

Emigration of South Africans to the West: Sociological and missiological implications

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Dates:

Received: 24 Aug. 2024

Accepted: 04 Dec. 2024

Published: 17 Jan. 2025

How to cite this article:

Magezi, C., 2025, 'Emigration of South Africans to the West: Sociological and missiological implications', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46(1), a3287. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i1.3287>

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A huge number of South Africans, including Christians, are emigrating to the Western world, which is experiencing a serious regression in Christianity. Unfortunately, the contribution made by South African Christian emigrants has not been sufficiently examined; hence there is no literature on this particular topic. Given this, the objective of this article was to provide a comprehensive discussion of the contemporary emigration situation in South Africa and assess how South African emigrants can evangelise the post-Christendom West, which is, fortunately, still Christian and Christian tolerant. The article dialogued with relevant literature to accomplish the proposed objective and provide an overview of the push and pull factors of why South Africans emigrate to the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America, New Zealand and many other countries, all of which used to send missionaries abroad, but they are now experiencing exponential growth in atheism. Further, the article discussed the unprecedented growth of Christianity in Africa, particularly South Africa, in contrast to the opposite trends in the Western world, thus, establishing how South African Christian emigrants can contribute towards evangelising the post-Christendom West, according to the biblical notion that God advances his kingdom through migration in *centripetal* and *centrifugal* ways. Thus, although the emigration of South African Christians to the West is associated with pain and sorrow, it is not an accident, but God uses it in his scheme to accomplish his redemptive purposes and plans for the world. In this case, emigration in South Africa is viewed as a missiological opportunity.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The focus of the article is interdisciplinary, that is, it discusses the emigration phenomenon in South Africa (migration) and its contribution to the advancement of God's Kingdom to the West (missiology). The article challenges South African Christian emigrants to the Western world to perceive their migration as an evangelical and missiological opportunity.

Keywords: emigration context in South Africa; migration conceptual framework; South African emigrants or immigrants in the West; missiological opportunity; evangelism; migration theology; centripetal and centrifugal concepts of mission.

Introduction and study background: A terrain sketch and problem identification

There are numerous complex push and pull factors that are compelling many South African Christians to emigrate to post-Christendom Western countries (BusinessTech 2023:n.p.; cf. Coetzee 2023:n.p.), which used to send missionaries to Africa and other continents in the early epoch of their Christianisation (Brown 2001; Darko 2018; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Jenkins 2002:2; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Walls n.d.:100; Yeh 2018). Ironically, the 21st century ushered in a new mission paradigm (reverse mission), in which the West now receives missionaries from predominantly Christian African countries (Brown 2001; Darko 2018; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Jenkins 2002:2; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Walls n.d.:100; Yeh 2018). However, there is a dearth of theological studies that deal with the contemporary emigration of South African Christians to the West, which has, without doubt, been plagued by a decline in Christianity. Thus, there is a need for scholarly works that challenge South African Christians to view their emigration to the West as a missiological opportunity.

The term 'missiological opportunity' refers to the understanding that emigrant South African Christians have a calling to guide people into eternal fellowship with God. Such fellowship is premised on believing in Christ's redemptive acts (Arthur 2009:2; Torrance 1992:64, 2008:44). Notably, Bosch (1991:401; cf. Wright 2006:23) understands that the Church is called to participate in God's own mission and, thus, argues that the *Missio Dei* is 'God's activity which embraces both

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the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate'. Likewise, Parry (2005) avows that:

... [M]ission is first and foremost God's own mission. God sends himself before he sends his church. There is a centrifugal force in God's very being as the Son and the Spirit spiral out from the Father to bring healing to the world. Mission is first of all God sending his Son in the power of the Spirit to reconcile the world to himself and the mission of the church is nothing less than the gift of sharing by the Spirit in the Son's mission to the world on behalf of the Father. (p. 58)

In the context of this article, missional work and evangelism are viewed as closely related concepts in Christian outreach although they have distinct focusses and approaches. Missional work encompasses a broad range of activities that are aimed at embodying the gospel in various aspects of life, including social justice, community development, education and health care. It seeks to meet the holistic needs of individuals and communities. Evangelism primarily emphasises the verbal proclamation of the gospel message by inviting individuals to accept Jesus Christ as their saviour. However, if this distinction is not handled carefully, it can easily build a false dichotomy between missional work and evangelism, because the latter also falls under the mission of the church. This is portrayed in Bosch's (1991:81) understanding of the mission of God, which the Church is called to participate in. This mission is comprehensive in nature as it focusses on both salvation and sensitivity to the needs of others. To use Bosch's (1991) own words:

Mission is not narrowed down to an activity of making individuals new creatures, of providing them with 'blessed assurance' so that come what may they will be 'eternally saved.' Mission involves from the beginning and as a matter of course, making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognize injustice, suffering, oppression and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside. (p. 81)

The comprehensive nature of the Church's and Christians' mission to the world was inaugurated at the incarnational mystery of God, *in* and *through* Jesus Christ (Groody 2009:653). In both words and deeds, the God-man, Jesus Christ, demonstrated the comprehensive nature and character of God's mission, which the Church is called to participate in (Groody 2009:653). Thus, in this article, the mission or missiological opportunity for South African Christian emigrants to the West should be viewed as either integral or holistic. This is attested by Bosch (1991:512), who indicates that Christians are divided on which of the two is the proper way of doing mission. Regardless of the existence of such divergent perceptions, this article contends that mission work, such as caring for the needs of others, is the outcome of evangelism. In this way, evangelism is the way in which God brings people to salvation, while mission work is the manifestation of faith in Christ, by which Christians render service and minister Christ to others (cf. 1 Jn 3:16–18, Gl 5:6, Ja 2:18). In my view, Chester (2004) encapsulates the aforesaid position in his discussion on the integral or holistic mission of the Church by arguing that:

Social activity is the consequence of evangelism, social activity can be a bridge to evangelism, and social activity is the partner of evangelism. Social action, then, can precede, accompany or follow evangelism. (pp. 61–62)

In view of the foregoing discussion, this article advances that South African Christian emigrants to the West are expected to exhibit the integral/holistic mission when they participate in the *reverse mission*. This term signifies the bid of African Christians to 'bring Christianity back to the Western world; that is to people who introduced it to Africa in the first place' (Jemirade 2017:263). Bosch (1991) and Chester (2004) also allude to the missional position that is adopted in this article.

