradigm as a theologically deformative model. In doing so, it employs the framework of the *missio Dei* to diagnose how Western Christianity's history reflects theological misalignment. The aim is not merely to lament what has been lost but to examine how this moment opens new possibilities for participation in God's global mission.

This interpretive shift from nostalgic lament to theological discernment forms the foundation of the article. Drawing on insights from scholars such as David Bosch (1991), Andrew Walls (2005), and Kwame Bediako (2000; 2007), this study proposes a reimagining of Western Christianity not as the cultural centre of the faith, but as a humble participant in a decentralized, global Christian movement guided by the Spirit's leading in diverse contexts.

2. Theological and Missiological Framework: *Missio Dei* as Interpretive Key

The concept of the *missio Dei* has become a key correction in contemporary missiology. It states that mission is not just an ecclesial program or denominational plan, but the very essence of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who sends the Church into the world as an extension of divine love and reconciliation. David Bosch (1991:390–393) described this shift as moving from a Church-centred view of mission to one rooted in God's sending nature. Mission, then, is not what the Church does for God, but how the Church engages in what God is already doing in the world.

This framework questions the main assumptions of Christendom. Under the Christendom model, mission was often limited to expanding and maintaining institutional Christianity (Muggeridge, 1980:17). It became entangled with colonial expansion, government-endorsed religion, and the preservation of

cultural dominance. In this view, the Church ceased serving God's kingdom and instead became an ally of the empire.

Bevans and Schroeder (2004:348-364) outline six theological constants of mission: participation in God's life, proclamation of Christ, transformation of society, contextualisation, reconciliation, and liberation. These constants directly address the failures of Christendom, which often replaced institutional stability with transformation, enforced uniformity instead of contextualisation, and maintained hierarchical power structures rather than fostering reconciliation and liberation.

Andrew Walls (2005:62-64) argued that Christianity's vitality has always depended on its ability to translate the gospel across cultures and settings. He contrasts the dynamic movement of early Christianity with the stagnation of Christendom, where faith became closely tied to a single culture, language, and set of institutional norms. This stagnation, Walls suggests, reflects a theological and missiological failure to follow the Spirit's movement.

Furthermore, Guder (2009:64) observes that the Christendom model led to "missional reductionism," where theology was separated from real-world engagement, and ecclesiology focused on preservation rather than participation. In this context, theological education often became professionalized and disconnected from missional practice (Farley, 1983). It is referred to as an "abnormal theology" by Laing (2009:11). This perspective emphasizes institutional maintenance over prophetic witness.

By reclaiming the *missio Dei* as the interpretive key, we are encouraged to evaluate Christian history not only by its achievements but also by its faithfulness to God's mission. This includes recognizing where the Church aligned with God's redemptive purposes and where it fell short. Theological frameworks must be informed by this missional perspective if they are to guide the Church through the current crisis and into meaningful participation in a post-Christendom age.

3. Historical Diagnosis: Christendom as Missional Distortion

The decline of Western Christianity into Christendom reflects not just a sociopolitical shift but a theological distortion. This section examines key historical periods through the perspective of the *missio Dei*, illustrating how each phase uncovers both God's providential work and the Church's ongoing temptation to adopt worldly powers. In every era, the Church's missionary calling was shaped, sometimes bolstered, often warped, by cultural, political, and theological factors.

3.1 The Early Church and the Constantinian Shift (1–500 AD)

The early Christian movement was a cross-cultural, eschatologically driven community that faced persecution but remained actively engaged in mission. Rooted in Jewish tradition yet quickly expanding into Hellenistic and Roman

worlds, the early Church showed exceptional adaptability and resilience. Its expansion across Asia Minor, North Africa, and the Mediterranean illustrates the pilgrim principle described by Andrew Walls (2002:217): Christianity is naturally migratory, capable of cultural translation without losing its core theological message.

However, the Edict of Milan (AD 313) and the subsequent rise of Constantine transformed the Church's status from a persecuted minority to an imperial partner. What began as a marginal faith became a favoured religion, culminating in Christianity's establishment as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This moment, though hailed as a victory, marked a significant theological compromise.

David Bosch (1991:275) argues that the Constantinian shift caused a loss of eschatological tension and missionary energy. The Church's prophetic voice was silenced as it gained political protection. Mission, once centred on proclamation, incarnation, and suffering witness, was replaced by civic privilege, religious uniformity, and cultural assimilation. The *ecclesia* became the empire's moral instrument, and theological orthodoxy became linked with imperial loyalty.

