

Theological Libraries and “The Next Christendom:” Connecting North American Theological Education to Uses of the Book in the Global South

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ABSTRACT: Survey of the past thirty years of librarian literature on the documentation of world Christianity indicates a number of trends in theological librarianship, including a relative inattention to the connection between the documentation of world Christianity in ATLA libraries, and the needs of theological researchers in North America. A trilogy of recent books by Philip Jenkins on the globalization of Christianity argues for the significance of the writings of the “global South” to reading habits in the “global North.” Based on the work of Jenkins and other scholars, this paper identifies ten specific connections between North American theological education and the documentation of world Christianity—connections that are rooted in the uses of the book in the global South. These are reasons for increased promotion and support of the documentation of world Christianity among ATLA libraries.

Readers of the *Summary of Proceedings* from past annual conferences of the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) will observe a tradition of publicly stated concern and group deliberation over present and future efforts to document world Christianity.¹ The depth of this tradition was poignantly evidenced four years ago in a paper by Martha Smalley and Paul Stuehrenberg (Yale Divinity School).² Their paper lists twenty-three articles written by ATLA librarians that focused on the documentation of world Christianity; and, as the authors acknowledge, there are more articles that might have been listed. Review of this literature gives evidence of the principled care and effort of theological librarians who for over thirty years have argued for the importance of ATLA libraries to the study of the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the global South – in Latin America, in Africa, and East Asia.

Reading through these past ATLA presentations, one observes three trends among theological librarians in their efforts to identify and fulfill the responsibilities of North American libraries in the face of the increasing globalization of Christianity. First, the focus of these past statements is the *collection* of theological materials from around the world through strategic acquisition of books, periodicals, pamphlets, papers, and recordings.³

Second, this thematic emphasis on collection development has followed a trend of increasing pragmatism regarding both the anticipated scope of the documentation of world Christianity, and the realizable extent of collaboration

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper read at the 2008 ATLA Annual Conference in Ottawa (June 26, 2008).

² Martha Lund Smalley and Paul Stuehrenberg, “Incorporating Global Perspectives into Theological Education: The Role of the Library.” *Theological Education* 40.1 (2004): 59-71.

³ The emphasis on collection is seen in the following articles: Lewis Day, “Collecting Asian Sources: An Overview,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 47 (1993): 119-122; Timothy Paul Erdel, “From the Colonial Christ and Babylonian Captivity to Dread Jesus: Documenting World Christianity on a Shoestring Budget,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 54 (2000): 83-95; Thomas Reid, “Acquiring Materials on World Christianity in a Small Theological Seminary Library,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 54 (2000): 103-106; Robert L. Phillips, “Acquiring Theological Materials from Korea,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 51 (1997): 151-158; Paul Stuehrenberg, “Collecting Latin American Theological Literature,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 47 (1993): 109-114; Robert Schreiter, “Globalization and Theological Libraries,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 44 (1990): 146-159; Curtis Bochanyin, “Latin American Collecting and Theological Libraries,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 44 (1990): 191-96.

among ATLA libraries. The phenomenal growth of Christian populations in the southern hemisphere, combined with too-limited institutional interest and funding in North America, have led librarians to scale back their expectations for libraries' collections and cooperation. A poignant statement of this pragmatic attitude was provided in 1993 by Dr. Channing Jeschke, former director of the Pitts Theology Library (Emory University), and principal architect of the sub-Saharan African Collection at Pitts Library. After over a decade of effort, Jeschke observed that he was "less optimistic that we can together devise one grand scheme whereby ATLA can address this need through a coordinated, cooperative project for the acquisition of Third World materials."⁴ Similar sentiment is implicit in other more recent presentations that celebrate accomplishments, while wondering aloud whether ATLA collaborations have resulted in better practices, and acknowledging that many of the best recommendations for documenting world Christianity have not been followed.⁵ Perhaps due to this limited success, there has been work to encourage documentation by refocusing individual libraries' efforts at the denominational level.⁶ It is a trend that expresses a growing realism that denominational ties, faculty interests, and existing collection strengths are primary drivers for the expenditure of resources to collect materials from the global South.⁷ "Think globally, act locally" makes for a good bumper-sticker, but in library collection development, thinking locally first is, it seems, the best route to acting globally. If this is accurate, and there is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of local goals and interests to this endeavor, then this highlights the need for ATLA to continue to cultivate personal knowledge and institutional interest in the documentation of world Christianity, and not only the process and workflow of building these collections.