Given the call that Christians have to participate in God's mission, it follows that when South African Christians emigrate to the Western world, they should participate in missiological or evangelical opportunities. This notion is interlinked with the manner in which God has used migration to accomplish his redemptive purpose and plan for the world throughout the ages. That is, migration has always played a central role in the advancement of God's mission, both in the recorded scripture and history of Christianity across the globe (Magezi 2018:27–146, 2019:1–8; Maticio 2008:31–42).¹ Maticio (2008:31–42; Goheen 2011; cf. Mitchell 2008) notes that the advancement of God's kingdom through migration, in both the Old and New Testaments, is *centripetal* and *centrifugal*. In the former way, sinners encounter salvation when they migrate to places where they come into contact with the saved, while in the latter concept, God's people go to places where people need salvation. Thus, from a redemptive perspective, God uses South African Christian emigrants to accomplish his redemptive purposes and plans for the world (Magezi 2018:119).

To accomplish the objective of this article, the 'Conceptualising emigration from South Africa' section provides a contextual definition of emigration, its conceptual framework, causes and extent. The section also identifies the major destination countries for South African emigrants and provides an overview of the current state of Christianity in Africa and the West. The aim of doing so is to challenge South African Christian emigrants to the West to perceive themselves as missionaries. The article concludes by discussing the challenges of determining the contributions that South African emigrants are making to missions in the West because no specific empirical studies have been conducted in that regard.

Conceptualising emigration from South Africa

Delineating emigration and conceptualising emigration in South Africa

Emigration is the process of leaving one's country of origin to reside in another (cf. Cambridge Dictionary n.d.n.p., Coetzee 2023:n.p.; Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.n.p.). Kenton

1. For a detailed understanding on this subject, read Magezi's (2018:27–146) PhD thesis titled 'Theological understandings of migration and church ministry model: A quest for holistic ministry to migrants in South Africa' completed at North-West University, Potchefstroom. The thesis looks at cases and narratives of migration in both the Old and New Testaments.

(2023:n.p.) defines the same term as 'the relocation or process of people leaving one country to reside in another'. At this juncture, the difference between emigration and immigration should be clarified, because they can be conflated owing to their similarities in spelling and pronunciation (BYJUS n.d.:n.p.). Immigration refers to the change of residence to a new country, where one is not a native or citizen, while emigration means departing from one's country of citizenship to reside in another. However, Atoyan et al. (2016) categorise emigration as either temporary or permanent. The former refers to relocation for a certain period, after which one returns to his/her country of origin, whereas the latter denotes permanent relocation to another country for various reasons (Atoyan et al. 2016).

There are many conceptual frameworks of migration, such as the Neoclassical Theory, Dual Labour Market Theory and Network Concepts Theory that attempt to bring better comprehension of the intricate global context of migration in many different ways (De Haas 2014:6; cf. Kurekova 2011:3). With this in mind, the subsequent section briefly discussed the merits and limitations of the aforesaid migration frameworks, with particular reference to the context of emigration in contemporary South Africa. The section concluded by advancing an eclectic approach to understanding emigration in South Africa. De Haas (2014:30) notes, 'instead of being mutually exclusive', an eclectic approach undergirds those different conceptual frameworks on migration 'may apply to particular manifestations of migration occurring under specific conditions, with particular social categories and/or to particular levels of analysis'.

In quest of a migration conceptual framework for understanding the contemporary context of emigration in South Africa

Neoclassical theory

According to this migration framework, people are pushed to migrate because of the wage and income differences between countries (Kurekova 2011:2, 5–7). People from countries that offer low wages are motivated to relocate to those that offer better remuneration (Kurekova 2011:2, 5–7). However, the conceptualisation of higher income as a pull factor does not account for the inverse phenomenon, whereby some people migrate from higher to lower-income countries (cf. De Haas 2008; Kurekova 2011; Massey et al. 1998). Thus, international migration is not only characterised by people moving from poorer to wealthier countries (De Haas 2014:2).

Further, Olejarova (2007:13) argues that the main weakness of the *neoclassical* theory is its assumption that international migration would not occur without 'wage differentials between countries, and that labour markets are thus the primary mechanisms by which international flows of labour are induced'. That is to say, the theory does not regard other autonomous sources of the contemporary context of international migration, such as violation of human rights, natural disasters, political and crises, religious persecution and wars. Ultimately, Olejarova (2007:13) and Massey et al.

(1993:434) note that the *neoclassical* framework seems to suggest that international migration movements can be controlled by regulating and influencing the labour markets in both migrant hosting and sending nations.

Dual labour market theory

Kurekova (2011:9) and Olejarova (2007:14–15) state that the *dual labour market* framework of migration accounts for two types of economies, namely: the *capital-intensive economy*, which utilises both skilled and unskilled labour; and the *labour-intensive economy*, which depends on unskilled labour. This framework advances that migration is instigated by the labour demand, instead of labour supply. That is, nations with progressive economies entice low-skilled people to take lowly classified jobs, which are usually shunned by the native people (Kurekova 2011:9; Olejarova 2007:15). Consequently, developed countries tend to institute restrictive recruitment policies to control the influx of immigrants from developing countries (Kurekova 2011:9; Olejarova 2007:15). Kurekova (2011:9) aptly points out that this migration framework is flawed because it focusses more on the formal recruitment procedures in host nations at the expense of the autonomous causes of international migration in the nations of origin.

Further, De Haas (2014:6) notes that the proposed framework of migration is weak because it solely focusses on the positive factors that entice immigrants to relocate to host countries. Consequently, scholars and institutions are likely to have a biased understanding of the 'causes, consequences and experiences' of international migration (De Haas 2014:6). That is to say, the *dual labour market* framework pays scant attention, if any, to the push factors in countries of origin. Such factors include high unemployment rates, which invariably push working-age groups to seek work beyond their nations' borders. This means that although the *dual labour* framework of migration aids one in recognising the movement of skilled and unskilled labour to developed economies, it is limited because it dichotomises the intricate nature of the contemporary situation of emigration in South Africa.

The network concepts (transnationalism framework)

The *network concepts* framework is a sociological approach to migration, which focusses more on factors that perpetuate migration in time and space, based on the availability of social networks within a shared community (Kurekova 2011:10; Olejarova 2007:17; Vertovic 2009). In Kurekova's (2011:10) view, this framework suggests that 'the existence of a diaspora or network' influences people to choose their potential countries of destinations when migration factors such as wage differences and recruitment policies have ended. The *network concepts* theory is interrelated to the migration systems framework, which suggests that migration changes the relationship between social networks and other symbolic ties such as 'social, cultural, economic, and institutional conditions at both the sending and receiving ends and that it forms an entire developmental space within which migration processes operate' (Kurekova 2011:10; cf. Olejarova 2007:16). Some scholars also refer to the network

theory as transnational migration. Vertovic (2009) refers to the framework as transnationalism because it conceptualises the existence of transnational social spaces.