The early Church's lively engagement in the *missio Dei* through suffering, contextualisation, and witness gave way to a triumphalist ecclesiology that equated political favour with divine blessing. This marked the beginning of the long era of Christendom, where the Church ceased to see itself as sent and began to view itself as settled.

3.2 Medieval Christendom and Institutional Expansion (500–1500 AD)

The fall of the Western Roman Empire marked the start of a period of deep socio-political chaos and fragmentation (Cairns, 1996:118). In this absence of imperial authority, the Christian Church rose not only as a spiritual guide but also as a stabilising influence, safeguarding education, culture, and religious practices through its monastic communities and church structures. What began as a spiritual sanctuary during turbulent times gradually evolved into an institution wielding significant political and cultural influence.

As Cairns (1996:165) and Walls (2000:21) observe, the Church's integration into feudal society marked a pivotal transformation in its identity and mission. Once characterized by its trans-cultural witness and universal proclamation of the gospel, the Church increasingly aligned itself with territorial interests and political structures. The expansion of monastic missions among the barbarian tribes of Northern and Western Europe was indeed extraordinary, but these missions often fused the Christian message with European cultural patterns. The result was a form of Christianity deeply intertwined with ethnicity, geography, and political allegiance.

This fusion led to what became known as Christendom, a territorial and political expression of Christianity rooted in the idea of a single, inherited civilization.

Christendom was not just a religious realm; it was a socio-political system where Christianity was intertwined with governance, legal authority, and cultural identity (Walls, 2000: 21). As tribal kingdoms converted to Christianity, it served both as a spiritual tradition and a symbol of civilizational belonging. Conversion implied not only religious commitment but also entry into the sphere of a 'civilised' Christian Europe.

The institutional Church, especially through the expanding influence of the papacy, extended its authority over both spiritual and worldly spheres. Tools like canon law and excommunication were used to enforce church control, while movements such as the Crusades showed the Church's involvement in imperial expansion. Although presented as holy war, the Crusades reflected the combination of religious devotion with political and economic goals. In this way, the Church stopped acting as a servant of the *missio Dei* and instead became an agent of empire and conquest.

Bevans and Schroeder (2004:215) critique this phase as one of "ethnocentric ecclesiology," where the Church started to assert its cultural and institutional forms as divine and normative. The gospel's call for inclusivity and transformation was increasingly overshadowed by an imperial ecclesiology that equated Christian faith with Western civilization. Although moments of genuine spiritual renewal did appear—particularly within monasticism and theological scholarship—these were often contained within the broader context of ecclesial dominance and political involvement.

Thus, the Middle Ages institutionalized a significant deviation from the Church's original prophetic and missional calling. Instead of serving as a countercultural witness, the Church became the ideological foundation of Christendom. Its mission shifted from being incarnational and prophetic to expansionist and protective. The faith, once rooted in the margins of empire, had now become the dominant cultural and political force within it.

The consolidation of Christianity during this era marks a decisive turning point in its socio-political development. The merging of the gospel with tribal identity, cultural dominance, and imperial ambition redefined the Church's role in the world. No longer a universal community transcending national borders, Christianity assumed a territorial character, limited by Western power and culture. This change would influence the future course of Western civilization and lay the groundwork for future theological and mission-related crises.

3.3 The Reformation and Confessional Fragmentation (1500–1700 AD)

The Protestant Reformation challenged the Catholic Church's theological and moral authority. Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli advocated for a return to scriptural primacy, justification by faith, and ecclesial reform. Theologically, this was a decisive moment. Missiologically, however, it did not fully escape the Christendom paradigm.

While the Reformers sought doctrinal reform, they maintained the Christendom structure by aligning closely with emerging nation-states. Churches became national institutions, “Magisterial Protestantism,” with religious identity tied to territorial sovereignty. This resulted in confessional states, where citizenship and religious conformity were inextricably linked.

As Noll (2012:183) notes, the Reformation led to fragmentation, not only theologically but politically. Religious wars, such as the Thirty Years’ War, revealed the tragic costs of fusing faith with political identity. Instead of recovering a missionary Church, the Reformation often entrenched national ecclesiologies and territorial power struggles.

The Reformers reclaimed vital theological truths, but they did not envision a post-Christendom Church. They inherited and adapted Christendom, rather than rejecting it. The missional implications were significant: the Church remained a cultural institution rather than a missionary community. Its focus shifted inward toward doctrinal orthodoxy and ecclesial boundaries, at the expense of outward mission and contextual witness.

