The Southern Shift in World Christianity: A Kairos Episode for the Believers Church

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Recommended Citation

Pickens, George, "The Southern Shift in World Christianity: A Kairos Episode for the Believers Church" (2011). Faculty Scholarship Papers. 30.
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To: Term-Tenure and Promotion Committee

From: George F. Pickens

Date: August 9, 2010

RE: Attached Essay

The attached essay is submitted as an “Alternate Professor Essay” in place of the Christian Scholarship Essay (COE Handbook 6.16.08.04d). This essay has been peer reviewed and was recently published in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, eds. Abe Dueck *et al* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2010), pp. 307-323.

Given my academic discipline the Christian dimensions of this essay are obvious, yet I highlight the representative significance of this essay for my work at Messiah College. This example of scholarship draws upon the three central areas of my teaching and scholarship: World Christianity, Christian Theology, and Christian Ministries and Missions (Applied Theology). It also addresses the four audiences I regularly engage in my vocation: students, scholars, pastors and missionaries. Employing a theological analysis of the community of Christian Faith (ecclesiology) to interpret relations between Christians in the global North and South, the essay applies the significance of these commonalities in World Christianity to my specific faith traditions (the Believers Church and the Church of the Brethren). Consequently, I believe this essay not only demonstrates my ability to complete peer-reviewed scholarship, but it also represents the integration of the three primary fields and four major audiences of my vocation.
Chapter Seventeen

The Southern Shift in World Christianity: A Kairos
Episode for the Believers Church

George F. Pickens

Christians around the world are finally becoming aware of the historic times in which they live. Christians in the global North\(^1\) have come to this realization slowly and recently, and in similar ways Christians in the South are beginning to comprehend their significance at the epicentre of world Christianity. These momentous times in which Christians are living result from relatively recent changes in the global composition of the church in which the majority of the world’s Christians now reside in the lands of the southern hemisphere. Although this recent phenomenon underscores the significance of the new southern heartlands for the faith, Christianity is no stranger to the global South.

\(^1\) In this paper the terms “global North” or simply “North” refer to the five United Nations (UN) regions (55 countries) comprising Europe and North America. The terms “global South” or “South” refer to the sixteen UN regions (185 countries) comprising Africa, most of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australia/New Zealand. See United Nations, *List of Regional Groupings*, 2008, [http://www.mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Data/RegionalGroupings.htm](http://www.mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=Data/RegionalGroupings.htm).
Christianity first emerged in and from Asia, and it remained a predominately southern faith for the first six centuries of its existence. After 600 CE Christianity's statistical centre of gravity moved gradually north and west, so that by 1500 most of the followers of Jesus on earth, approximately 92 percent were northerners.\(^2\) This latter period in which Christianity became linked historically and culturally with Europe is the one which has defined the faith for most Christians for five centuries. Indeed, many in the North and South still view Christianity in terms of this period, as a faith in and of Europe.

However, since 1500 a reverse trend has been taking place, although slowly and gradually. From 1500 until 1900, Christianity's centre of gravity moved steadily southward, and by 1950 the statistical centre of Christianity moved south of Jerusalem\(^3\) for the first time since Jesus walked the earth. Between 1900 and 1970 the southern shift was sharper and more obvious, and soon after 1980 southern Christians outnumbered those in the North for the first time in a thousand years. By 2005, this southward shift meant that 65 percent of all Christians lived in the global South,\(^4\) and these trends will continue so that by 2100 the global centre of Christianity is projected to be in northern Nigeria. Yet, even before that time Christianity will have come full circle in terms of its composition and geographical centre, out of the South and back again.\(^5\)

This historic inversion of the statistical centre of world Christianity is a result of the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the South and the accompanying decline of the church in the North. The wane of Christianity in Europe is usually understood to be the product of lower birth rates coupled with the impact of secularism and communism. Even though statistics on church attendance don't reveal a marked decline in Christianity in the United States similar to the experience of Europe, it can be argued that a decline has

