

Chapter 94

The Emerging Geography of Global Christianity: New Places, Faces and Perceptions

Robert Strauss

94.1 Introduction

In the early 2000s, Philip Jenkins, historian from Pennsylvania State University, awakened his Western readers to the “Next Christendom,” a global Christianity emerging from the Southern Hemisphere. Born in Port Talbot, Wales in 1952, Jenkins’ early academic career was in criminology. After 20 years of academic work in State College, Pennsylvania, he changed the focus of his research to global Christianity and its associated religious movements, which culminated in the book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (2002).

Surely and steadily, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa, and Seoul had joined Rome, Geneva, and New York as focal points of the Christian faith (Mbiti 1995: 154). These cities illustrate that an undeniable geographic shift had occurred. Latinos, Africans, and Asians were emerging as new leaders in the global mission enterprise (Fig. 94.1). Passion, community transformation, and honor were taking their place along side of doctrine, church polity, and righteousness. The analysis by Jenkins (2002/2011) builds upon the foundation of Stephen Neill (1900–1984), bishop in the Anglican Church, who traced the geographic expansion of Christianity from its origins in the Middle East to the Colonies of the New World (1991). Neill was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, but served as an Anglican missionary in Tamil Nadu, India. Regarded as an expert on the historical expansion of Christianity in India, he taught at a theological seminary in the Tamil vernacular, one of the more difficult languages in India.

The next Christendom from new places has introduced new leaders, roles, and theological perspectives. While this chapter provides an overview of the shift that has occurred, this book itself explores the depths of new issues that are emerging from the Majority World, not only related to Christianity, but also other world

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Fig. 94.1 Mission leaders from the global north and south (Photo by Robert Strauss)

religions and spiritual experiences. The old paradigm of nations sending and receiving missionaries has been turned on its head. Today, everyone is going everywhere with the good news that not only addresses the redemption of individuals, but also a revitalization of local communities. For example, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Northern Europe sent Protestant missionaries to India and China. Today, churches are flourishing in India and China, which in turn are sending missionaries abroad. The message of today's cross-cultural workers is holistic, focusing on individuals, families, communities, and nations.

While geography at a macro level is less significant today because of ease of travel, technology, and virtual connections, geo-culture at the micro level is more important than ever. Rather than exporting Western forms to the rest of the world, cross-cultural workers are critically contextualizing¹ (Hiebert 1986) the function and meaning of redemption among host societies using locally familiar forms.² This

¹Paul Hiebert (1986) defines critical contextualization as a process whereby local customs are both phenomenologically respected and also critically evaluated by local religious leaders and cross-cultural workers based on coherence with Sacred Scripture. For example, the Hindu Vedas present one Ultimate Reality with an infinite number of possible manifestations. Therefore, religious activity conditioned by social structure and past associations is respected. The result is innumerable gods developed in countless forms. In contrast, the Bible of the Christian faith presents only one way to God (Acts 4:12).

²Ralph Linton (1936) introduced the concepts of form, function and meaning. Form refers to the style, shape, manner or procedure. Function speaks to purpose while meaning is the significance and importance. To illustrate, a handshake may be a ritual in athletics that means, "You did a good job!"

fact is elaborated below under The New Perspectives. In other words, as everything changes, some things stay the same. Furthermore, geopolitics is now key to the further expansion of Christianity. A Christianity that is perceived as Western or from the North may not be embraced as readily or deeply as Christianity from the South. To understand how geopolitics is impacting the expansion of Christianity, one must consider the shift of Christendom to the global South.

94.2 The Shift

94.2.1 A Review of Past Analyses by Philip Jenkins

The first edition of *The Next Christendom* by Jenkins was a response to the historical geographic shift in Christianity to the global South. Jenkins was not the first or only religious studies scholar to notice the global shift (2002: 4–5). Others were calling attention to it in published academic works. Walbert Buhlmann (1976) had already written, *The Coming of the Third Church*, which analyzed the emerging church from the “Third World.” Among others, British ecclesiastical historian Edward Norman had lectured and written in the early 1980s about Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere. Missiologists were also already aware of the emerging mission movements from the Majority World (Walls 1996; Engel and Dyrness 2000). In point of fact, and not surprisingly, those involved in the mission community were keenly aware of the emerging church the global South. As far back as the 1850s, Henry Venn (1796–1873), an Anglican clergyman of the Church Missionary Society, spoke of the coming “euthanasia of the mission.” By this peculiar phraseology, Venn was speaking about a strategy of “exiting,” whereby mission agencies would depart and native pastors would govern native indigenous churches [see also *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* by John Nevius (2003/1886)]. These strategies were laying the foundation for the Next Christendom.