3.4 Enlightenment, Secularisation, and the Crisis of Mission (1700–2000 AD)

The Enlightenment introduced the “Decline of European Christianity” (Kim, 2012:121) through a new epistemological paradigm that emphasized reason, individual autonomy, and empirical science. This intellectual movement profoundly influenced theology, ecclesiology, and mission. Faith was pushed into the private sphere; theology lost its public voice; and the Church, once a moral authority, became just one voice among many in a more diverse society (Guder, 1985:4; Wells, 1993:60).

Os Guinness (2022) and Kim (2012) describe this as the “great disembedding,” where Christianity’s public relevance diminished under the pressure of modernity. The Enlightenment’s critical rationalism challenged the plausibility of religious belief, while industrialisation and urbanisation fragmented traditional communities. The Church responded by either retreating into institutional maintenance or by accommodating secular ideologies.

Theological education became more professionalised and detached from ecclesial mission (Farley, 1983). Western theology, shaped in relative isolation from global Christianity, became increasingly abstract and systematised, unable to address the cultural or missional crises of modernity (Laing, 2009:22).

This period witnessed what Guder (2009:13) calls “missional reductionism,” where mission became a programme, not a paradigm. The Church’s focus shifted from participation in God’s mission to institutional survival and denominational expansion. The gospel was often moralized or privatized, unable to engage with the structural injustices of industrial capitalism or the cultural pluralism of modern cities.

Yet, paradoxically, the 20th century also marked the rise of global Christianity. While Western Christendom declined, the Church experienced exponential growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Scholars like Bediako (2007) and Walls (2005) identify this shift as the most significant development in Christian history since the Reformation. It marked the end of Western dominance and the emergence of a polycentric, Spirit-led, global Christian movement.

The West, having exported the gospel, now finds itself in need of receiving it anew from the margins, from the South, from voices shaped not by privilege but by suffering and resilience. This is the turning point: the end of Christendom becomes a call to humility, repentance, and renewal through re-participation in God's mission.

4. Crisis and Opportunity: The End of Christendom as a Missiological Kairos

The dissolution of Western Christendom signifies more than just the decline of institutional Christianity; it signals a Kairos moment in missiological history. It challenges the contemporary discourse on Western civilization with its "mother of all crises" (Kirk, 1999b:157). In biblical terms, a Kairos is a divinely appointed time of crisis and decision, a moment when God calls His people to repentance, reorientation, and renewed participation in His redemptive purposes. The collapse of Christendom, though mourned by some as a cultural loss, must be viewed as a providential disruption. This necessary pruning prompts the Church to rediscover its cruciform identity within the unfolding mission of God.

Lesslie Newbigin (1989:222) was among the first to suggest that the post-Christian West must now be viewed as a mission field. The Church, having forfeited its privileged position, must re-enter culture as a witness, not a ruler. This transition, though painful, opens the possibility of a return to the apostolic imagination, one shaped not by power or prestige, but by vulnerability, humility, and contextual engagement. As Bosch (1991:7) asserts, moments of historical crisis often open new theological horizons and demand fresh ecclesial responses.

4.1 Interpreting the Crisis: From Lament to Discernment

A significant part of the current crisis lies in how the Church interprets its loss of influence. When viewed through the lens of secular sociology, the collapse of Christendom appears as decline and irrelevance. From a missiological perspective, it is a necessary dismantling of theological assumptions that once equated God's kingdom with Western cultural ascendancy.

Hall (1997:5) suggests that Western Christians have not yet fully grasped the implications of the demise of Christendom. Many remain tempted to restore former structures of influence, failing to see that these structures were, in part, the cause of the Church's lack of missional effectiveness. The epistemological crisis described by Kirk (1999a: xiii) is not simply academic; it is theological. It

concerns the credibility of Christian witness in a post-Enlightenment culture that is disenchanted, pluralistic, and often suspicious of religious authority.

Instead of resisting this decline, the Church must discern what the Spirit is saying within and through it. As Wright (1999:3) notes, we are not witnessing the death of Christianity but the death of a specific form of Christianity, namely, Christendom. Although this death can be disorienting, it opens space for the resurrection of a new missional imagination.

4.2 Reclaiming Missional Identity: Cruciform and Contextual

The Church's renewal must start with reclaiming its cruciform identity. Theologically, this involves rediscovering what it means to be the Body of Christ. The Church is not called to rule but to serve, not to dominate but to witness, not to preserve power but to embody sacrificial love. Guder (1998:84) argues that the Church's primary vocation is to be an incarnational community, one that lives among the people, listens, learns, and testifies to God's reconciling work in Christ.