Third, a reader of past ATLA presentations on world Christianity will note that less attention has been given to two other library functions that are equally applicable to the literature of the global South: 1) the curation of this literature (e.g., its cataloging, indexing, preservation, and digitization), and, 2) its connection to our users (e.g., its interpretation and promotion for faculty, students, and other researchers). This difference in relative emphasis on "collection" over against "curation" and "connection" should not, however, be understood as a total disregard for these other components of library services. So, for example, with specific regard to connecting collections to users, Smalley and Stuehrenberg explicitly state that "libraries must be proactive in helping faculty become aware of world Christianity resources relevant to their teaching, going beyond their traditional role of acquiring resources and having them available on the shelves."⁸ This helpful statement echoes other comments made at ATLA conferences by theological faculty, like Judith Berling, who affirmed in 1998 that "faculty may need assistance (and inspiration) [from librarians] in becoming aware of this literature and how to best incorporate it in their courses."⁹ Here, however, the connection is presumably to collections already present in the library, and not to materials that require additional funding and staffing for acquisition. In other words, the connection of faculty and students to the literature of world Christianity has been primarily discussed as interpretation of existing collections, and not

⁴ Channing Jeschke, "Non-European Foreign Acquisitions in the Context of Globalization," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 47 (1993): 116.

⁵ Smalley and Stuehrenberg, "Incorporating Global Perspectives," 65.

⁶ Paul Stuehrenberg, "A (Perhaps Too) Simple Proposal for Documenting World Christianity," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 52 (1998): 109-117.

⁷ See especially the sage comments by David Bundy, "Paradigm for Partnership: Toward a Method for Documenting World Christianity in the Denominational Theological Seminary Library," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 51 (1997): 143-144; cf. Kenneth Sawyer, "Observing Multiculturalism," *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 6, no. 3-4 (2004): 24-25.

⁸ Martha Lund Smalley and Paul Stuehrenberg, "Incorporating Global Perspectives," 68.

⁹ Judith Berling, "Update on the ATS Globalization Project," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 54 (2000): 260. For similar statements, see David Bundy, "Documenting Global Christianity: Churches that are Not Part of the World Council of Churches," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 52 (1998): 103.

promotion of ongoing or additional collection initiatives. To invoke David Stewart's recent listing of metaphors for the function of the library, our collections of world Christianity run the risk of being understood as only "silos" that are "provisions for the season when they are needed." Instead, I think most librarians would view these global collections as "witnesses"—to borrow again from Stewart's list of metaphors—prophetic witnesses that not only point back to forebears in the Christian tradition, but that also point forward to conversations that our faculty and students must engage now, and to books, periodicals, pamphlets, papers, and recordings that our libraries must acquire to sustain this conversation.¹⁰

The present essay is an effort to advance the connection between our institutions and the documents of world Christianity by addressing the question: why should ATLA institutions collect texts that document the growth and current status of Christianity in the global South? Paul Stuehrenberg has answered that libraries should collect the literature of Latin American "because it's there" and is "often on the cutting edge of theological discourse."¹¹ A set of reasons for documenting world Christianity was provided by anthropologist Thomas Correll at the 2002 ATLA Conference: "In my view," Correll states, "every theological library should have a strong collection of ethnographic resources to facilitate culture learning, the preparation for experience and ministry in unfamiliar social worlds, and to make available useful characterizations of the beliefs and values of non-western peoples."¹²

These are certainly cogent and commendable reasons for documentation of world Christianity. What they lack, I would argue, is a specificity and immediacy that enables and energizes librarians to connect current and future collections of world Christianity to the research and curricular needs of our faculty and students. In making this connection, we will often have, of course, well-informed conversation partners among faculty and administrators who are aware of accreditation requirements and past publications (e.g., in the journal *Theological Education*) regarding the significance of globalization to theological education in the twenty-first century. As theological librarians, however, we have a responsibility to be proactive purveyors of access to theological information from around the world, and mentors in its virtuous reading and application.