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\(^3\) South of 31.8 degrees north latitude.


occurred nonetheless, demonstrated in a growing shift away from historic Christianity and towards an emergent form of deism.\textsuperscript{6} Regardless of how this ebb is interpreted, however, the statistical decline of Christianity in the North has been clearly demonstrated.\textsuperscript{7}

The growth of Christianity in the southern lands has also been well documented and interpreted, at least in general and regional terms.\textsuperscript{8} Although at least one scholar foresaw the southern shift of Christianity over twenty-five years ago,\textsuperscript{9} this trend was largely a well-kept secret within the academic community. More recently, however, a spate of articles and books has popularized the rise of southern Christians to the global majority.\textsuperscript{10} These sources recount Christianity's southward spread through tales of triumph over formidable obstacles, internal and external, historical and cultural, religious and political, indigenous and imperial. While the protagonists in Christianity's most recent southern story were initially thought to be Northerners, it is now clear that they have been indigenous southern Christians, men and women who were "the most effective interpreters of Christianity to their own people."\textsuperscript{11} The rise of southern Christianity is a narrative of waning European power and ascendant local initiatives that have resulted, not only in political independence for many, but also in religious and theological autonomy. Consequently, local expressions of Christianity have emerged throughout the global South, many of which are radically dissimilar from their northern correlatives.


\textsuperscript{7} For example, Johnson and Chung, "Tracking Global Christianity."


\textsuperscript{10} The works of Philip Jenkins listed above are examples.

\textsuperscript{11} Robert, "Shifting Southward," 53.
This re-formulation of the faith in the South is taking place across Christian traditions, and this reconfiguration of the global church has great significance for the Believers Church. One of the most significant products of this southward shift of global Christianity is the disintegration of Christendom: that linking of geography and state favouritism with Christian faith that became synonymous with northern Christianity. However, because Believers Church ecclesiology doesn’t rely on Christendom models, this southern shift in world Christianity represents a kairos episode for the Believers Church, a time replete with possibilities and opportunities.

In the sections that follow, the potential significance of the southern shift of Christianity for the Believers Church will be examined. Three common and non-Christendom idioms to understand the Church, which suggest a strategic role for the Believers Church, will be summarized. An illustration of how one Believers Church has engaged this new global Christian conversation will follow. Then, several possibilities for renewal of the Believers Church that result from this new North-South conversation will be offered.

Global God-Talk about the Church: The southern shift in global Christianity has been heralded as both good news and bad. While it is widely acknowledged that the growth of Christianity in the South represents a dynamic spread and revitalization of the faith, it has been argued that a dangerous polarization within the global church is developing. Philip Jenkins has warned about a growing southern fundamentalism that could prove to be destructive for relations between Christians North and South. The current controversy over homosexuality within the worldwide Anglican Communion is one example of a North-South conflict, and it is possible that these clashes will spread and intensify.

While it can be argued that Jenkins has misunderstood the nature of southern Christianity and that the dangers associated with the spread of

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12 For ease of expression, throughout I will use the term "Believers Church" to refer to that body as it exists in North America. I realize that expressions of the Believers Church exist elsewhere, yet this paper addresses primarily the North American community.


14 Ibid.
southern Christian fundamentalism are exaggerated, still cause for concern is warranted. Given the colossal differences in contexts within the global church, it is not surprising that Christians from different hemispheres misunderstand and even mistrust each other. Minority Christians in the North, formed by affluence and unique historical and cultural experiences, are ill-equipped to understand and engage constructively their poorer and differently formed brothers and sisters in the South. Likewise, majority Christians in the South are largely uninformed of the complex historical and cultural processes that have shaped Christianity in the North. In order to facilitate global conversation across this gulf, minority and majority Christians must discover positive ways to relate to each other.