This cruciform identity also requires a contextual perspective. Western theology has often universalized its cultural assumptions, treating its expressions of faith as the norm. In the post-Christendom era, theology must reconnect with local contexts, guided by the lived experiences of ordinary people. Laing (2009:22) challenges theological institutions to develop leaders not for preservation but for prophetic witness in diverse societies. This requires discernment within specific contexts, theological humility, and intercultural understanding.

4.3 Listening from the Margins: Learning from the Global Church

The dramatic shift in Christianity's demographic centre from the Global North to the Global South is not a statistical anomaly; it is a theological signpost. It signals that the Spirit is at work outside the former centres of power, raising new voices, new theologies, and new expressions of Church. Bediako (2007) and Sanneh (2003) have demonstrated how African, Asian, and Latin American churches are providing fresh interpretations of the gospel, rooted in communal identity, spiritual vitality, and social engagement.

The Western Church must now adopt the stance of a learner, not a teacher. It must sit at the feet of those it once aimed to civilize and control. It must listen again to the gospel's call for justice, reconciliation, and transformation, not as theoretical ideals, but as urgent mission-driven imperatives expressed through real-world struggles. Tiéno (2006:37) affirms that the rise of non-Western Christianity challenges the Church to reconsider the structures, priorities, and assumptions that have long shaped its theology and mission.

This reversal is what Walls (2011:237) described as the "Great Reverse Migration," the movement of the gospel back into the West, not through imperial strength but in diasporic humility. The end of Christendom is not the end of Christianity; it is

the moment when the Church re-joins the global body of Christ as one member among many, no longer asserting supremacy but embracing mutuality.

4.4 Missional Hope: Reimagining the Future

The decline of Christendom need not provoke despair. Instead, it can foster hope, a hope rooted in the knowledge that God's mission is not dependent on Western institutions or cultural dominance. As Wright (2008) notes, Christian hope is not escapist or nostalgic; it is rooted in the promise of new creation. This eschatological vision empowers the Church to move forward not in fear, but in joyful anticipation of God's redemptive purposes.

The Church's future lies not in regaining cultural control, but in embodying a credible alternative—a community marked by justice, peace, humility, and grace. It will be a Church formed not in cathedrals of power, but in communities of compassion. It will speak not from the centre of empires, but from the margins of society. It will testify not to its greatness, but to the greatness of God, who chooses the weak to shame the strong and the foolish to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27).

In this way, the end of Christendom becomes not a tragedy but a transition. It is an invitation to follow the Spirit's guidance, to rediscover the Church not as an empire but as a pilgrim people (Walls, 2002:217) called to witness, serve, and love in a world still longing for redemption. It is a Kairos in which we must not only mourn the past but also embrace the future, trusting that the Lord of mission is the same as the Lord of history.

5. Rediscovering the Church: Future Pathways for Participation in the Missio Dei

If the end of Christendom marks a providential Kairos, then the urgent task for the Western Church is to return to the Bible and rediscover itself not as a relic of a bygone era but as a renewed participant in God's ongoing mission. This rediscovery must be rooted not in its own cultural nostalgia or institutional survival but in theological humility, intercultural learning, ecclesial reformation, and eschatological hope. The missio Dei does not call the Church to reclaim lost power but to embody a new stance of service, vulnerability, and witness in a pluralistic, post-Christendom world. Three very important things must happen: return to the Bible, return to the local church, and return to mission.

5.1 Theological Humility and Repentance

The first step in reimagining the Church is theological repentance. Western Christianity must confront its complicity in colonialism, nationalism, and systems of injustice that were often sacralised under the guise of mission. Christendom equated gospel proclamation with civilizational superiority, leading to theological arrogance and a distortion of Christian identity.

As Bediako (2000) and Newbigin (1989) remind us, faithful Christian witness begins with humility, recognising that God's mission transcends our cultures, traditions, and institutions. The Church must learn to listen anew: to Scripture, to the cries of the oppressed, to the global Church, and to the Spirit who continues to unsettle our settled assumptions. This posture of humility opens the way for authentic transformation and renewed credibility in public life.

5.2 Mutuality and Intercultural Learning

The demographic shift in global Christianity requires a new ecumenical awareness and the development of a mutual theology of partnership. The West can no longer see itself as the central or default model of Christian practice. As the Global South becomes the main context for Christian vitality, the Western Church must engage in intercultural learning characterized by mutuality, respect, and shared discernment. This aligns with what Jesus Christ prayed for (John 17).

