

From Jerusalem to Timbuktu: A World Tour of the Spread of Christianity

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978-0-8308-4527-9

“Combining years of global relationships, extensive research, millions of miles traveled, and a wide knowledge of Christian history, Brian Stiller has produced a must-read masterpiece! I know of no other book that so encapsulates mission history, current trends, and real-life anecdotes of faithful followers of Jesus Christ.”

— Paul Borthwick, mission specialist, author of *A Mind for Missions and How to Be a World-Class Christian*

Mighty Upsurge in Christianity Taking Place Around the Shrinking Globe

Two thousand years ago the Christian church began on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. Since then the demographic “center” of Christian populations has made its way across Europe.

With the surprising growth of the Christian community globally in the past fifty years, the demographic weight of Christianity in Africa and Asia has pulled this global center south and west. Demographers now place the center of population density of Christians in Africa.

The metaphorical center of world Christianity has literally moved from Jerusalem to Timbuktu in the nation of Mali. This is not merely some clever title – it is a remarkable sign that points out what we otherwise might miss. Long a city name used as a metaphor for a far-away and unreachable place, today Timbuktu signifies this massive shift, as the location of the center represents a mighty upsurge in Christian faith around the shrinking globe.

What is the extent of that growth? The answer might come as something of a surprise, particularly to those in the West. Even those least inclined to dismiss religion from ideological modernist presumptions – the Lutheran sociologist Peter Berger, for example – during the 1960s fell into the trap of assuming that the trends in former state-church Western European nations (such as France and Sweden) were part and parcel of modernization. In 1968, Berger projected that by “the twenty-first century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture” typified by the fragmentation of life and the division of labor. Thirty years later, however, these projections seemed far less plausible. As Peter Berger now notes, “The assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled, ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”

The journey from Jerusalem to Timbuktu, with its relocation of the Christian center out of its centuries-long European habitat, alerts us that much is going on. As we will see, this growth and relocation is not driven merely by external forces, but also by reexpressions of faith in five major ways. It is those reasons, or *drivers*, that we will explore in this book. Some expand the witness of the gospel, resulting in remarkable growth of churches and the Christian population. Others do more in reshaping the vision and heart of the gospel, its self-understanding and ways of seeing its surrounding world.

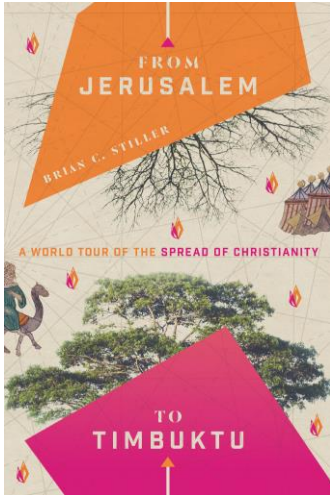
— From chapter one, “Faith Is on the Rise”

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What led to the church's vibrant growth throughout the Global South? Brian Stiller identifies five key factors that have shaped the church, from a renewed openness to the move of the Holy Spirit to the empowerment of indigenous leadership. While in some areas Christianity is embattled and threatened, in many places it is flourishing as never before.

The Global Explosion of Christianity

How did you come to write *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu*?

Brian Stiller: Each book has a story. This one began years ago as I traveled, working with colleagues internationally, speaking at churches and staff conferences in various parts of the world. But it particularly took hold when, in 2011, after stepping down as a university and seminary president, I was invited to immerse my life in the Christian community as global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance.

Be it in my home country of Canada or in visiting abroad, I was asked to speak on what I was seeing globally. In study and research, reflection, conversation, and observation, I saw particular forces (or as I note, *drivers*) at work, growing and reshaping the church. I tested these with missiologists, seeking to fairly and accurately identify what is at work today in our global Christian community.

Many factors impinge on and free up the gospel witness. My interest was to get to the heart of the drivers creating such remarkable growth. As Patrick Johnstone has noted about this period, "Evangelical Christianity grew at a rate faster than any other world religion or global religious movement." In 1960 evangelicals numbered just under 90 million, and by 2010 that had reached close to 600 million. I wanted to find out who and what they were. I also wanted to see what, within my lifetime, has engaged and continues to engage the reshaping of the church to which I belonged.

What might surprise readers about this "world tour" of the spread of Christianity?

Brian: In the West it is assumed that secular ideas are taking over and Christian faith is dying out. Globally, the opposite is true. Christian faith has exploded.