In this essay I will set out to identify and briefly describe *ten* specific connections between theological education and the documentation of world Christianity that are rooted in the uses of the book in the global South. My hopeful thesis is that our documentation of world Christianity has greater potential to grow and flourish if theological librarians know and proactively articulate the connections of these collections to the interests and activities of our faculty and students. My focus on the use of "the book"—especially the Bible in the global South—will repeatedly appeal to a recently published trilogy of books on world Christianity by Philip Jenkins. Jenkins is widely regarded as an authoritative and accessible writer on the globalization of Christianity, and especially its phenomenal growth in Latin America, Africa, and East Asia. In this essay, the work of Jenkins provides a focus for evaluation of the potential contribution of the literature of the global South to our ATLA institutions.¹³

¹⁰ David R. Stewart, "Issues in Publishing (Research Behaviors Panel)," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 61 (2007): 184-85.

¹¹ Paul Stuehrenberg, "Collecting Latin American Theological Literature," 109.

¹² Thomas Correll, "Voices from the Inside: What Will We Do with Those Literatures from Non-Western Sources?" *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 56 (2002): 91.

¹³ Jenkins's focus on the uses of the book (not pamphlets, audio recordings, or other media) in the "global South" is reflected, with a few exceptions, in the present analysis, although the same set of collection rationale would apply to these other formats. My arguments for documenting world Christianity also reflect Jenkins' focus on Latin America, Africa, and East Asia, although, as we shall see, documentation of the growth of immigrant Christian populations in Europe and North America offers similar insights.

The basic claim of the first book in Jenkins's trilogy, *The Next Christendom*, is that that the center of gravity in the worldwide population of Christianity is shifting south to Africa, Latin America, and East Asia.¹⁴ This thesis was not a novel one when Jenkins's book was first published in 2002. Scholars like Harold Turner and Andrew Walls had previously documented the epochal growth of Christian groups in the southern hemisphere, but it was Jenkins who popularized awareness of this global phenomenon. The demographic trends highlighted by Jenkins are staggering. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Christians in the global South accounted for 16% of Christianity worldwide in 1900. A century later in 2000, 58% of Christians lived in the global South: 1.2 billion people. Projections indicate that, in 2025, 67% of Christians will live in Africa, East Asia, and Latin America. The percentage of the Christian population in Europe and North America, by contrast, will have gone from 82% in 1900 to 32% in 2025.¹⁵ Some estimate that by 2050 there will be approximately three billion Christians in the world, of whom only around one-fifth will be non-Hispanic whites.¹⁶ It is important to acknowledge here that the extent and significance of this shift in the global number of Christian adherents is debated by scholars.¹⁷ But there is general assent to the accuracy of Jenkins's basic claim regarding the quantitative ascendancy of Christians in the two-thirds world of the global South.

Adding to complex demographic shifts in world Christianity are the global patterns of immigration. This topic is a focus of Jenkins most recent book, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*.¹⁸ Echoing other scholarship on the growth of immigrant churches from the global South in Europe and North America, Jenkins argues that the much-heralded demise of Christianity in Europe is mitigated by what he terms the growing "southernization" of Christianity in the global North.¹⁹ A couple of statistics are indicative of this shift in the North American context: in 1960, 40% of immigrants into the United States were from the global South; in 1990 it was 90%. In Canada during the same thirty years, the proportion went from 8% to 70%.²⁰ Given the quantity and concentration of Christians in the global South, immigration from South to North arguably translates into a religious movement. Further treatment of these immigration patterns is outside the ambit of this present paper, but it will be increasingly important to ask: how should these trends in global immigration affect the rationale and resources given for our documentation of world Christianity, especially in light of the fact that an ever increasing number of our citizens and seminarians represent faith communities from the global South?

¹⁴ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁵ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (2nd Edition; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.12-15.

¹⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁷ Critiques of Jenkins's account of "The Next Christendom" include: Frans Wijzen and Robert Schreiter, eds., *Global Christianity: Contested Claims* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007); Peter Phan, "A New Christianity: But What Kind?" *Mission Studies* 22 (2005): 59-83; Emmanuel M. Katongole, "Hauerwasian Hooks and the Christian Social Imagination: Critical Reflections from an African Perspective," in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas* (ed., L. Gregory Jones, et. al.; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 131-152. In response to some critics, Jenkins acknowledges the importance of demographics and population growth to the expansion of Christianity in the global South, especially in Africa: David Fleeer, et. al., "The New Faces of Christianity: Reflection in Four Disciplines," *Restoration Quarterly* 50.2 (2008): 118.

¹⁸ Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰ Jehu J. Hanciles, "Migration and Mission: The Religious Significance of the North-South Divide," in *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross; London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2008), 124.