However, it was not clear a decade ago, nor is it clear today, how many Christian believers in the West are aware of the shift. Nevertheless, a Euro-American religion is now global. In 1900, one may have imagined a typical Christian as an Italian, German, or American, but over a century later one would more likely see a Brazilian, Ugandan, or Filipino. Hilaire Belloc, the noted Catholic historian and collaborator with G.K. Chesterton, wrote, “Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe” (1920: 191). Not so anymore and certainly not going forward.

For example, parishioners of the First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs meet on Sunday mornings for worship, looking at elaborate stained glass windows before them and listening to a repertoire of sacred hymns from a grand pipe organ. Founded in 1872 by a Presbyterian missionary named Sheldon Jackson, the church today is pastored by Dr. Jim Singleton, a scholar of church history.

At the same time, 20,000 km (12,200 miles) southwest in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, Maile, a church elder among the Bisorio tribal people, teaches his people from a Bible translated into the Bisorio vernacular. The riverbank setting at

Table 94.1 The changing distribution of Christian believers

Area	Number of Christians (millions)			
	1900	1970	2010	2050
Africa	10	143	493	1,031
Asia	22	96	352	601
North America	79	211	286	333
Latin America	62	270	544	655
Europe	381	492	588	530
Oceania	5	18	28	38
TOTAL	558	1,230	2,291	3,188

Data source: <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd>

the headwaters of the Sepik River is several days' travel from the capital city of Port Moresby. In 1982, two missionaries from the United States founded the church, whose structure is made of wooden polls with a thatched roof of leaves. Maile and other Bisorio church leaders travel tireless throughout inhospitable terrain in the surrounding mountainous region to spread the Good News of redemption. This local story from the Sepik River area of Papua New Guinea is repeated regionally and nationally all across the global South.

Based on research provided in the World Christian Database (from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Table 94.1 generalizes the numbers of Christians distributed by continent. A staff of scholars led by Todd Johnson maintains the World Christian Database, which is updated quarterly and represents 238 countries and 13,000 ethnolinguistic peoples. The research data (highlighted areas) show where and when the shift has and is taking place.

Around 1900, over 82 % of Christian believers were from the North (460 of 558 million). By 2010, that distribution declined to less than 39 % (874 of 2,291 million). In other words, today the majority of Christian believers are geographically from the South. By the middle of the twenty-first century, only about 25 % (863 of 3,188) of Christian believers will be from the North.

94.2.2 A Corresponding Geographic Shift in the Locus of the Global Mission Enterprise

Accordingly, the locus of the global mission enterprise likewise has shifted. The emerging mission movements from the Majority World have taken their place on the stage of the global mission enterprise. For example, the church in China has

launched the “Back to Jerusalem” movement (Chinese: 传回耶路撒冷运动), a vision for local churches throughout China to send 100,000 Chinese missionaries back along the Silk Road to Jerusalem (Hathaway et al. 2003). The campaign is not new, but was conceived in the 1920s by Chinese students at the Northwest Bible Institute, established by James Hudson Taylor II (1894–1978), the grandson of Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) who was the founder of China Inland Mission.

Since independence in 1947, the national mission movement from India has rapidly developed. Today the Indian Missions Associations coordinates over 250 national Indian missionary agencies, through which local churches have sent over 40,000 Indian missionaries. Dr. K. Rajendran, the longtime General Secretary of Indian Missions Associations, later became the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the World Evangelical Alliance (Rajendran 2005).

Based in Hyderabad, India, the Indian Missions Associations launched a training arm in 1992, the India Institute of Missiology. Today the Institute accredits curriculum for 60 national Indian missionary training centers. Dr. C. Barnabas, interestingly with a Ph.D. in chemistry, has directed the Institute since its inception. In each academic term, 2,000 Indian nationals are in training, many earning BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees in the academic discipline of missiology.