One way to proceed is to foster a North-South conversation that draws upon the commonalities among global Christians. For example, all Christians, North or South, do theology in narrative ways whenever they speak about God (to use Augustine’s definition). Indeed, northern and southern Christians have characteristic forms of “God-Talk,” ways of articulating and practicing their faith that are narrative yet idiomatic and often misunderstood by the other. In order to facilitate understanding and appreciation across this global Christian divide, a significant role exists for interpreters to translate the idiomatic God-Talks of the North and South. Because she shares with many southern Christians a basic ecclesiology which doesn’t build upon Christendom, the Believers Church is well-placed to become such an interpreter within the global Christian community.

Historically, the Believers Church has defined herself through eight affirmations, and these convictions represent the basic theological idioms the Believers Church uses to do theology, to talk about God internally, and to carry out God-Talk with those outside the tradition. These core convictions also express the basic ecclesiology of the Believers Church, an understanding of the community of faith that doesn’t build upon Christendom. Indeed, Believers Church ecclesiology is a rejection of the state-church model of

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Christendom. So, when this distinctive and non-Christendom God-Talk about the Church is heard within the contemporary global context in which most southern communities are not formed by a Christendom model, common ecclesiastical idioms between the Believers Church and southern Christians can be detected. As non-Christendom ecclesiologies, these shared ways of understanding and being the community of faith are products of similar historical experiences with power structures. Like most members of the southern Church, many in the Believers Church talk about their faith communities using narratives that include varying degrees of marginalization, oppression, and persecution. Many within the Believers Church, like their contemporary southern counterparts, began their Christian journeys among communities of the poor and under-educated, suffering at the hands of those in power. Communities formed without the support of the powerful, then, are shared themes in the faith stories of Christians within the Believers Church and inside the majority church in the South.

Given these similar non-Christendom cradle experiences, it is not surprising that, when the Believers Church and many southern Christians talk of their faith communities, they employ similar ecclesiastical idioms or common theological forms of expression. While I am not suggesting that the entirety of the southern Church embraces Believers Church ecclesiology, I am saying that when many southern Christians engage in God-Talk about the church, they use non-Christendom idioms that are also used by the Believers Church. Here it will be possible to introduce only three shared ecclesiastical idioms in order to highlight a potential strategic role for the Believers Church within the global Christian conversation.

A Community of the Book: The Believers Church affirms the authority of the written word, so that the Bible is central to her identity, articulated in her beliefs, and animated in her practices. The Believers Church is also an interpreting community in which the Bible is read, interpreted, and applied communally. Rather than building on a Christendom model in which a significant role in biblical interpretation is given to state and ecclesiastical authorities, for the Believers Church it is understood that God speaks through the Book as it is discerned through the local community of faith.

Likewise, it has been demonstrated that the majority church in the global South is also a community formed by and around the Book, without the
external influences of the Christendom model.\textsuperscript{17} Even though many members of the southern church are pre-literate, still the stories and teachings within the Bible are central and formative for the identity of the faith community. Biblical themes of slavery, exile, restoration, dreams, healings, deliverance, prophecies, and spiritual warfare resonate with much of the majority church in the South.\textsuperscript{18} These themes which challenge the Bible's relevance in the North are exactly the ones which convince the average Christian in the South that the Bible is a living text.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, one of the commonly noted factors for the phenomenal growth of the southern church is the availability of the Scriptures in the vernaculars. This places the grassroots reading and application of the Bible at the centre of the local community of faith, and this is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Africa, where "Christianity has been from the beginning book-religion."\textsuperscript{20} This African reliance upon the sacred text for communal identity, belief, and practice has been compared with the experiences of the early Anabaptists, so that clear parallels between large segments of the southern church and the Believers Church emerge.\textsuperscript{21} When the Believers Church and the southern Church look to the Bible to form and inform their understandings of their faith communities, they are speaking a similar ecclesiastical idiom.