The network concepts framework concentrates on the prevailing relationships among the migrants in hosting nations, as well as non-migrants in nations of origin (Kurekova 2011:10). These existing ties are usually known as *cumulative causation* of international migration (Kurekova 2011:10). In Massey et al.'s (1993:448, cf. Olejarova 2007:17) view, international migration is a response to former existing links between the migrant sending and receiving nations. Such links include family, kinship, friendship and 'shared community of origin' (Massey et al.'s 1993:448; cf. Olejarova 2007:17). Colonial links and trade or investment flows are some of the ties that constitute the network concepts framework (Kurekova 2011:10). Massey et al. (1993:448) plausibly opine that, although the network concept framework and the numerous aspects that evolve from it are important in comprehending international migration, one can argue that it offers an incomplete grasp of the autonomous causes of contemporary emigration in South Africa. Some of these causes include human rights violations, political violence, economic stagnation and religious intolerance.

Preliminary conclusion on migration frameworks

In summary, the discussion of the various frameworks of understanding migration, particularly the emigration context in South Africa, are limited in many different ways, as indicated in the above discussion (De Haas 2014:5). In discussing contemporary emigration in South Africa, the subsequent section adopted an eclectic approach, which can be summarised as push and pull factors (Cohn 2009:70–97; cf. Kyaing 2014:1–14). These factors are considered as 'forces that either induce people to move to a new location or oblige them to leave old residences'² (INFLIBNET Centre n.d.:n.p.). This approach makes it easier to comprehend the complex and diverse context of emigration in South Africa because it utilises various frameworks of migration. Various scholars (Kurekova 2011, 2000; Massey et al. 1993; Portes 1999) maintain that an eclectic approach is an important conceptual framework for explaining migration because it offers various aspects of migration that cannot be contemplated separately from the various frameworks of migration, including those that were discussed above. That is to say, 'migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained by a single theory' (Arango 2000:283).

An eclectic approach of push and pull factors will be presented to provide an overview of the causes and extent of emigration from South Africa. It also identified the major destination countries for South African emigrants. Although there are various push and pull factors of emigration in South

2. Push factors include poor economic conditions, low productivity, lack of opportunities for growth, rapid population growth that surpasses available resources, unemployment, political instability, cultural conflicts, religious persecution, underdevelopment, exhaustion of natural resources and natural calamities (cf. INFLIBNET Centre n.d.:n.p.). Pull factors of migration include job opportunities, better employment, higher wages, better facilities, better working conditions, business opportunities and amenities that attract emigrants to the receiving nations (cf. INFLIBNET Centre n.d.:n.p.).

Africa, this article only discussed the following: unemployment and its interrelated aspects, high crime rate and political and economic instability.

The causes and extent of South African emigration and major destination countries

The extent of emigration from South Africa

Coetzee (2023:n.p.) reports that, according to South African government statistics, between 2001 and 2021, the number of people who relocated overseas had grown at an unprecedented magnitude, from about 1.5 million to over 2 million. Statista (2023d) reports that in 2020, the number of South African emigrants increased to around 915 000. Statista (2023b:n.p.) approximates the number of workers who left South Africa in 2022 at 625 560, while about 14% of the working population were considering emigrating.

BusinessTech (2023) notes the challenge of nailing down the exact number of taxpayers that are emigrating from South Africa, because of lack of tracing by official organisations; however, recent data from South African Revenue Service (SARS), indicate that for the past 5 years, more than 40 500 taxpayers ended their tax residence in South Africa. BusinessTech (2023) further notes that in a parliamentary question and answer session of May 2023, the South African finance minister indicated that the ministry had lost R1.35 billion in potential taxable income from about 2700 and 1100 taxpayers, respectively, who earned more than R500 000, and R1 million annually (Statista 2023:n.p.). BusinessTech (2023) further acknowledges Henley and Partners' latest Wealth Migration Report of 2023, which shows that in 2022, 400 high net-worth individuals emigrated from South Africa, and this was intensified by the fact that 500 more were expected to leave in 2023 (BusinessTech 2023). To worsen the situation, the number of millionaires in South Africa dropped at an alarming rate between 2021 and 2022 (BusinessTech 2023). BusinessTech (2023) explains this regression thus:

The latest African Wealth Report for 2023 shows that South Africa was home to 37,800 US dollar millionaires at the end of 2022, down from 39,300 recorded at the end of 2021 – a loss of 1,500 HNWIs. (n.p.)

It is important to note that this big drop is mainly caused by the country's prevailing economic conditions, corruption, poor governance, lack of suitable financial policies and many other factors (BusinessTech 2023). However, the report also attributes the regression to emigration (BusinessTech 2023).

The causes of emigration and countries of destination for South African emigrants

Unemployment and its interrelated factors: Interaction between push and pull factors of unemployment and employment

Kenton (2023:n.p.), Statista (2023d:n.p.), BusinessTech (2023) and Joubert and Fourie (2002:55) advance that unemployment is a major emigration factor for South Africans. This is validated by Statista's (2023e) empirical research, in which 64% of the respondents in 2022 indicated that unemployment

was the most prevalent worry among South Africans. In September 2023, Statista (2023f) conducted similar empirical research, which similarly found that:

As of September 2023, a share of 64 percent of respondents in a monthly survey conducted in South Africa stated that they are worried about unemployment and jobs. (n.p.)

In line with the aforementioned empirical findings, Coetzee (2023) observes that:

One of the main reasons for emigration among South Africans is the search for better economic opportunities. The South African economy has struggled with high unemployment and low growth in recent years. (n.p.)

In order to understand the context depicted above, it is imperative to use statistical data from sources such as Statista (2023a, 2023e, 2023f, 2024), South African Government (2023) and Trading Economics (2023). For instance, Trading Economics (2023) shows that the unemployment rate in South Africa rose from 31.9% in 2022 to 32.1% at the end of 2023. In absolute figures, the number of unemployed people increased by 46 000 between 2022 and 2023, thus, bringing it to 7.9 million by the end of 2023. In spite of the slight reduction in the unemployment rate that was reported by the South African Government (2023), it remains high. To make matters worse, Statista (2024) predicts that the 2024 unemployment rate will be higher than that of the previous year and it will look as follows as shown in Table 1.