- In 1900, Africa was home to 8.7 million Christians. Today there are 542 million, with estimates that by 2050 this will rise to 1.2 billion.
- In China, when the Kuomintang government fell to Mao Tse-tung and his forces in 1949, there were under a million Christians in China. Through the Cultural Revolution, Christians were not only "re-educated" but also many were killed. Today the exploding population of Chinese Christians is estimated to number 100 million and more. If the growth continues at the rate of 7 percent, Christians could be 32.5 percent of the Chinese population by 2040 and 66.7 percent by 2050.
- Narrowing this discussion to evangelicals in Latin America, in 1900 there were 50,000. Today there are 100 million.

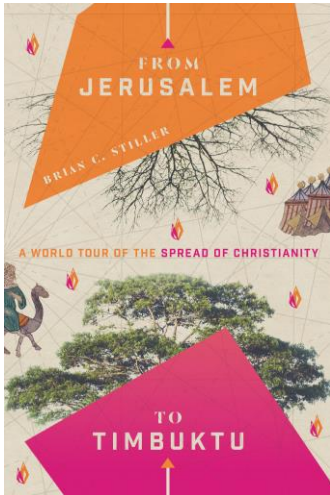
What did you hope as you set out to write this book?

Brian: I looked for prime reasons that held true wherever I went or studied. But I could find

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"The church is growing around the world! Believe it or not, Christianity is stronger than ever and is thriving in unexpected places. In this behind-the-scenes exploration of the global church, Brian Stiller describes and gives examples of what's driving this remarkable expansion of Christianity. Be encouraged. Christian faith is alive and well around the world."

— Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, Wheaton College

nothing comprehensive, synthesized into a big picture. Missiologists would typically take a slice of a more singular point of view, all very helpful and well researched. I wanted a more global view, yet locating those elements that were at the heart of this growth and expansion. I located five drivers, those factors that are foundational to what we have experienced with the spread of Christianity.

What do you hope readers learn in *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu*?

Brian:

- The church is exploding. Interest in faith is sweeping our globe, catching young people within their needs and interests.
- People from all Christian sectors have discovered the person of the Spirit and his gifts—no longer are people spooked by the Spirit. He is real, alive, and interested in empowering us for life and service.
- Globally the church is led by people of the nations. No longer is the West leading.
- Foundational to this rise has been the powerful tool of Bible translation, and it is still going on.
- Millennials no longer are thrown off stride (as was my generation) by political and social issues, but are at the forefront of taking interest in political and civic leadership and widening the gospel witness so that matters of wholeness for the person are very much at its center.



Brian C. Stiller, author of *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu: A World Tour of the Spread of Christianity*
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"While many authors have written ably on the shift of Christianity to the global South, Stiller offers a captivating personal story of remarkable connections with church leaders from all parts of the globe. His expansive vision for the Spirit, the Bible, indigenous Christianity, the public square, and a holistic gospel articulates a clear and hopeful direction for the future of Christianity."

— Todd M. Johnson, associate professor of global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Ambassador for World Evangelical Alliance Explores Spread of Christianity

Brian C. Stiller is global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance. He previously served as president of Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto and was the founder and editor of *Faith Today* magazine.

Stiller was raised in a minister's home on the prairies and received degrees from the University of Toronto (BA in History), Wycliffe College (Master of Religion), and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Doctor of Ministry).

During the 1960s Stiller served as director of Montreal Youth for Christ, Toronto YFC, and Canadian president of Youth for Christ.

From 1983 to 1997 he served as the president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and he was president of Tyndale University College and Seminary from 1995 to 2009. Tyndale is the oldest standing institution of its kind in Canada, serving nearly 1,200 students. During Stiller's presidency they purchased a new campus, and he was appointed president emeritus by Tyndale.

Since July 1, 2011, Stiller has served as global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance, a global alliance that serves nearly 600 million evangelical Christians.

Stiller hosted a national weekly television program *Cross Currents* and is the author of a number of books, including *Praying for the World: An Insider's Guide to Praying for the World*, *Evangelicals Around the World: A Handbook for the 21st Century* (general editor), *Find a Broken Wall: 7 Ancient Principles for 21st Century Leadership*, *You Never Know What You Have 'Till You Give It Away*, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, *Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the Public Square*, *What Happens When I Die?*, *When Life Hurts: A Three-Fold Path to Healing*, and *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill*.

Brian and his wife, Lily, have two grown children and five grandchildren.

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