Of greatest interest to the present study is the thesis of Jenkins's book, *The New Faces of Christianity*, published in 2006 as the second in his trilogy on world Christianity.²¹ The work maintains focus on the worldwide population shifts in contemporary Christianity, but more specifically addresses the implications of these global trends for the teachings and practices of the Christian faith. As the subtitle of the book suggests, a most significant factor in world Christianity is the approach to "believing the Bible in the global South." Jenkins basic thesis is that the interpretation of the Bible in Africa, Asia, and Latin American is shaped by social conditions. The agrarian, tribal, animistic, and economically impoverished cultures of the majority of southern Christians lead to a general identification with the ancient worldview of the Bible. All this distances "southern" readings from the interpretation of scripture in the global North, particularly in North America and Europe.²²

A remarkable and controversial feature of Jenkins's book is his sustained argument that northern Christians have much to learn from southern Christianity, particularly in the use of the sacred book. Jenkins's conclusion is that most Christians in the global South are in a better position to interpret "authentically" the biblical writings than are their spiritual brothers and sisters in the global North, where post-Enlightenment modernization and secularization have alienated many contemporary Christians from the biblical worldview. By contrast, Christians in the global South valorize the authority and message of the Christian scriptures because they immediately identify with the historical realities and social conditions depicted from the first century CE Mediterranean world: "cultures that readily identify with the biblical worldview find it easier to read the Bible not just as historical fact, but as relevant instruction for daily conduct."²³ We may wish to question this assertion, but for librarians attempting to connect their administration, faculty, and students to present and future documentation of world Christianity, Jenkins historical observation and conclusions provide provocative premises for making the case that ATLA schools should more actively pursue and peruse the documentation of world Christianity.

The **first reason** that ATLA libraries should document world Christianity is its potential for enriching our understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Based upon the cultural similarities between many Southern Christians and the social worlds of the ancient Jews, Jenkins argues that interpretations of the sacred text in the global South display greater valuation and understanding of the writings in the Hebrew Bible. This relative emphasis on books of the Hebrew Bible can help to "exorcize the stubborn ghost of Marcion" among northern Christians, opening windows of interpretation for new understandings of the Hebrew Bible. As Jenkins observes: "reading from the South can help free biblical passages and even whole genres from the associations they have acquired from our own historical inheritance."²⁴ In conditions of poverty, social injustice, political violence and corruption, "global South Christians find abundant material in the scriptures, often in passages that resonate little with Northern theologians."²⁵ We might consider, for example, contrasting interpretations of Lamentations in the North and South. The book of Lamentations is read by Walter Brueggemann as a text to interpret through the lens of an "exiled" and "displaced" Christianity in the United States, where the church's cultural and economic influence has waned.²⁶ The interpretation and preaching of Lamentations and other texts from the Hebrew Bible texts are,

²¹ See note 16.

²² The terminologies of global "North" and "South" are, of course, common signifiers of geospatial identity, and should only be understood as general markers of relative location. My use of the terms is heuristic and accommodative, and I acknowledge that they are problematic at the level of defining culture, and frequently misrepresent the facts (e.g., much of Africa, Latin America, and East Asia are in the northern hemisphere).

²³ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 4.

therefore, addressed to “a cultural condition of post-Christendom.”²⁷ By contrast, the interpretation of Lamentations by Chinese theologian Archie Chi Chun Lee emphasizes the relevance of Lamentations to the very real oppression of Christians in China, and the need for an expression of lament that occurs in the face of persecution, and not just the displacement seen by many in North American Christianity.²⁸ This and other contrasting interpretations have the potential to foster greater recognition of the need for documentation of global perspectives in order to comprehend both the ancient biblical text and our contemporary contexts.

A **second reason** for documenting world Christianity is the new light that is cast on the New Testament writings and their religious discourses. Like the cultural affinity with the Old Testament, the cultural conditions of Southern Christians lead to distinctive emphases in interpretation of sacred books, especially with regard to the books of Matthew, Hebrews, James, and Revelation. Jenkins presents evidence that African, East Asian, and Latin American readings of these books shed new light on texts, which have long been mined and interpreted in the scholarly institutions of Europe and North America.