Here, it is important to note that blacks constitute the majority of the emigrants, as they are affected the most by unemployment (Statista 2023a). Overall, the demographic group that is most affected by unemployment is the youth, who constitute the majority of the emigrant population (Joubert & Fourie 2002:55; cf. Statista 2023a, 2023e, 2023f:n.p.; Trading Economics 2023). Statista (2023e) reported that, in the first quarter of 2022, the rate of youth unemployment 'was significantly higher' among the age groups 15–24 and 25–34 years, where it reached '63.9 percent and 42.1 percent, respectively'. Trading Economics (2023) describes the increase in the 2023 youth unemployment rate in South Africa as follows:

The youth unemployment rate in South Africa, measuring jobseekers between 15 and 24 years old, picked up to 59.4% in Q4, from an over one-year low of 58% in the third quarter. (n.p.)

The high national and youth unemployment rates can be attributed to many reasons, chiefly the load shedding crisis, which has forced many companies to cut down on production and, consequently, retrench staff (cf. BusinessTech 2023:n.p.).

TABLE 1: Prediction of the unemployment rate for 2024.

| Factors | 2024 forecast |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Unemployment rate | 32.79% |
| Number of unemployed people | 8.24 million |
| Employment rate | 57.04% |
| Total labour force | 25.13 million |
| Labour productivity | \$11.74 |

Source: Statista, 2024, *Socioeconomic Indicators South Africa report*, viewed 21 February 2024, from <https://www.statista.com/study/174049/socioeconomic-indicators-south-africa-report/#:~:text=The%20gini%20coefficient%20in%20South%20Africa%20is%20forecast,South%20Africa%20is%20forecasted%20to%2057.04%25%20in%202024.>

Some companies resort to using fuel-powered generators, but this increases production costs and, ultimately, staff retrenchment (BusinessTech 2023:n.p.). Without doubt, load shedding culminates in a serious economic crisis and despondence among the labour force given that most companies are forced to stop hiring, as they strive to minimise production costs. Thus, the government's best efforts to create employment in 2023 failed to reduce the unemployment rate, particularly among the youth. In the following statement, Mbandlwa (2023) bemoans that the South African government does not have a proper job creation model, because it focusses more on public service delivery:

The government of South Africa does not have an economic development model that seeks to address poverty. Economic policies are not specifically developed to create employment opportunities, but the main focus is on public service delivery. Job creation is not the primary objective of economic policies. (p. 1)

From 1997 to 1999, Britain was a major destination for many young South Africans under the age of 27 (Joubert & Fourie 2002:55). In 1997, Britain offered 8500 work visas to this age group (Joubert & Fourie 2002:55). In 1998 and 1999, 14000 and 23000 of such visas, respectively, were issued (Joubert & Fourie 2002:55). Apart from Britain, the other major destinations for South African emigrants were Australia, United States of America (USA) and New Zealand (Joubert & Fourie 2002:55; Statista 2023b, 2023d:n.p.; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2017:215). Hitherto, the trends have not changed and the United Kingdom (UK) is increasingly hosting the most migrant stock from South Africa 'with almost a quarter of a million residents listing Republic of South Africa (RSA) as their birth country' (BusinessTech 2023:n.p.). Statista (2023d) supports the foregoing observations by asserting that:

In 2020, cumulative South African emigrants amounted to roughly 915,000. The vast majority settled in the United Kingdom (around 247,000), followed by Australia (nearly 200,000). Together, the two countries constituted roughly 49 percent of the total South African migrants living abroad. Moreover, the third major country of destination for South Africans was the United States, with about 117,000 people living there. Overall, the 21 countries presented covered 94.4 percent of all South African migrants. (n.p.)

Although the pursuit of employment opportunities in the abovementioned destinations and many others is the major pull factor for South African emigrants, it should be noted that there are many other reasons. Firstly, countries such as the UK have made 'specific changes to their immigration systems over the past years to attract skilled labour and talent to apply their trades in a foreign jurisdiction' (BusinessTech 2023:n.p.). Secondly, South African emigrants have always preferred the aforementioned destination countries, particularly the UK, because of language and cultural similarities and the availability of affordable flights. In addition, South African emigrants find the UK attractive because it is the hub of economic activity in Europe, and it hosts a large South African community (cf. BusinessTech 2023:n.p.; Statista 2023a:n.p.). Language similarity is one of

the primary determinants of the choice of destination because it facilitates ease of communication and integration within the new hosting societies. Consequently, South Africans are less likely to emigrate to countries where they would encounter language barriers (Statista 2023a).

It is not only the unemployed who are bearing the brunt of low economic growth; many South African professionals, such as engineers, nurses and doctors, are also seeking better livelihoods overseas (Coetzee 2023:n.p.; cf. Statista 2023d:n.p.). In concurrence, BusinessTech (2023) notes that:

South Africa is experiencing serious poor economic growth that have caused many South Africans to consider going abroad. This poor economic growth has been recently linked a lot to worst load shedding in South Africa record. (n.p.)

An empirical study conducted in 2022 by Statista (2023b:n.p.) revealed that over 4% of employed participants indicated that they were likely to emigrate from South Africa in the short term. In light of the exact number of employed South Africans, it can be deduced that about 625560 workers emigrated that year (Statista 2023d:n.p.).

It should be highlighted that South African based African immigrants are also emigrating to developed countries in droves, because of the prevailing inhospitable conditions in the country, where they are often accused of stealing jobs from locals and diluting the nation's culture (Joubert & Fourie 2002:56). Owing to the aforementioned reasons, South Africans are increasingly subjecting immigrants to xenophobic violence and attitudes, thus, compelling them to relocate to more tolerant countries, thereby reducing pressure on the strained South African labour market (Joubert & Fourie 2002:56).

The nexus between South Africa's high crime rate and emigration

Joubert and Fourie (2002:57) note that the high rate of crime in South Africa is one of the major causes of emigration. It is also worrisome that many South Africans view the South African Police Service as incapable of winning the battle against the ever-increasing crime rate. Even the booming private security industry has failed to effectively contain the scourge (Associated Press 2023:n.p.). In concurrence with the foregoing arguments, Coetzee (2023) advances that:

Another major reason for emigration is the high crime rate in South Africa. The country has one of the highest crime rates in the world, and many South Africans have left the country in search of safer living conditions. (n.p.)