Lamin Sanneh (2003) and Tiéno (2006) emphasise that Christianity is now truly polycentric, with diverse cultures providing unique insights into the gospel's meaning and mission. These voices are not peripheral; they are essential in advancing the faith. Churches in the Majority World have developed rich expressions of spirituality, communal life, and contextual theology that challenge the Western Church's individualism, intellectualism, and institutionalism.

This requires not a token inclusion of non-Western voices, but a radical decentring of Western theological paradigms. The West must enter into dialogue not as a teacher but as a learner, receiving the gospel again through the lived witness of communities that have followed Christ under persecution, poverty, and pluralism. As Andrew Walls (2005:53) observes, the gospel always finds fresh vitality when it crosses boundaries and takes root in new soil.

5.3 Ecclesial Reformation and Missional Practices

The institutional Western Church must undergo a profound structural and spiritual reformation. Christendom established ecclesial models designed to maintain and control parishes, denominations, universities, and clerical hierarchies, to preserve the faith in homogeneous societies. These predominantly mission-less ecclesiologies do not fit the post-Christendom context. New ecclesial forms are needed: small, contextual, and incarnational communities of witness. Stuart Murray (2004) advocates for a "diaspora ecclesiology," in which churches understand themselves as scattered, vulnerable, and engaged, rather than central and powerful. This involves transitioning from attractional models of the Church (which assume cultural favour) to missional models grounded in presence, service, and local relevance.

Michael Gorman (2001) proposes that the Church must adopt a "cruciform ecclesiology," a way of being Church that reflects the self-giving love of Christ. This involves prioritising hospitality over hierarchy, discipleship over dogma, and justice over institutional survival. Ecclesial reform is not primarily about programs

or strategies, but about identity and a sense of belonging. It is the rediscovery of what it means to be the people of God in a world of contention.

5.4 Theological Education for Mission

Reimagining the Church also requires reforming theological education. As Farley (1983) and Laing (2009) have argued, the fragmentation and professionalisation of theological formation in the West have disconnected academic theology from the Church's missional calling. Seminaries often produce religious professionals rather than spiritual leaders, focusing on internal debates rather than cultural engagement.

A new model of theological education must emerge, one that is formational, contextual, and missional. This means training leaders who can discern God's activity in their neighbourhoods, engage with cultural complexity, and collaborate across boundaries of race, class, and tradition. It means rooting theological reflection in the life of local communities, not merely in textbooks or academic debates.

Missional theological education must equip leaders not only to teach doctrine but to foster imagination, courage, and prophetic vision. It must break down the divide between laity and clergy, academy and congregation, orthodoxy and praxis. In a pluralistic and fractured world, theological institutions need to become laboratories of faithful experimentation, where the Church learns to live as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom.

5.5 Eschatological Hope and Witness

Ultimately, reimagining the Church requires a revival of eschatological hope. The decline of Western Christianity should not be approached with anxiety or nostalgia, but with confidence in God's faithfulness. The Church's role is not to preserve the past but to envision the future to live as a community of resurrection amid a world of despair.

As N.T. Wright (2008) argues that Christian hope is not escapism, but rather participation in God's mission of new creation. This hope empowers the Church to labour with joy and integrity, knowing that the outcome of history does not rest in human hands. The end of Christendom is not the end of the Church; it is a transition into a new chapter of God's story.

In this light, the Church must become a community of eschatological imagination enacting signs of the kingdom through acts of justice, reconciliation, healing, and witness. It must confront the idols of our age not with fear but with courage, offering an alternative vision of human flourishing grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In doing so, it reclaims its vocation to be salt and light, leaven and lampstand, not by ruling over society, but by serving it in love.

6. Conclusion

The historical decline of Western Christianity into Christendom reflects a complex interplay of theological compromise, cultural entanglement, and institutional self-preservation. While often celebrated in its time as the maturation of the Church, Christendom now appears as a missional distortion, a season in which the Church sacrificed its cruciform identity for political privilege and cultural dominance. The loss of Christendom's power and prestige, though mourned in some ecclesial circles, should be viewed as a providential disruption—a divine moment of grace that opens new opportunities for theological renewal and missionary faithfulness.

Through the lens of the *missio Dei*, this article aims to reframe the history of Western Christianity not merely as a decline but as a divine *Kairos*. It highlights a critical moment when the Spirit urges the Church to restore its true vocation. This involves shedding illusions of control, admitting complicity in systems of oppression, and rediscovering the Church's identity as a sent people: humble, contextual, and hopeful.