A Restoring Community: This reliance upon the Bible has led the Believers Church also to use widely the ecclesiastical idiom of restitution, restoration, or primitivism. The Believers Church affirms that the pristine church of the apostolic age is the timeless example for the church.\textsuperscript{22} When the church fails to follow the patterns of the first church, a restoration of the church may be accomplished through a return to the primitive purity of the New Testament. Thus, one of the formative historical and theological themes of the Believers

\textsuperscript{17} Jenkins, "Liberating Word," 22-26.
\textsuperscript{19} Jenkins, "Liberating Word," 22.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 48-51.
\textsuperscript{22} Durnbaugh, "Summary of Believers' Church Affirmations, 322-323.
Church has been its struggle to restore the original simplicity, purity, discipleship, and dynamism of the earliest church, while also keeping the ancient faith meaningful. Believers Church ecclesiology, then, looks to the past and draws upon the experiences of the first Christian communities to enlighten contemporary communal experiences.

This traditionalistic ecclesiology, which seeks to restore the purity and simplicity of the primitive church, is also characteristic of large segments of the majorities in the southern hemisphere. Many African Instituted Churches demonstrate a clear intention to restore the patterns and dynamism of the New Testament Church, and many African Christians form their identities through attempts to emulate the first Christians. Pentecostalism is arguably the largest form of Christianity in the global South, and it emerges from “that movement for stripping away of the extraneous, known as primitivism, whereby the believer transcends tradition to re-enter the New Testament.” The resonance of the dominant cultures in the Bible with the realities of everyday life in the southern hemisphere give the Bible a relevance which leads many southern Christians to form their daily lives by attempting to re-create the biblical communities of faith. Because their worlds so resemble those of the Bible, it is widely believed that they should live as did the people of faith described in the Bible. Consequently, when the Believers Church and the southern church speak of the community of faith, using the idiom of restoration or primitivism, they should understand each other.

A Separated Community: The common idiom of primitivism leads to another distinctive element of shared ecclesiastical God-Talk: the identity of the church as a separated community. Over against the Christendom models of sixteenth-century Europe, the Believers Church gathers a pilgrim people who

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25 Martin, Pentecostalism, 115.
26 Jenkins, The New Faces of Christianity.
27 This was a surprising experience during my service alongside African Instituted Churches. See Pickens, African Christian God-Talk, 201-202.
are citizens of the kingdom of God, whose primary allegiance is to that realm. The Believers Church, therefore, has understood itself to be a community in the world, yet to some extent to be separated from the world. Many members of the Believers Church view themselves as a minority community called to demonstrate their distinctives in humble yet obvious ways. Thus, the Believers Church has a long history of closely examining the relationship between the church and wider society distinguished by varying degrees of suspicion for and distance from the social and even theological mainstream. This understanding of a separated community has led many members of the Believers Church to embrace distinctive dress and various forms of nonresistance and nonparticipation in order to distinguish them from the Christian majority.

Christians in the global South also experience their faith in non-Christendom contexts, and many understand their churches as separated, even marginalized, communities. For some, their very profession of Christianity places them within a minority and identifies them as members of a distinctive community. Within southern lands dominated by Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or various primal religions, Christians live and practice their faith as a separated people, often suffering various forms of persecution. Additionally, many Christians living in southern lands dominated by Christianity also experience their faith in communities set apart from the mainstream churches. The classic example is members of African Instituted Churches who are obviously set apart through their display of distinctive dress, colourful public processions, and loud and lively worship. Protestant communities in Latin America and Pentecostal communities throughout the global South are additional examples of separated minorities within Christian majorities.