Associated Press (2023:n.p.) vividly notes that, over the past decade, incidences of violent crimes in South Africa have reached unprecedented levels, with 27494 murders being reported between January 2023 and February 2023. This figure is much higher than the 2012–2013 tally, which stood at 16213. The report further states that:

South Africa's homicide rate in 2022–2023 was 45 per 100,000 people, compared with a rate of 6.3 in the United States and around 1 in most European countries. (Associated Press 2023:n.p.)

Crime statistics for October to December 2019 to 2023, as reported by the South African Police Service, (2023:n.p.) attests to the high crime rate in South Africa. As depicted in Table 2, the number of murder cases during the peak period (October to December) increased invariably from year to year (South African Police Service 2023:n.p.).

The above-depicted trend could also be witnessed in other crime categories, such as sexual offences, attempted murder, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm, common assault, common robbery and robbery with aggravating circumstances (South African Police Service 2023:n.p.). Although there were some decreases in some years, the trends would pick up in the following year (South African Police Service 2023:n.p.). Joubert and Fourie (2002:57) indicate that, among many other things, the victims of these crimes experience traumas, which have a 'major influence on psychic costs', so they end up migrating to countries that offer affordable therapy, better security, low crime rates and, above all, peace of mind.

Impact of political and economic instability on South African citizens

Coetzee (2023:n.p.) and BusinessTech (2023:n.p.) concur that the prevailing unfavourable diplomatic and political situation in South Africa, which is blighted by high levels of corruption in the government and the pervasive economic challenges leads to public discontentment and, ultimately, increase emigration and intention to emigrate. Parsons and Krugell (2021) attribute the economic tension in South Africa to poor government policies, which make people lose confidence in the government's ability to turn the economy around. In addition, 'policy uncertainty began to emerge in various economic analyses of the South African situation in the late 2000s, as the country's economic performance began to deteriorate' (Parsons & Krugell 2021:1). There are too many policy uncertainties in terms of job creation, retirement and many other areas, thus, people lose confidence in the government (Dhlembeu et al. 2022:1–25; cf. Mbandlwa 2023).

For instance, Dhlembeu et al. (2022:1) note that very few South Africans are reaching the average retirement age of 65 years with sufficient funds to sustain themselves during their retirement. This sentiment is shared by many other authors, such as Visser (2021:1), Lamprecht Research (2015:1), Niu et al. (2020: 1), Reyers, Van Schalkwyk and Gouws (2015:23) and FNB (2023:n.p.). For example, FNB (2023:n.p.) reports that 'South Africa faces a significant retirement savings problem, with statistics indicating that less than 10% of

TABLE 2: The number of murder cases during October–December from 2019 to 2023.

| Months | Year | Murder cases |
|--------------------|------|--------------|
| October – December | 2019 | 5908 |
| October – December | 2020 | 6297 |
| October – December | 2021 | 6859 |
| October – December | 2022 | 7555 |
| October – December | 2023 | 7710 |

Source: South African Police Service, 2023, *Crime statistics: Integrity*, viewed 20 March 2024, from <https://www.saps.gov.za/services/crimestats.php>.

individuals can retire comfortably'. Similarly, an empirical study by Visser (2021) found that:

... [T]he number of people in SA who are confident that their retirement savings will cover expenses during retirement has decreased from 20% to 14% as a result of the pandemic. (p. 1)

Dhlembeu et al. (2022), OECD (2020), Veri Group (2023) and many others acknowledge that South Africa is in a dire predicament, because of a lack of financial literacy among the citizens, high inflation, corruption in government departments, economic instability, the rising cost of living, inadequate pensions schemes, personal financial obligations and the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. However, it should be noted that the changes in retirement policies have seen potential pensioners prolonging their career lifespans beyond retirement age (Veri Group 2023:n.p.). The new retirement policy closes opportunities for unemployed young people who would be looking forward to joining the labour force (Veri Group 2023:n.p.). At this juncture, it should be categorically stated that even the seniors who work beyond the stipulated retirement age also emigrate abroad, particularly to Western countries, such as Spain, which have stable economies (Codonye 2017:n.p.).

Political instability is undoubtedly a major cause of emigration from South Africa (BusinessTech 2023:n.p.). ACLED (2023:n.p. cf. Keane 2023) postulates that the current political environment is marred by inter and intra-political party power struggles, which stem from competition for influential provincial and national positions (ACLED 2023:n.p.; cf. Keane 2023). Indeed, many local officials lost their lives, as they tussled for top positions within their political parties (ACLED 2023:n.p.; cf. Keane 2023). In other words, as politicians fight to secure local, provincial and national government positions, it is apparent that they become both victims and perpetrators of violence and political turmoil (ACLED 2023:n.p.; cf. Keane 2023). For example, Piet Moletsane, a candidate councillor in Meloding, was assassinated in September 2021, while Siyabonga Mkhize of Durban faced the same fate (ACLED 2023:n.p.; cf. Keane 2023). Both candidates and the alleged masterminds of their murders were ANC members (ACLED 2023:n.p.; cf. Keane 2023). ACLED (2023) paints a vivid picture of this alarming political violence as follows:

... [P]olitical violence targeting local officials in South Africa is on the rise, more than tripling in 2021 compared to the previous year and increasing an additional 70% in 2022. (n.p.)

The main purpose of political assassinations, attacks and threats is to eliminate and intimidate opponents and whistle-blowers who may disclose corruption within the spheres of government (ACLED 2023; Gumede 2023; cf. Pinto 2023:n.p.). Corrupt practices culminate in the deterioration of local, provincial and national infrastructure, thereby depriving people of access to the basic services that enhance their human dignity or wellbeing (Mantzaris 2017:15–20). Thus, the ultimate casualty of corruption is service delivery, which is evidenced by the dereliction of roads, buildings and

government institutions, such as hospitals (Mantzaris 2017:17–18; cf. Sebake 2014:744–755).

Although corruption is widespread in all spheres of governance, there is rampant impunity, as only a few perpetrators are prosecuted (Daily Investor 2022:n.p.). Gossel and London (2018) indicate that the South African government has failed to deal with many corruption cases across various sectors and state-instituted investigations, notably the Zondo Commission Inquiry bring little solace. Thus, South Africans are cautioned to be conscious that the nation:

... [M]ay not have the institutional capacity to fight systemic corruption and prosecute those involved at a pace sufficient to convince domestic and foreign investors that their investments are safe from ongoing corruption. (Gossel & London 2018:n.p.)