This potential illumination of the biblical text is, according to Jenkins, attributable to a belief in spiritual beings and their active presence and influence today. The animism of many Christians in the global South, it is argued, is more attuned to the supernatural worldview of the biblical authors than the post-Enlightenment perspective of many “Northern” Christians. As a result, biblical accounts of spiritual forces, demons, and other supernatural beings are interpreted literally, and accepted as realities of the present world. In contrast to the demythologizing impulse of modern Western theologians like Rudolf Bultmann, for whom the Bible’s three-storied universe of heaven, earth, and hell is something that “we no longer believe,” believers in the global South exist in a world inhabited by demons, angels, and overt impulses of the divine spirit.²⁹ As Jenkins acknowledges, animistic and charismatic beliefs are well-attested among “Northern Christians,” but the emphasis and predominance of their acceptance is much greater in Africa, Latin America, and East Asia: “Many African and Asian readers appreciate [that] the New Testament worldview was in fact based on the struggle against forces of evil, a cosmic vision that most Americans can no longer accept with any degree of fidelity.”³⁰

The interpretive significance of this “southern” credulity is not simply a matter of assenting to the reality of the miraculous and spiritual influences in human life. Most important is the social and political significance of belief in spiritual powers and miracles for biblical interpretation. One example from my own doctoral dissertation illustrates this point. At the conclusion of my dissertation on the literary and cultural functions of the narrations of escape from prison in the Acts of the Apostles, I come to a final conclusion regarding the significance of these miraculous stories in the contemporary world:

For most [contemporary] readers, these miracles will prove foreign and perhaps even bizarre events. The transferal and appropriation of the prison-escapes’ theology and political ideology will likely prove problematic to those interested in such hermeneutical endeavors. A more apt ‘liberation theology’ might stem from Paul’s imprisonment in Acts 21-28, where oppressive forces are manipulated and subverted through the gradual and invisible operations of divine providence.³¹

My conclusion was grounded in rationalistic presuppositions about miracles in the modern world, and my own experiences as a Christian in the southeastern United States. The effect of my conclusion was to minimize the

²⁷ Ibid., 78.

²⁸ Archie Chi Chun Lee, “Engaging Lamentations and the Lament for the South: a Cross-Textual Reading,” in Marvin L. Chaney, et al. *Distant Voices Drawing Nearer: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

²⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 4.

³⁰ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 184.

³¹ John B. Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison Escape in Acts of the Apostles*. BZNW 131 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 288.

relevance of New Testament miracles for my imagined audience in North American academia. Contrast this conclusion to the following observation by Paul Gifford in his 2005 essay entitled, “A View of Ghana’s New Christianity.” Gifford writes that, “when the New Testament is used [in Ghana], there are some miracles of Jesus that are particularly apposite, but probably more important than the Gospels are the Acts of the Apostles, with Peter’s deliverance from prison (Acts 12) and the freeing of Paul and Silas (Acts 16) particularly significant.”³²

The force and accuracy of Gifford’s claim was driven home for me recently during work on a library exhibit from our sub-Saharan periodicals collection on the topic of Bible and Missions in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the students working on the exhibit discovered a small Methodist publication from Mozambique, entitled *Inhambane Tidings*, which reports the events surrounding a Christian school teacher’s reversion to his indigenous, tribal religion and his subsequent incarceration based on trumped-up charges.³³ The man is suddenly and inexplicably released from prison and returns to his Christian community as an evangelist and teacher. In the news article, the whole series of events is explicitly and elaborately retold according to the storyline of the narratives of imprisonment and miraculous release in Acts chapters 12 and 16. The man is presented as a modern day Peter or Paul, released from prison, and also released for a new life in Christ. I will not here detail the article’s complex intertextuality and distinctively African theology, but this one example of biblical interpretation illustrates the potential of documentation of world Christianity to enrich and even transform biblical interpretation in North America. If I had been attuned to these “southern” voices, my dissertation would have concluded quite differently, and I would have explored more fully the connections of physical and spiritual liberation that are latent, but present in the narratives of Acts, and which were occluded for me by a largely secular and post-Enlightenment approach to biblical interpretation.