Tradition tells us that Thomas the Apostle carried the Gospel to India in the first century AD. In South India these converts to Christianity were known as Nasrani Mappila.³ It is interesting to think that the Gospel of Christ began spreading throughout India long before it reached geographic Europe. Of India’s 1.2 billion people, approximately 2.5 % or 30 million are professed Christians.

In Latin America, the Cooperación Misionera de Ibero-America is a broad network of churches, mission agencies, and missionary training centers throughout all of Ibero-America. Today, approximately 10,000 Latino missionaries are associated with the network. In Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Guatemala, and other countries, there are biblical seminaries, missionary training centers, and locally based mission agencies that are passionate about advancing the Kingdom of God.

These are but a few examples. Similar stories can be told about South Korea, Nigeria, the Ukraine, and many other nations where local churches are sending cross-cultural workers elsewhere in the expansion of Christianity.

Second only to the United States, South Korea sends out more missionaries than any other global country. From the continent of Africa, Nigeria is the leading nation participating in the global mission enterprise with approximately 5,200 national Protestant Christian missionaries. Based in Jos, Nigeria and led by Executive Secretary Reverend Timothy Olonade, the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Associations envisions mobilizing, training and sending out 50,000 Nigerian Christian missionaries to northern Nigeria, North Africa, and the Arab Peninsula (see www.nematoday.org).

³Nasrani is a local term for Christians, while Mappila is a title of respect.

94.2.3 Factors That Precipitated the Shift

The historical phenomenon of the geographic shift may be reliably analyzed in various ways. An “exit strategy” approach to church planting has resulted in a “passing of the baton” to local native leadership (Steffen 1997). Also, as cross-cultural workers increased in their cross-cultural competencies, the process of critical contextualization produced locally familiar forms and functions imbued with ancient meaning from the Sacred Scripture (Hiebert 1986). However, no single activity in global missions has strengthened the local indigenous native churches more than the translation of the Scripture into the local vernacular. No scholar has argued this more forcefully than Lamin Sanneh, especially in his book, *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel Beyond the West* (2003). Sanneh, a son of royalty, was raised in Gambia, West Africa. Today he is a professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University (Fig. 94.2).

More broadly and most notably, the history of Christian expansion beginning in the seventeenth century is tied to colonization (Neill 1991). For example, the King of Denmark sponsored the Danish-Halle Mission, beginning in 1706. Influenced by his court chaplain, Dr. Lutkens, King Frederick IV sent two missionaries from the Lutheran clergy and graduates of Halle University in Wittenberg, Germany to work in the Danish colonies near Tranquebar. Frederick was concerned that the Roman Catholic Church was sending missionaries to the new colonies, but the Protestants had not. One of the two, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, translated the New Testament into Tamil.

Finally, as nations secured their independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, consistently local, regional, and national expressions of Christianity emerged in new places with new people and perspectives (Tucker 2004) (Fig. 94.3).

Philip Yancey (2001) offers a fresh explanation for the global shift that transcends human explanation. It occurs to him that the observable pattern is a historical phenomenon of God moving geographically where He is wanted. The Bible is clear that God’s eternal program for humankind is that the whole earth be filled with

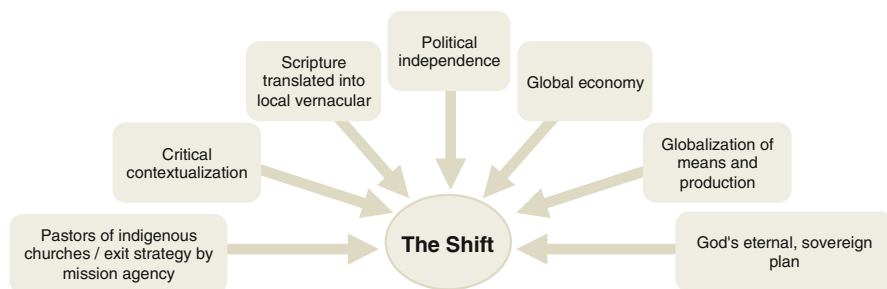


Fig. 94.2 Factors precipitating the global shift (Source: Robert Strauss)



Fig. 94.3 Diego and Ailin, new faces from the South (Photo by Robert Strauss)

people who know and love Him. Note these references throughout the Old and New Testaments that demonstrate the global scope of God’s intention (read the surrounding context of these references for the fuller narrative):