The foregoing assertions are largely true because many top politicians who were implicated in the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into state capture were never removed from their powerful positions, and they continue to flaunt their opulent lives, contrary to the expectations of many South Africans (Daily Investor 2022:n.p.). However, there are some perpetrators who have been brought to book. For instance, following the oral evidence on the international management consulting firm, Brain and Company, it was barred from doing business with the South African government for a period of 10 years (Corruption Watch 2022). The company had improperly gotten a R160m SARS contract extension through informal meetings with former president, Jacob Zuma. Notwithstanding this example, the majority of people and companies that were implicated in the inquiry were not investigated or prosecuted, thus, clearly showing a lack of institutional capacity to fight systematic corruption and prosecute perpetrators (Corruption Watch 2022). It is strongly recommended that the South African government continues to implement the findings and recommendations of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry. President Ramaphosa has made promises to do so in his addresses to the nation. This action will help maintain local and foreign investor confidence in the country.

It should be noted that the public normally links poor service delivery and unemployment to the mismanagement of the economy and public funds by government officials. Public discontent often manifests in protests against inept and corrupt local government officials (ACLED 2023:n.p.). For instance, between 2018 and 2022, South Africa recorded 550 service delivery protests (ACLED 2023:n.p.), which indicates that South Africans are highly frustrated by financial, political and economic mismanagement in all spheres of governance. Further, political instability deters foreign investment, because investors 'consider the effective execution of law and order as an indicator of property rights protection' (Gossel & London 2018:n.p.).

FasterCapital (2023) reveals that foreign investors have the capacity to create many jobs for local people. However, Pinto

(2023:n.p.) advances that while many of the challenges that discourage foreign investors, such as corruption, are largely attributed to the African National Congress (ANC), which has been the ruling party since the dawn of independence in South Africa in 1994, the political, social and economic tensions predate independence. As indicated already, contemporary tensions are evidenced by the 2021 riots and shutdowns, which were convened by the opposition Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party (Pinto 2023:n.p.). Political and economic tensions are attributed to many reasons, such as the ineptitude and corruption of the political class (Pinto 2023:n.p.). It, therefore, follows that the 'ANC is going through a deep crisis' and 'it is far less clear what an alternative to the current status quo could look like' (Pinto 2023:n.p.). In this way, South Africans are experiencing a new and uncertain political and economic era, which pushes them to emigrate to more politically and economically stable overseas countries.

Contextualising the emigration trend in South Africa to the state of Christianity in the West and Africa

Earlier discussion in this article (see sections *Unemployment and its interrelated factors: Interaction between push and pull factors of unemployment and employment; The nexus between South Africa's high crime rate and emigration; Impact of political and economic instability on South African citizens*) highlights the push and pull factors driving emigration to Western destinations. There are no credible data on the number of South African Christians who have emigrated to the West. However, from a logical deduction of the official number of Christians in South Africa, one can argue that Christians constitute the largest percentage of citizens who are emigrating to the West. Statistically, Christianity and Islam are the major religions in Africa, with the former being predominant in the sub-Saharan region and the latter being prevalent in the northern part of the continent, especially in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya (Statista 2023).

For instance, in 2020, Christians accounted for about 60% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, while approximately 30% were Muslims (Statista 2023). In absolute terms, the region had approximately 650 million Christians in 2020, and the number is forecast to increase rapidly to over 1 billion by 2050 (Statista 2023). As of 2023, about 96% of Zambians were Christians, being the largest percentage on the continent, followed by Seychelles (95%), Rwanda (94%) and DR Congo (92%) (Statista 2023). Although South Africa was not in the top 10 Christian countries in Africa that year, 80% of its population are Christians, which is a relatively high number (Statista 2023:n.p.). Forster (2024) concurs and lists South Africa as one of the three countries, globally, where religious participation is increasing (Statista 2023:n.p.). The 2022 national census results support the aforesaid trends by indicating that 85.3% of South Africans professed to be Christians (Statista 2023:n.p.). Therefore, it automatically follows that a

significant majority of people who are emigrating to the Western world are Christians.

The foregoing statement is a logical deduction because Christians and non-Christians alike experience the same push and pull factors. The aforementioned statement is qualified by Steffen (2008), who argues that:

Christian migrants have many understandable reasons to leave their communities of origin behind; reasons which are often coerced and imposed by the miserable socio-economic and political situation in their respective countries. In searching for a greener pasture, they often take the painful sacrifice of cutting the umbilical cord that connects them to their families and communities. (p. 2)

The above point is further substantiated by Connor and Tucker (2011:985–1000; cf. Otiso 2023; Sackey-Ansah 2020), who underscore that, in general, Christians constitute 49% of international immigrants.

Having deduced that Christians constitute the largest number of South Africans who are emigrating to the West, the proceeding section discussed the serious regression of Christianity in the destination countries. The West is considered a post-Christendom world, as it used to send missionaries to Africa and other continents in the early epoch of their Christianisation (Brown 2001, n.d.; Darko 2018; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Jenkins 2002:2; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Walls n.d.:100; Yeh 2018). Ironically, the West is now being evangelised by missionaries from African countries that are predominantly Christian, which is a new mission paradigm of the 21st century (Brown 2001, n.d.; Darko 2018; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Jenkins 2002:2; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Walls n.d.:100; Yeh 2018).

Now, in examining the current state of Christianity in Africa and the Western world, the article concluded by advancing that South African Christians who emigrate to the West because of the push and pull factors that were discussed in the 'Conceptualising emigration from South Africa' section should view their migrations as missiological opportunities. This should be the case, especially when one examines the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity from the West to the African continent, as discussed in the ensuing section. Consequently, this awakens the African Church to realise that it needs to play a significant role in global Christianity.

The unprecedented growth and regression of Christianity in Africa and the West, respectively

In view of the contemporary situation of emigration in South Africa, whose overview was presented in the section that conceptualised the contemporary emigration context of South Africa, it is apparent that the majority of South African Christians are emigrating to overseas countries that are experiencing regression in Christianity.