The challenges of secularisation, pluralism, and postmodern fragmentation cannot be addressed by returning to the power structures of the past. Instead, they call for a new imagination—one shaped by the gospel and empowered by the Spirit. The Church must move from centre to margin, from dominance to discipleship, from maintenance to mission. It must embrace forms of life and leadership that are incarnational, intercultural, and eschatologically grounded.

This is not merely a tactical shift. It is a theological repentance and reorientation. The Church must learn again how to listen to the cries of the oppressed, to the voices of the Global South, to the wisdom of marginalised communities, and above all, to the Spirit of Christ who continually calls His people into the world He loves.

As Christendom gives way to global Christianity, the Western Church stands at a crossroads. It can either cling to a fading legacy or step forward into a future marked by mutuality, creativity, and faithful witness. The choice before us is not whether Christianity will survive. God's mission will continue and will be completed (Mat 24:14). The question is whether we will participate in it with joy, courage, and humility.

The death of Christendom is not the death of the Church. It is the death of an illusion. And in its place, by God's grace, a new vision emerges: the Church reformed by the cross, empowered by the Spirit, and committed to the mission of God in every time, place, and culture.

References

- Bediako, K. 2000. 'Africa and Christianity on the threshold of the third millennium: the religious dimension', *African Affairs*, 99(395), pp. 303–323. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/99.395.303>
- Bediako, K. 2007. 'The emergence of world Christianity and the remaking of theology', *Conferences and Lectures*, 613, pp. 1–16. Available at: https://digitalcommons.calvin.edu/hh_av_conferences/613
- Bevans, S.B. and Schroeder, R.P. 2004. *Constants in context: A theology of mission for today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969101900203>
- Cairns, E.E. 1996. *Christianity through the centuries: A history of the church*. 3rd edn. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Clayton, P. 1999. 'Missiology between monologue and cacophony', in Kirk, J.A. and Vanhoozer, K.J. (eds) *To stake a claim: Mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp. 78–95.
- Farley, E. 1983. *Theologia: The fragmentation and unity of theological education*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Gorman, M.J. 2001. *Cruciformity: Paul's narrative spirituality of the cross*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Guder, D.L. 1998. *Missional church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Guder, D.L. 2009. 'Missio Dei: Integrating theological formation for apostolic vocation', *Missiology: An International Review*, 37(1), pp. 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960903700108>
- Guinness, O.S. 2022. *The great quest: Invitation to an examined life and a sure path to meaning*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Hall, D.J. 1997. *The end of Christendom and the future of Christianity*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.
- Kim, E. 2012. *The rise of the global South: The decline of Western Christendom and the rise of majority world Christianity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Kirk, J.A. and Vanhoozer, K.J. (eds) 1999a. *To stake a claim: Mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Kirk, J.A. 1999b. 'Christian mission and the epistemological crisis of the West', in Kirk, J.A. and Vanhoozer, K.J. (eds) *To stake a claim: Mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, pp. 157–171.
- Laing, M. 2009. 'Recovering missional ecclesiology in theological education', *International Review of Mission*, 98(1), pp. 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2009.00002.x>
- Murray, S. 2004. *Post-Christendom: Church and mission in a strange new world*. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Newbigin, L. 1989. *The gospel in a pluralist society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Noll, M.A. 2012. *Turning points: Decisive moments in the history of Christianity*. 3rd edn. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- Sanneh, L. 2003. *Whose religion is Christianity? The gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Tiénou, T. 2006. 'Christian theology in an era of world Christianity', in Ott, C. and Netland, H.A. (eds) *Globalizing theology: Belief and practice in an era of world Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, pp. 37–51.
- Walls, A.F. 2000. *The missionary movement in Christian history: Studies in the transmission of faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Walls, A.F. 2002. 'Christian scholarship in Africa in the twenty-first century', *Transformation*, 19(4), pp. 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880201900401>
- Walls, A.F. 2005. *The cross-cultural process in Christian history: Studies in the transmission and appropriation of faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Walls, A.F. 2011. 'World Christianity: Theological education and scholarship', *Transformation*, 28(4), pp. 235–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378811417514>
- Wells, D.F. 1993. *No place for truth: Or whatever happened to evangelical theology?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Wright, N.T. 1999. *The challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering who Jesus was and is*. London: SPCK.
- Wright, N.T. 2008. *Surprised by hope: Rethinking heaven, the resurrection, and the mission of the church*. New York: HarperOne.