A recent and exciting example of southern Christians who understand themselves as pilgrims separated from the majority are members of the growing numbers of “insider movements” emerging in Muslim contexts in Asia. These movements are best known in Bangladesh, where “tens of

28 Durnbaugh, "Summary of the Believers’ Church Affirmation,” 322-323.
29 A general description of these movements throughout South Asia can be found in Dudley Woodberry, "A Global Perspective on Muslims Coming to Faith in Christ,” in
thousands” of disciples of Jesus follow their Lord within the broader context of Islam. These communities, found in all sixty-four districts of Bangladesh, have a distinctive identity that separates them from the Muslim majority and Christian minority, and it is ironic that members of these distinctive communities face their fiercest persecution at the hands of the established Christian communities. Like their brothers and sisters in the Believers Church from another time and place, these contemporary Asian pilgrims face environments—politically and religiously—hostile to their set-apart communities of faith. Consequently, when they speak the ecclesiastical idiom of separation from the world, the Believers Church should understand.

Because Believers Church ecclesiology is not based on Christendom, it employs ecclesiastical idioms commonly used by Christians in the global South, who are also being church in non-Christendom contexts. This commonality provides an opportunity for the Believers Church to play a strategic role in helping the global church to relate across the hemispheric divide. Positioned solidly in northern Christianity and conversant with Christendom models of the faith, yet also familiar with the formative experiences of the non-Christendom South, the Believers Church in a sense speaks both theological languages. While the limits of this paper do not allow a discussion of other common ways of talking about the church, those mentioned above demonstrate how the idiomatic theology of the Believers Church allows it to be bilingual, speaking both northern and southern God-Talk to describe the community of faith. The three ecclesiastical idioms highlighted above continue to form the distinctive ways the Believers Church in the North views herself and, from this base understanding, the Believers Church can understand and communicate the identity of many of the churches gathered in the South. At the same time, the Believers Church in the North can interpret in the other direction across the global Christian divide to assist southerners to understand the ecclesiologies of their northern brothers and sisters.


Even so, using this common language to talk about the church in the global context is challenging and stretching for all involved, yet it is being done. One example of a North-South conversation taking place within the global Believers Church will now be summarized. This conversation is based upon shared ecclesiastical idioms and history, yet it is also formed by significantly different contemporary contexts. This partnership will highlight the possibilities of North-South relationships forged around common ecclesiastical idioms.

Christian Communities in Conversation: The Church of the Brethren and the Ekklesiatar Yanu'wa a Nigeria: The Ekklesiatar Yanu'wa a Nigeria is the largest national body of the church of the Brethren in the world, with over 150,000 members. This robust community of faith emerged from the work of Church of the Brethren missionaries and, from its beginning in 1923 in north-eastern Nigeria, the Brethren mission focussed on establishing an indigenous African church that was relevant to the local context. Rather than attempting to import their denomination from North America, the mission sought to form Nigerian Christians rather than Brethren, thus demonstrating their core distinctive of restoration of the New Testament pattern (conversion rather than proselytization). In order to form these Nigerian communities of faith, four holistic approaches were utilized: evangelism (church-planting), education, health care, and rural development; these methods reflected the mission's understanding of the relevance of faith to everyday life. In these ways the mission emphasized Christianity as a way of life rather than a mere

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31 For example, for many years North American Mennonites have served in the way that is being described among African Independent Churches. See David A. Shank, ed., Ministry of Missions to African Independent Churches (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1989); and David A. Shank, ed., Ministry in Partnership with African Independent Churches (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1991).
32 A Hausa term literally translated “the church of the children from the same mother.”
34 Chalmer E. Faw, “Profile of Brethren Mission: An Evaluation of Fifty Years in Nigeria,” Brethren Life and Thought 1, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 86.
creed, so the church was introduced as a community formed more by the orthopraxy of Jesus and the first Christian communities than the orthodoxy of later Christianity. Consequently, the Nigerian church was established as a faith community under the authority of the Bible and around the pattern of the earliest Christian communities. This restorative and Bible-based approach to being the church was consistent with the European and North American experiences of the Brethren, and it has equipped the Nigerian church to build upon this ecclesiology in its own context.