In most Western countries, Christianity has generally been experiencing regression, yet in Africa, Asia and Latin

TABLE 3: The projected population change in countries with the largest Christian population in 2010.

| Countries | Country's population as share of world's population in 2010 | Country's population as share of world's population in 2050 | Share of country's population that is christian in 2010 | Share of country's population that is christian in 2050 |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 United States America | 4.5% | 4.2% | 78.3% | 66.4% |
| 2 Brazil | 2.8 | 2.4 | 88.9 | 86.4 |
| 3 Mexico | 1.6 | 1.5 | 95.1 | 91.4 |
| 4 Russia | 2.1 | 1.3 | 73.3 | 71.3 |
| 5 Philippines | 1.4 | 1.7 | 92.6 | 92.0 |
| 6 Nigeria | 2.3 | 4.2 | 49.3 | 39.3 |
| 7 China | 19.5 | 14.0 | 5.1 | 5.4 |
| 8 Democratic Republic of the Congo | 1.0 | 1.6 | 95.8 | 95.7 |
| 9 Germany | 1.2 | 0.8 | 68.7 | 59.3 |
| 10 Ethiopia | 1.2 | 1.6 | 62.8 | 58.3 |
| Top 10 (2010) Total | 37.5 | 33.3 | 40.0 | 42.2 |

Source: Pew Research Centre, 2017, *The changing global religious landscape*, viewed 27 March 2024, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>

America, it has been growing exponentially (Brown 2001, n.d.; Darko 2018; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Jenkins 2002:2; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Walls n.d.:100; Yeh 2018). With regard to the remarkable expansion of Christianity in the global South, Jenkins (2002:1) concludes that 'We are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide'. Over the last century, the Christian world shifted to Africa, and Latin America, as well as eastward to Asia (Jenkins 2002:18). This phenomenon critically asserts that Christianity is no longer rooted in the Western world, unlike in the early Christian missionary era of the pre-20th century (Jenkins 2002:101–108).

Jenkins (2002:1) further predicts that Africa will replace Europe and America as the epicentre of the global Christian movement by the year 2050,³ given that 'over the past century ... its [centre] of gravity ... has shifted inexorably southward to Africa, Asia and Latin America'. Likewise, Walls (n.d.) alludes to a similar point and argues, thus:

[L]et us recall that within the last century there has been a massive southward shift of the centre of gravity of the Christian world, so that the representative Christian lands now appear to be in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and other parts of the southern continents. This means that Third World theology is now likely to be the representative Christian theology. (p. 100)

Jenkins (2002:3) buttresses the foregoing assertion by stating, '...the era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning'. However, scholars such as Tienou (2006), Yeh (2018), Ezemadu (2012), Peterson (2017), Hayward (2015) and Brown (2001:n.d.) perceive the aforesaid shift as a current, rather than a future reality.

Tienou (2006:37) unequivocally states that the shift from Western to global Christendom presents a crucial moment for urgent reflection on Christianity. Likewise, Yeh (2018:n.p.)

3. Dale (2005:278) notes that Jenkins' (2002) prediction of the shift in the centre of gravity of future Christianity is a major problem, because statistics from the past century could not tell if the 'new Christian reality' that is emerging in Asia and Africa would continue along the lines that it has progressed in recent decades. Thus, it was inappropriate for Jenkins (2002) to draw conclusions on the future of Christianity, based on the situation or statistics of his time. However, I rebuff Dale's (2005) critique of Jenkins (2002), because current scholarship has proved that the aforesaid shift is a contemporary reality.

points out that during the 19th and 20th centuries, missionary work was predominantly carried out by Westerners. Yeh (2018:n.p.) and Darko (2018:43) argue that this missionary trend was called *From the West to the Rest of the World*; however, it shifted significantly during the 20th and 21st centuries. That is, developing nations from sub-Saharan Africa and other continents are now taking on active roles as participants and leaders in overseas missions (Darko 2018:43). This is corroborated by Ezemadu (2012:9), who argues that the African continent rose from being a target for missions to being recognised as a powerful force in evangelising the developed nations. That is to say, there is a consensus among church and mission historians that Western Christianity, which was once pivotal in the civilisation of the developed countries, now faces an existential crisis. One characteristic of this crisis is the deChristianisation of the Western world and the Christianisation of other continents such as Africa (Tienou 2006:37).

A review report by Pew Research Centre, a demographics and world religions think tank, validates the notion of Christianity regression in Europe and America (Pew Research Centre 2017). The report projected that, by 2050, there would have been significant changes in the populations of countries with the largest Christian populations, such as the USA and Brazil. By 2010, these countries had begun to lose their positions in the top 10 list of countries with the largest Christian populations, as shown in Table 3.

The above findings clearly indicate the decline of the Christian population in the USA, which is one of the major destinations for South African emigrants. Jones (2021) confirms the decline of the Church in the USA, as membership fell below majority for the first time in 2020, with only 47% indicating that they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque. This was in contrast with 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999 (Jones 2021). The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches had the steepest decline from 76% to 58% and 73% to 65%, respectively (Jones 2021). Bendavid's (2015) study also indicates that approximately 20 churches in England close every year, while in Germany, the Roman Catholic has closed around 515 churches in the past decade. The Holland

Protestant Church was also expected to close about 700 churches within 4 years (Bendavid's 2015). This has resulted in many church buildings being converted to supermarkets, bookstores, gyms, etc.

In spite of the current regression of Christianity in the Western world, the Pew Research Centre (2017) predicts that the religion (Christianity) will remain dominant for the next four decades. While Islam is projected to grow at a faster pace, it will not overtake Christianity in terms of population, despite the fact that, in the next two decades, 'the number of babies born to Muslims is expected to modestly exceed [that of] Christians' (Pew Research Centre 2017:n.p.). While Christianity is expected to maintain its numerical dominance over all other world religions, it is apparent that it is experiencing regression in countries like the USA and England, which are some of the top three destinations for South African emigrants. Although Christianity is competing with other world religions, as discussed in this section, numerous scholars (Brown 2001, n.d.; Ezemadu 2012; Hayward 2015; Peterson 2017; cf. Tienou 2006; Yeh 2018) concur that its centre of gravity has shifted from Europe and America to Africa and other continents.