- Genesis 12:3 “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (a statement to Abram)
- Joshua 4:1–7, 24 “that all the people of the earth might know”
- 1 Samuel 17:46 (young David slaying Goliath) “that all the earth may know”
- Psalms 33:8 “all the inhabitants of the world”
- Isaiah 45:22 “all the ends of the earth”
- Haggai 2:7 “all nations”
- Mark 11:17 “Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?”
- Luke 2:10 “bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people”
- Revelation 5:9 “hast redeemed us to God...out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation”

94.3 The New People

94.3.1 *Collectivism vs. Individualism*

The Christian believers from the South tend to be more group-oriented rather than individualistic. This fact is grounded in empirical research among human subjects. Geert Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), among other social researchers, describe the United States as the most individualistic culture in the world. As such, Christian believers in the West tacitly assume that faith is a personal matter. Whether an individual is able to articulate it or not, there are tacit assumptions related to my faith, my beliefs, my church, and my pastor. The next Christendom is not making the same assumptions. Followers of Christ in the emerging mission movements from the Majority World are not thinking in terms of “I,” “me,” and “my.”

94.3.2 *Holism vs. Dichotomism*

Distinct from the United States, Canada, and Northern Europe, most people in the Majority World are holistic in their view of life. The tribal animist in Papua New Guinea does not consciously think of his incantations to the spirit world, whether to personal spirit beings or impersonal spirit forces, as an activity separate and distinct from his physical work in the garden. Both are part of normal daily life. In South India, a woman from a Hindu background may sleep with her face pointed toward the East, the direction from which energy flows. For her, religion is not just a theological creed, but also a way of life. Similar to the man in Papua New Guinea, she assumes that impersonal spirit forces are all around, both negative and positive, impacting harm and happiness.

In the emerging global South, Christian believers tend not to dichotomize life. They are not separating their religious faith from day-to-day life experiences. From the reason crops in the field grow to the cause of death, they would assume some sort of interface between this world and another.

94.3.3 *Relationships vs. Tasks*

Empirical research as well as our own personal experiences have shown us that Western cultures are task oriented with a primary focus on the bottom line. Despite repeated training in participative management, servant leadership, and Theory X

and Y,⁴ we still emphasize the task to be done as per proven business processes in a specified timeframe according to a line-item budget. These business components are carefully articulated in written low context documents – the request for proposal, statement of work, technical and cost proposals, non-disclosure agreement, contract, and after-action review.

The next Christendom is much more oriented to personal relationships that have been built over time in varied contexts. Written contracts are not necessary, but if drafted they are merely starting points at best because relationships and mutual activity evolve. Partnerships between the North and South will be forged informally through long-term friendships, time, shared experiences, and building trust. This is high context, where status is not achieved through performance, but acquired through affiliations.

94.4 The New Perspectives

94.4.1 *What Are the New Roles?*

Not only are men and women from the Majority World assuming status and roles as leaders in the global mission enterprise, but also local roles have emerged as critically important. For example, if a Western mission agency or a non-governmental organization wants to launch an initiative in the south of India, today it would be folly on the part of the Western entity and inconceivable from the perspective of local South India Christian leaders that such an endeavor would be attempted apart from local needs assessment, endorsement, planning, implementation, and sustainment.

In Bangalore, India, the capital of Karnataka, Dr. Jayakumar Ramachandran is a key Christian leader. A Telugu-speaker born into a business family, whose father was a strict Hindu and mother a Christian, Jayakumar has founded a mission agency, a missionary training center, extension centers in the northeast of India, medical clinics, and orphanages. Residents in the Banaswadi Layout of Bangalore know him as a patron in relationships of clientelism. He has been the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the India Institute of Missiology. With a Masters of divinity from Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas and a Ph.D. in missiology earned in India, Jayakumar has been an advocate for standards of academic rigor in national missionary training centers throughout India.

A large U.S.-based missionary agency launched a church-planting endeavor in the south of India in 2003, but chose not to seek sponsorship from church leaders. After 8 years of fervent activity, virtually no access has been gained into local ministries.