When the Ekklesiar Yan'wa a Nigeria was formed as an independent national body in 1972, the Church of the Brethren was invited to remain in partnership. North American Brethren have continued to send long-term and short-term personnel to serve in specialized capacities, mainly teachers and partnership coordinators. The Church of the Brethren also provides funds for specific projects and initiatives, and most North American Brethren now view their Nigerian counterparts as equal partners while some in the Nigerian church still understand the North American church to be the dominant partner. Yet, both communities have expressed the value of this relationship. From the Nigerian Brethren, the Church of the Brethren receives insights into church growth, an enlarged perspective on faith and the world, and "a greater sensitivity to the cross-cultural nature of the gospel." From their northern partners the Ekklesiar Yan'wa a Nigeria receives funds, personnel, and resources for developing her contextualized understanding of peace through reconciliation.37

What is especially relevant here is the way in which this partnership, born of a common history, builds upon a shared ecclesiology. Not only do both faith communities continue to view themselves as formed around the Bible and patterned after the earliest churches, but their common understanding of the church as a separated community is also formative for their partnership. On the one hand, the Church of the Brethren was fashioned in Europe and the United States within the contexts of war, relative affluence, and Christendom.

36 Scott Holland, interview by George F. Pickens, 1 May 2008.
In this milieu Brethren expressed their separation from the Christian majority through commitments to non-violence and simplicity, both striking alternatives to the violence and affluence of their environments. The Ekklesiar Yanu'wa a Nigeria, on the other hand, emerged within the context of poverty, injustice, tribalism, and the dominance of other religions (Islam and resilient primal religions). To be a separated community in this context also meant to be a peace church, but peace that is understood and expressed differently. The Church of the Brethren's identity as a peace church has meant primarily a commitment to non-participation in war, but for Nigerian Brethren being a peace church means primarily a commitment to reconciliation. Indeed, the Ekklesiar Yanu'wa a Nigeria now considers herself a peace church more than ever before; but rather than peace being understood primarily as the absence of war, it is understood that the community of faith should be committed to peace expressed through reconciliation between tribes, religions, and wholeness in the presence of evil and injustice. Thus, a shared ecclesiastical idiom—a separated community understood as a peace church—allows for conversation and partnership which makes room for north-south contextual differences. The role of North American Brethren in this partnership illustrates the strategic possibility that exists for the Believers Church to broker such North-South conversations, building upon shared idioms for being communities of faith.

Shared understandings of the church as a peace community have also allowed North American Brethren to broker global conversations even more widely. Since the World Council of Churches declared the first decade of the twenty-first century to be “The Decade to Overcome Violence,” the Church of the Brethren has been actively involved with other Historic Peace churches in a global conversation focussing on the significance of their common ecclesiastical idiom. While this conversation is taking place in lower profile and on local levels around the world, two larger conferences have been held in which communities of faith sharing similar ecclesiologies have participated. The first was a gathering of mostly Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers held in Bienenberg, Switzerland in June 2001. This conference focussed on more global and general issues, and the proceedings have been published. The

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38 Bugu, “Reconciliation or Pacifism?” 129-130.
39 Enns, Holland, and Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace.*
second gathering was organized in Nairobi, Kenya in August 2004. This conference dealt with issues more specific to Christian communities of peace in Africa; these proceedings have also been published.40

For our purposes these ongoing conversations are significant for at least three reasons. First, these conferences illustrate how shared understandings of the church can bring Christians together from several traditions. Rather than focusing on the more inhospitable and limiting aspects of Christian doctrine (what is believed), these conversations proceed from more hospitable common expressions of Christian community (what is experienced and shared with others). While these two dimensions of the faith are ultimately interdependent, the ecumenical possibilities for proceeding from the latter are clearly illustrated.

Second, these conversations around common ecclesiastical idioms are global, including Christians from the minority North and the majority South. Thus, the ecumenical possibilities of shared ways of understanding the church are realized on an even deeper level, as the hemispheric divide is crossed. Even though, as we have seen in Nigeria, a common ecclesiastical idiom doesn’t necessarily mean shared understandings, nevertheless constructive North-South conversations can take place when commonalities are realized.