A **third reason** for documenting world Christianity is the interpretive value of contemporary cultures in the global South for understanding the history and culture of past Christian eras in the global North. This is a conclusion Philip Jenkins repeatedly arrives at in his analysis of Christian culture and biblical hermeneutics in Africa and East Asia. Jenkins observes that, “African and Asian churches claim a primitive quality, a fidelity to the earliest traditions of the church, and sober scholars of these contemporary versions of the faith note the close resemblances to the Christianity of the Mediterranean world.”³⁴ This correspondence between cultures of early Christianity and the global South has long been noted in works by the missiologist and church historian Andrew Walls, who argues that “we can better understand the early church in light of the recent experience of the churches in Africa and Asia.”³⁵ More specifically, Walls makes the case that the present situation of Christianity in Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Asia resembles the situation in the late second century, when engagement with Hellenistic culture enlarged and refined the church’s understanding of who Christ was.³⁶ Other scholars have highlighted the possibilities for new understanding of ancient Mediterranean beliefs, for example, ancient codes regarding honor and shame in social and religious interaction.³⁷ Moving forward in history, the responses to Christianity among the old religions of Europe that are seen in Patrick, or Bede, or Gregory of Tours are worth comparing to the Christian

³² Paul Gifford, “A View of Ghana’s New Christianity,” in *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (ed. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 86.

³³ Esther Clemens, “Deliverance! ‘And when they saw him they were astonished,’” *Inhambane Tidings* (July 1956): 4. The magazine was published in South Africa “in the interests of the Portuguese East Africa, Transvaal, and Rhodesia Mission of the Free Methodist Church” (2).

³⁴ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 180.

³⁵ Andrew Walls, “The Expansion of Christianity: An Interview with Andrew Walls,” *Christian Century* 117 (August 2-9, 2000): 792-99.

³⁶ Andrew Walls, “Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4.2 (2001): 46.

³⁷ Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 77-103.

encounter with indigenous religions in Africa.³⁸ For librarians, the challenge is not only to make this comparative literature available, but to help forge its connections to the classic theological disciplines, like Patristics, in order to better outfit our libraries as laboratories for understanding not only contemporary Christianity in the global South, but Western cultures in the ancient and medieval worlds.

A **fourth reason** for documenting world Christianity is the capacity for new types of Christian groups in the global South to enhance previous theories about the sociology of religious groups. Jenkins describes the rise of a largely “conservative” Christianity and “literalist” approach to the scriptures within cultures not deeply impacted by the European Enlightenment and the rise of Western science. Though we may question the extent of his claims, his basic thesis raises the possibility of new forms of conservative and neo-orthodox Christianity not driven by the anti-Enlightenment rhetoric that underlies many “fundamentalist” movements in North America and Europe. As Jenkins states it, “fresh Southern readings help restore these traditions like apocalyptic discourse to their ancient centrality within Christian thought, but without the ultraconservative implications that ‘fundamentalism’ has acquired in our own culture.”³⁹ Fundamentalism is, of course, a difficult term to define, and scholars like Paul Gifford have persuasively demonstrated that many African churches are heavily dependent on brands of fundamentalism native to the United States.⁴⁰ But the validity of Jenkins basic claim is supported on a number of fronts, including a 1985 report on the African Independent (or Instituted) Churches (AICs), written by the Independent Churches themselves. After writing on how seriously they take the Bible, they continue: “Some will say that we are therefore ‘fundamentalists.’ We do not know whether that word applies to us or not.... We do not have the same problems about the Bible as White people with their Western scientific mentality.”⁴¹ For scholars and students in our seminaries and universities, the value of this literature may, therefore, lie partly in its witness to new or renewed forms of Christianity that hold firmly to a “high view” of the authority of the Christian scriptures, but that either avoid, or provide alternative accounts of Scripture in response to historical and scientific criticism of the Bible. The documentation of these global voices in our libraries may, therefore, provide useful comparative data for study and assessment of Enlightenment critiques and fundamentalist apologetics of the type that continue to have significance in the academic study of religion in North America.

A **fifth reason** for actively collecting the literature of world Christianity is its potential contribution to interreligious understanding and dialogue. Southern Christianities are most proximate to many forms of contemporary Islam: “The Christianity of Africa and much of Asia has a great deal in common with the Islam of those regions.”⁴² As Jenkins points out, this proximity is both geographical and ideological. Unlike northern Christianity’s focus on the objections of its “cultured despisers” and the critiques of modern day secularism, the primary opposition to many forms of Southern Christianity are competing forms of religiosity, especially Islam. The documentation of world Christianity is therefore an account of interreligious rhetoric and dialogue, from which our North American culture may have much to learn. This is especially the case because most forms of Southern Christianity share much in common with the worldview of classical Islam, e.g., the widespread belief in spiritual forces, the appreciation of agrarian and nomadic lifestyles, and especially the “primary orality” of a culture in which written texts and their

³⁸ Lamin Sanneh, “Global Christianity and the Re-education of the West,” *Christian Century* 112.22 (July 19-26, 1995): 716.