⁴In 1960 Douglas McGregor of Harvard University introduced Theory X and Theory Y in the book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. Approaches to management and motivation, Theory X assumes an authoritative manager must force and direct work. Theory Y assumes people are self-motivated and thus a participative style of work management is preferred.

In contrast, another agency headquartered in Colorado initiated a partnership in 2004 with the India Institute of Missiology to provide expertise in a story-based worldview approach to cross-cultural ministry. Access to local leaders originated with the World Evangelical Alliance⁵ where Dr. K. Rajendran provided inimitable transfer of trust. The leaders of the agency were introduced to Dr. C. Barnabas and Dr. Jayakumar Ramachandran. Authentic relationships became the foundation for partnerships, a flourishing local ministry, and sustained impact.

In Ibero-America, Dr. Omar Gava from Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina, is the Coordinator of Missionary Training for Cooperación Misionera de Ibero-America International. His Doctorate of Ministry with an emphasis on andragogy was earned at the Faculdade Teologica Sur America in Londrina, Brazil. With over 40 years of practical ministry experience, Gava coordinates all missionary training curriculum design and delivery. He founded Recursos Estrategicos Globales (Global Strategic Resources) in Argentina, a civic organization that provides missiological resources to all the missionary training centers in South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Iberian Peninsula.

94.4.2 What Are the New Relationships?

In the next Christendom, we see a return to the model of the early church, which was comprised of multiple ethnicities. In the New Testament there is no record of a Gentile-only church. Despite racial resistance particularly from Jewish leaders in the first century, who understood that the Jews were the only people of God, the narrative of the biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles tells a story of inclusivity. Note the selected passages from Acts shown in Table 94.2.

At the birth of the early church, Jews from 15 nations had gathered in Jerusalem, as specified by Old Testament requirement for the Feast of Pentecost. From the beginning of Acts (1:8), Christians believed God had instructed them to spread the Gospel of Grace to all nations. As the narrative of the book of Acts unfolds, men, women, children, plus all ethnicities and social classes were recipients of the Good News. In contrast to Roman culture where even seats in the Coliseum were designated according to social class, seating in the Christian church was not. The hope of renewing this inclusivity is in the next Christendom.

⁵Launched in London, England in 1846, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is the world's largest association of evangelical Christians serving a constituency of 600 million people. Today it is comprised of 1128 national evangelical alliances organized into seven regions of the world. The purpose of WEA is multifold: (a) to live and proclaim Kingdom values, (b) to provide identity and voice to global followers of Christ, (c) to seek holiness, justice and renewal at every level of society (family, community and nation), and (d) to glorify God.

Table 94.2 The story of inclusivity in the Acts of the Apostles

Chapter:Versus	Description of scripture text demonstrating inclusivity
2:5–11	Jews from 15 nations (note Parthia, Mede, and Elam in modern Iraq)
2:16–21	Sons, daughters, young men, and old men
5:14; 8:12	Men <u>and</u> women
6:1	Hellenized Jews (note a change in social structure to accommodate)
6:7	Priests from Judaism
8:4–5	Philip the evangelist sent to Samaritans (mixed race of Jews and Gentiles)
8:36–38	Ethiopian from North Africa
10:1–11:18	Italians
10:6	A tanner (in India – <i>chamar</i> , lower caste)
13:1	Simeon called Niger (name means “black” – leader of church in Antioch)
13:1	Lucius of Cyrene (from North Africa – leader of church in Antioch)
16:14, 27	Lydia (merchant) and a jailer (low social class)
17:4, 12, 34	Prominent women
18:8	Synagogue rulers
21:5	Wives and children included in the prayer send-off of the Apostle Paul

Source: Robert Strauss

94.4.3 What Is the New Theology?

Throughout Latin America, Christian believers tend to express their faith through demonstrable activity (“signs and wonders” from Romans 15:19) and with genuine passion. They read about the miracles in the Bible, but do not discard them as for another dispensation. They regard them as applicable to their very life situations today. These assumptions about theology contrast with American fundamentalism where, starting in the 1920s, a clear distinction was made between fundamentalists and holiness groups (Carpenter 1997; Hofstadter 1963; Marsden 1980, 1987, 1991).