Given the aforesaid shift, it is imperative to give a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, overview of the current state of Christianity in Africa, with a particular focus on South Africa, in order to amply demonstrate the respective regression and growth of Christianity in the West and Africa. Christianity and Islam are the major religions in Africa, with the former being predominant in the sub-Saharan region and the latter in North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya (Statista 2023). For instance, in 2020, Christians accounted for about 60% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, while approximately 30% were Muslims (Statista 2023). In absolute terms, the region had approximately 650 million Christians in 2020, and the number is forecast to increase rapidly to over 1 billion by 2050 (Statista 2023). As of 2023, about 96% of Zambians were Christians, being the largest percentage on the continent, followed by Seychelles (95%), Rwanda (94%) and DR Congo (92%) (Statista 2023). In view of this, Oasis International Ltd (2019) helpfully observes that:

Whereas Christianity used to be most densely populated around Europe, Latin America, and North America, the epicentre of Christianity is quickly becoming the continent of Africa – specifically, the sub-Saharan region. Today, 26 percent of all Christians live in Africa, and that number is expected to increase to 40 percent by 2060. By contrast, that number in Europe is expected to decline from 25 percent to 14 percent, and in North America, from 12 percent to 9 percent. (p. 2)

Although South Africa was not in the top 10 Christian countries in Africa in 2023, 80% of its population are Christians, which is a relatively high number (Statista 2023:n.p.). Forster (2024) concurs and lists South Africa as one of the three countries globally, where religious participation is increasing (Forster 2024). The 2022 national census results support the aforesaid trends by indicating that

85.3% of South Africans professed to be Christians (Forster 2024). However, South African Christianity is diversified, and not all denominations are experiencing numerical growth at the same rate as Neo-Pentecostal and African Instituted churches, such as the Zion Christian Church, Johane Masowe and Johane Marange sects⁴ (Forster 2024). Membership in mainline churches, such as the Methodists, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed has been constantly diminishing. However, the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are still resilient and remain among the large denominations in Africa (Forster 2024). This is also noted by Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021:1–10), who indicate that, from 2013 to 2019, the membership of the South African Dutch Reformed Church declined significantly.

In spite of the evident decline in membership in mainline churches, Neo-Pentecostal and African Instituted churches are growing fast. It follows, therefore, that the majority of South African emigrants to the West are Christians, so they are expected to evangelise that part of the world in order to stymie the serious regression in Christianity that is being experienced there. In light of the growth of Christianity in Africa (particularly South Africa) and its regression in the West, I argue that South African emigrant Christians have a missionary role to play. In saying the aforementioned, I am cognisant that emigration negatively affects South African local churches because, as their membership dwindles, they also lose their human and financial resources, assets, leadership skills and passion/zeal. However, in light of its regression and unprecedented growth, in the West and Africa, respectively, one can reasonably argue that it would be naïve and myopic for Christians to perceive emigration as a negative development in kingdom building, rather than as a missiological opportunity in the West.

In other words, the aforementioned conception corresponds with the understanding that biblical salvation is advanced in *centripetal* and *centrifugal* ways (Magezi 2018:27–146, 2019:1–8; cf. Matacio 2008:31–42). These two concepts help one to comprehend the mission of the Church in both the Old and New Testaments (Magezi 2018:27–146, 2019:1–8; cf. Matacio 2008:31–42). The *centripetal* concept of mission holds that a sinner receives salvation upon relocating to a place that is inhabited by saved people (Magezi 2018:27–146, 2019:1–8; cf. Matacio 2008:31–42). On the other hand, the *centrifugal* concept can be exemplified by the emigration of South African Christians to the West, where they can usher the unsaved into salvation, thus, reversing the prevailing regression in Christianity (Magezi 2018:27–146, 2019:1–8; cf. Matacio 2008:31–42). Thus, the emigration of South African Christians across the globe should be understood from the perspective of the *centrifugal* concept of mission. In the same vein, the emigrants themselves should be conscious that, although they may have been pushed or pulled by personal or selfish reasons, it was God's sovereignty and providential

4. Forster's (2024) online work is important because it shows how Christianity is changing in South Africa, as Pentecostal and indigenous churches grow. The work provides the reasons for the growth of the Pentecostal and indigenous churches and the decline of colonial or mainline denominations.

control that permitted them to do so for the purpose of extending his kingdom. In this way, the individual and corporate push factors of emigration in South Africa, such as high unemployment and crime rates, as well as political and economic instability, may also 'receive a more than human aspect in God's providential control of everything that has to do with human beings, as he works out his plan to fulfil his promises' (Magezi 2018:119). Now, having established those mentioned above, the underlying question is: What are South African Christian immigrants contributing to missions in the West? This question is addressed in this section.

South African Immigrants contribution to mission in the West

In response to the aforementioned underlying question, it can be argued that there are no sources that specifically discuss the contributions of South African Christian emigrants to missions in the West. For instance, Sackey-Ansah's (2020:66–82) article titled *African Christian immigrants* and Otiso's (2023:114–131) *From South to North: Contributions of African Immigrants in Western Christianity* are some of the works that make general reflections on the subject. Sackey-Ansah (2020:66) evaluates the influence of the two African churches namely: the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in the USA.

Sackey-Ansah (2020:66) argues that the influence of African Christian immigrants to the West is often overlooked and under-researched. In most cases, African immigrants 'deem it a spiritual mandate from God to impact their sphere of influence during their expeditions [in the West]'; hence, they form or join churches, form prayer groups, preach the gospel and create mission fields (Sackey-Ansah 2020:66). Individual African Christians and churches have made significant impact in Canada, the UK, the USA and many other Western nations where religious freedom is guaranteed (Sackey-Ansah 2020:74). Although Sackey-Ansah's (2020) and Otiso's (2023:114–131) works helpfully highlight the contributions of some African Christian immigrants, they do not provide specific information on the impact of South African immigrants to mission in their host countries.

Thus, existing literature does not pay specific attention to how South African Christian immigrants are contributing to the mission in the West. Given this, there is an urgent need to conduct specific empirical research that can establish the number of South African Christian immigrants in the West and how they are contributing to missions abroad. However, the absence of research on the proposed aspects does not mean that South African Christian immigrants are not contributing to the mission in the West. Instead, this shows that this area is overlooked; hence, it needs to be considered from an empirical research perspective.

Conclusion

This article examined the contemporary context of emigration from South Africa to the West and established that most of

the emigrants, including Christians, relocate because of a variety of push and pull factors. The article also established that destination countries themselves are experiencing a serious decline in Christianity, given that they used to be the centre of gravity for global Christianity and global evangelisation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Scholars concur on this fact; however, the overriding reality is that the centre has now shifted to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Having established that the article advanced that the contemporary growth of Christianity in Africa and its regression in the West should motivate South African Christians to perceive their emigration, regardless of the associated pain and sorrow, as a missiological opportunity. This is even enriched when one considers that, in God's scheme, migration and emigration are not accidents, but they are *centrifugal* and *centripetal* tools for advancing his redemption plans and purposes for the world. With this in mind, all the reasons for emigrating from South Africa should be looked at from God's sovereignty and providential control of all that concerns humanity, as he works out his redemptive plans and purposes for the world. However, at the moment, it is difficult to determine what South African immigrants are contributing to the mission in the West because no specific empirical studies have been conducted in that regard.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contribution

C.M. is the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by the author.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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