³⁹ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 17.

⁴⁰ Paul Gifford, “Christian Fundamentalism, State and Politics in Black Africa,” in *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (ed. David Westerlund; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 198-216.

⁴¹ African Independent Churches, *Speaking for Ourselves: Members of African Independent Churches Report on their Pilot Study of the History and Theology of their Churches* (Braamfontein: Institute for Contextual Theology, 1985), 26.

⁴² Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 27.

reading are the exception rather than the rule. In this way, the documentation of world Christianity may be one of our best points of access for understanding the history and thought of Islam worldwide.

A **sixth reason** is that documenting world Christianity promotes more holistic understanding and practices of healthcare. In his book, Philip Jenkins spotlights the potential contribution of non-Western views of spiritual healing, observing the almost complete absence of this topic in contemporary academic circles: “How many seminaries, even those with conservative or evangelical leanings, offer courses on spiritual healing?”⁴³ Beyond such rhetorical questions, Jenkins makes a normative claim that Christians in North America and Europe have a moral responsibility to reconsider and learn from the practices of healing in the global South: “The worst offense committed by global North Christians is not that they use conventional medicine, but that so few recognize its spiritual dimensions.”⁴⁴ Such analysis suggests that our theological institutions have much to benefit from traditions of spiritual health and wholeness in the global South—traditions that must first be documented in order to be studied.

A **seventh reason** for documenting world Christianity is to record the distinctive practices of religious reading in the global South. Much documentation from the global South reflects the importance of group identity and communal ritual in the engagement of the biblical text. Reading is often a public and social event, with the biblical text and its interpretations passed through the echo-chamber of community memory and circumstances. The communal quality of African readings of Scripture may provide new models for the kinds of ecclesial interpretation called for by contemporary theologians, like Luke Timothy Johnson, who emphasize not only the church’s corporate body of interpreters, but the religious experience and discernment of the divine spirit in the act of reading and understanding.⁴⁵ For his part, Philip Jenkins emphasizes the impact of this communal hermeneutic on the understanding of the community’s authority in the global South: “experiencing scripture communally promotes exalted concepts of the nature of the group that hears the sacred word; there is a sense that the religious community becomes the vehicle for the divine message.”⁴⁶ Such religious practices are full of possibilities for our professors and students of worship, liturgy, and congregational life. Many of our faculty are already aware of the importance of these practices and will support librarian overtures to document these forms of reading in the global South.⁴⁷

An **eighth reason** is closely related to the previous one: printed and multimedia accounts of Christianity in the global South provide evidence of oral practices of reading seen in the New Testament world, and represent a type of “primary orality” in reading and recitation that is alien to most Christians in the northern hemisphere.⁴⁸ As Jenkins observes, reading in the global South has an “incantatory quality, with presenters making full use of body language and vocal tones.”⁴⁹ This embodiment of the written word holds great promise, not only for historical study, but for practical theology and efforts to involve and enliven the whole person and community in practices of reading and listening.

⁴³ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 26.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the account of worship services among the “Aaronistas” of Guadalajara in David Bundy, “Documenting ‘Oneness’ Pentecostalism: A Case Study in the Ethical Dilemmas Posed by the Creation of Documentation,” *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 53 (1999): 162-163.

⁴⁸ The classic treatment of “primary orality” is that of Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (New York: Methuen, 1982).

⁴⁹ Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 26.

A **ninth reason** for documenting world Christianity is the potential for concepts and practices of theological scholarship in the global South to reorient the global enterprise of theological scholarship and education. Though relatively little attention is given to this topic in Jenkins's book, scholars like Kwame Bediako and Andrew Walls have observed the benefits that might accrue to North American schools through examination and discerning adoption of non-Western understandings of theological scholars and scholarship.⁵⁰ A poignant example of this re-conceptualization is seen in the work of the Korean scholar, Moonjang Lee, who has made focused attempts to demonstrate the importance of East Asian Christianity to "Western" notions of religious studies, particularly the conception of the scholar of religion as someone who is focused on a sharply delimited field of theological inquiry. In a 2006 essay, Lee argues for the reformatting of theological education away from Western norms in which even a biblical scholar dare not specialize in the whole of Scripture: "With respect to the study of Christianity as a religion," Lee writes, "Asian Christians find this compartmentalization of theology with its departmental specializations alien to their cultural and religious experience. An Asian traditional expert in religious learning and teaching is perceived to be someone who has attained a comprehensive and integrated understanding of that religion. We should find a way to overcome this compartmentalized theology."⁵¹

Lee proceeds to argue that "Asian indigenous Christian scholarship" does not reduce the study of religion to the methodology of the social sciences, as is often the case in the West, but seeks to study the religious dimension of the Christian faith as something not reducible to secular categories. Lee's claims highlight the need for librarians to collect works representative of this perspective, and to connect them to our administrators and faculties as sources for professional reflection and development.