In Africa, south of the Sahel, the spread of the Christian Gospel into indigenous regions has been rapid, resulting in groups of believers who have integrated their spiritualist customs with the new teachings from Scripture. Existing worldview assumptions about reality – classification, definition of self, definition of other, relationships, cause and effect (Kearney 1984: 106) – have not been displaced by a rival story from the Bible. Selected bits and pieces of the biblical narrative have been meshed together with existing core assumptions. Although alarming to some mis-siologists, this syncretism is a reality among African Christian believers throughout the continent (Ranger 2008: 155).

Analyzed from an intercultural point of view, culture is the learned, shared patterns of perception and behavior. Figure 94.4 displays a model of culture represented by

four concentric circles. Outwardly, one is able to observe human behavior, which is patterned, shared, and learned. People know how to greet one another. While the function remains somewhat the same throughout the world, the form differs. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin the form may be a handshake. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, the form will be a kiss on the cheek. Sociocultural institutions promote and prohibit behavior.

Beneath these observable aspects of culture are perceptions in the form of shared values and core worldview assumptions. At the value level, people have strong feelings about what ought or ought not to be. At the worldview level, people have assumptions about what is real, what is not real, who self is, who “other” is, relationships, cause and effect, and how time and space function.

Regarding Africa and many other regions of the world, people have quite readily assimilated the outward demonstrations of the Christian faith, whether these are Christian terms or rituals. Missionaries have been able to establish Christian institutions that serve host societies. However, it has been much more difficult to impact people at the levels of values, identity, and core worldview assumptions. Hence, change at these deeper levels has not occurred quickly. A villager in Senegal may go to the Christian pastor for help through prayer to God and at the same time solicit the local shaman to placate the offended ancestors through traditional incantations (see Fig. 94.4).

In India, the Christian Gospel has spread rapidly through cities and rural regions by mass conversion movements among homogeneous social networks (Pickett 1933; McGavran 1970). Entire villages and people groups converted to Christianity, especially among lower caste peoples. Two factors facilitated receptivity to the Christian message: (a) the ubiquitous social stratification of Hinduism and (b) the inclusivity of the Christian Gospel.

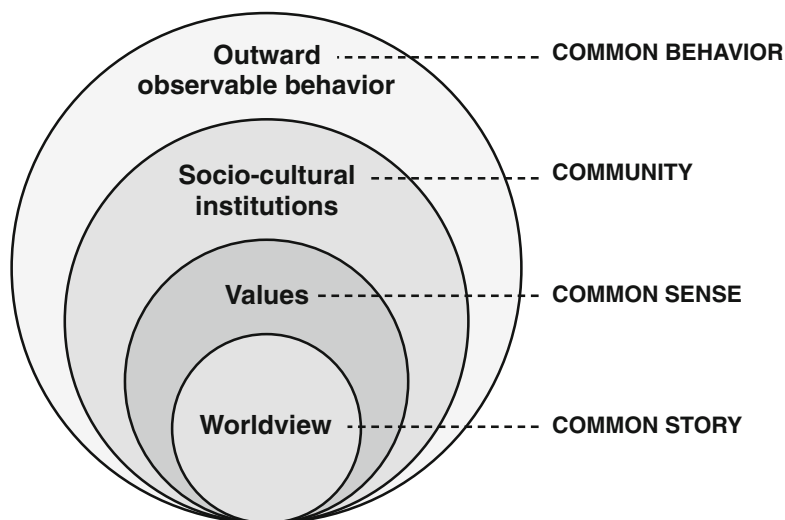


Fig. 94.4 A model of culture (Source: Robert Strauss)

94.5 Conclusion

Phillip Jenkins awakened us to the next Christendom, a global Christianity where influence and compassion emanate from new places, people, and perspectives. Where do we go from here? Numerous questions have been posed, both explicitly and implicitly, by the historic shift. How will the Global North answer these questions? On what basis will the North embrace inclusivity? How will egalitarian approaches of the West merge with the hierarchical approach of the East? To what degree will the Global South endorse gender equality and under what circumstances? As partnerships develop and resources are shared, what strategies will emerge to manage reciprocity and dependency? In what ways may the Global South curb the increasing secularization of the Global North? What is the Next Christendom's stance on human rights, homosexuality, and freedom?

American anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes, "I don't think things are moving toward an omega point; I think they are moving toward more diversity" (Page 2010: 127). And yet, *e pluribus unum*. Are we ready?

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