



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 25, 2011

Christianity Still Dominant Faith, But Global Makeup Has Changed

The Pew Forum's just released study *Global Christianity: 2011 Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population*, shows that at 2.18 billion adherents, or around a third of the world's 2010 population of 6.9 billion, Christianity is still, by far, the predominant faith across the globe.

But while a century ago the demographic center of the Christian faith was Europe, today "no single continent or region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity," note the Pew researchers.



In fact, while over 66 percent of the world's Christian population lived in Europe in 1910, by 2010 that number had dwindled to just 26 percent, while the numbers of the world's Christians in North and South America had risen from 27 percent in 1910 to nearly 37 percent in 2010. Moreover, with the massive global missions emphasis among many Christian groups, along with dramatic population growth and demographic shifts over the past 100 years, today nearly "one in every four Christians lives in sub-Saharan Africa (24%), and about one-in-eight is found in Asia and the Pacific (13%)," noted the Pew study.

The Pew research found that Catholics make up around 50 percent of all who claim Christianity as their religion, with Protestants following at 36.7 percent, and Orthodox at nearly 12 percent. Among the "other" categories Pew counted, which compose 1.3 percent of the world's broadly Christian population, were such denominations as Mormon and Jehovah's Witness, which share many biblical teachings in common with older, long-established Christian churches, but which also embrace tenets that many Catholic and Protestant theologians argue fall outside the confines of the historic Christian faith. (In the end, however, our culture concedes that a Christian is whoever says he is a Christian.)

While statistics show that the Christian population around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, the overall global population has also exploded, from 1.8 billion in 1910 to 6.9 billion in 2010, meaning that "Christians make up about the same portion of the world's population today (32 percent) as they did a century ago (35 percent)," noted the Pew report.

"This apparent stability, however, masks a momentous shift" in the demographic mapping of the world's Christian population, the report explained, because, although Europe and North/South America still boast a total of 63 percent of the world's Christians, that is 30 percentage points below the 93 percent of Christians the three continents claimed 100 years ago. Moreover, Pew noted, "the proportion of Europeans and Americans who are Christian has dropped from 95 percent in 1910 to 76 percent in 2010 in Europe as a whole, and from 96 percent to 86 percent in the Americas as a whole."

The Pew study explained that the enormous growth of Christianity in both sub-Saharan Africa and the Asia-Pacific region accounts for some of the greatest growth in the Christian faith in the past 100 years.



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While these two regions claimed relatively few Christians at the beginning of the 20th century, noted the Pew report, the “share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9 percent in 1910 to 63 percent in 2010, while in the Asia-Pacific region it rose from 3 percent to 7 percent.”

According to Pew, the United States is numerically the most heavily Christian country, with 246,780,000 believers (79.5 percent of its population), followed by Brazil, 175,770,000 (90.2 percent); Mexico, 107,780,000 (95 percent); Russia, 105,220,000 (73.6 percent); and the Philippines, 86,790,000 (93.1 percent).

Among the Pew studies other findings:

— While Christianity began in the Middle East/North Africa, “today that region has both the lowest concentration of Christians (about 4 percent of the region’s population) and the smallest number of Christians (about 13 million) of any major geographic region.”

— Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country, “is home to more Christians than all 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region combined.”

— Nigeria claims “more than twice as many Protestants (broadly defined to include Anglicans and independent churches) as Germany, the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation.”

— While Christians comprise just under a third of the world’s population, “they form a majority of the population in 158 countries and territories, about two-thirds of all the countries and territories in the world.”

The *Global Christianity* study, which looked at over 200 countries and their Christian populations, was compiled using national censuses, population surveys, and reports from specific denominations and church groups on church attendance. The data was then compared against records from 1910, including data from the [Centre for the Study of Global Christianity](#) at Massachusetts’ Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Conrad Hackett, demographer with the Pew Forum and the lead researcher on the project, explained to the [Christian Post](#) that his research team “set out to provide data on the number of Christians around the world as part of a series of reports ... focusing on the global populations of major religious groups.”

While Islam has garnered much attention over the last several years in the geo-political realm, demographers note that the numbers of its adherents— some 1.6 billion people, or a little less than a quarter of the world’s population — still run a distant second to those professing the Christian faith.



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