A **tenth reason** for documentation of world Christianity is greater accuracy in "northern" representations of what is read, heard, and written by Christians in the global South. In his account of the literature on world Christianity in the global North, Jenkins is aligned with many ATLA librarians in their dissatisfaction with the present state of documentation of global Christianity in the Western academy. As Jenkins repeatedly notes, there is often a broad gap between, on the one hand, the texts favored by Western scholarship on the global South, and, on the other hand, the texts and interpretations that emerge from the vast majority of Christians who occupy congregations and populate revival meetings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: "For this demotic thought world we must look to more commonplace sources, such as sermon texts, writings by local clergy and seminary educators, testimonies, best-selling memoirs and devotional works, or the kind of popular Christian writing that appears so often in popular media."⁵² Such observations buttress arguments for the development of unique collections on world Christianity that reflect indigenous voices, rather than market forces and ideologies of Western scholars and publishers.

Jenkins himself relies heavily on these primary sources, especially African periodicals and scholarly accounts of African sermons in order to make general claims about the nature of Christianity in the global South.⁵³ So, for example, indigenously published periodicals and local church hymnbooks are essential to Jenkins's account of indigenous Christian belief and practice.⁵⁴ The value of these types of primary documents, which are often ephemeral

⁵⁰ Kwame Bediako, "A New Era in Christian History – African Christianity as Representative Christianity: Some Implications for Theological Education and Scholarship," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 9.1 (2006): 3-7; Andrew Walls, "Scholarship, Mission, and Globalization: Some Reflections on the Christian Scholarly Vocation in Africa," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 9.2 (2006): 34-37; Evertt Huffard, "When Scholarship Goes South: Biblical Scholarship and Global Trends," *Restoration Quarterly*, 48.2 (2006): 65-72; Andrew Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," in *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Rodney L. Petersen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 166-183.

⁵¹ Moojang Lee, "The Asianisation of Theological Education," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 9.2 (2006): 42.

⁵² Philip Jenkins, *New Faces of Christianity*, 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53, 203n18, 212n29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

in nature, has long been championed by ATLA librarians, and Jenkins's books underscores the importance of their collection to historical analysis that is based in documentary evidence and not merely driven by the contemporary trends and fashions of academic guilds.

This articulation of ten reasons for documenting world Christianity provides multiple and varied points of connection between library collections and theological institutions. And, because they address the use of the book in the global South, these connections also have the potential to inspire librarians on a personal level, due to their traditional interest in practices of reading. These connections also advance beyond vague statements of the need for ethnographic study of world Christianity and inter-cultural dialogue with believers in the global South. Whether used as bullet-points in budget or grant proposals, or talking-points with administrators and faculty, I argue that these are provocative and potentially persuasive justifications for initiating and earnestly developing collections that document world Christianity. Librarians (and others) should debate the validity and value of these ten rationales—they might modify this list, add to it, or overhaul it completely—but this dialogue and dissent will itself contribute to a reorientation of a traditional conceptualization of these collections: they are not (only) crypts or time capsules for future exhumation, but are timely and engaging witnesses to the majority of Christians in the world today, and to some of the most burning questions of scriptural interpretation and religious identity in global Christianity.

The avenues for making these connections between theological collections and clientele will vary according to context and circumstance. For some librarians, the avenue will be a two-way conversation. The discussion may center on financial resources, or on resources for syllabi and course assignments. For others the avenue will be a one-way announcement of possibilities, as in an online guide to research on theological topics, or the assignment of a subject heading in a catalog record, or the selection of materials for a library exhibition. For some others, conferences and publications will provide opportunities to forge connections to our collections upon a broader multi-lane highway of professional and academic discourse. The hope of this essay is that librarians might further map and travel these avenues, connecting readers' uses of books to the uses of the book in the global South, and inspiring interest and investment in the documentation of world Christianity.