Third, these global gatherings of peace churches illustrate the strategic role offered to the Believers Church in this kairos episode of world Christianity. The non-Christendom, and thus more global and translatable, ecclesiastical idioms of Brethren and Mennonites have allowed these communities to lead in these initiatives, and this ability highlights how the Believers Church is well placed to broker further North-South conversations. When these shared ways of being the church are supplemented with the resources of the Believers Church in the North and the dynamism and vitality of the churches in the South, exciting possibilities for the global church can be realized.

Seizing the Kairos Moment: In order for her church to increase her faithfulness in engaging the possibilities of this kairos episode in the global history of Christianity and broker more broadly and deeply the kinds of global

40 Donald E. Miller, Scott Holland, Lon Fendall, and Dean Johnson, eds., Seeking Peace in Africa (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing, 2007).
conversations that were illustrated above, the Believers Church needs to continue transformations that have already begun. One of the most significant adjustments builds upon one of the implications of the above discussion of shared ecclesiastical idioms. In the current global context, as demonstrated above, what resonates with many majority Christians in the South are the most fundamental and historic elements of Believers Church ecclesiology. Indeed, formed as she is through varying degrees of crisis and marginalization, the Believers Church’s historic experiences and consequent theological expressions allow her to relate to the plight of most southern Christians. So, as the Believers Church struggles with the relevance of her past, and even as she experiments with shifts away from distinctives that are believed by some to have lost their usefulness, the Believers Church must understand the strategic role she can play in the global church because of her identity, not in spite of it. This should encourage the Believers Church to remain grounded in her historic identities and to build upon them in fresh ways.

Even so, this is not permission for complacency, rigidity, or any form of historical or theological legalism. Indeed, this kairos moment for the Believers Church can be seized only when she ceases to be preoccupied with herself and her survival, and then takes deliberate steps to actively, intentionally, and globally apply her distinctives in service to the Christian community beyond herself. Core elements of the Believers Church ecclesiology—her orientation towards peace and reconciliation, her emphasis on simplicity, and her struggle to remain distinctive in the midst of creeping globalization—provide ways of talking about and being the church that resonate with the contexts of most southern Christians. So, rather than withdraw within herself, the Believers Church must find increased and more effective ways to utilize this strategic position to broker North-South conversation, understanding, and partnership.

Taking up her role in this kairos episode of world Christianity will also require the Believers Church to continue to develop new postures and attitudes. The Believers Church, and indeed the entire global Church, must come to terms with the implications of the historic inversion of global Christianity. Radical alterations must be made in virtually every area of Christian experience, including theological education and local church life. Yet, these adjustments must be carried out with a clear understanding of what
has actually happened. Rather than one form of Christendom (Northern-centred) being replaced with another (Southern-centred), as Philip Jenkins has argued, it is more accurate to say that the global Church has moved from having only one hub to having many centres of influence.

This shift from Euro-centrism to poly-centrism requires that all Christians begin to view Christianity in all its wonderful variety, and learn to hold multiple expressions of the faith together, even in the midst of tension. All Christians must acknowledge that the contemporary story of the followers of Jesus does not revolve around any single people or place, and that no single community of Christians has the right to speak solely or most favourably for their Lord. For the Believers Church this means that she must fully recognize her southern counterparts, many of whom now outnumber their northern brothers and sisters. It also means that she must humbly move into this poly-centred global faith and use her experiences with minority status to assist northern Christians to make peace with this role.

To engage this global Christian poly-centrism, rather than relating to her southern brothers and sisters from positions of perceived power that often lead to paternalism and various forms of disregard, the Believers Church must continue to extend sincere regard to the majority Christians in the South. This means that northern Christians must seek to understand and appreciate not only the myriad expressions of the church in the South, but also the variety of contexts in which the southern church has been formed. When southern Christians are labelled, stereotyped, or otherwise generalized, they suffer a form of “anonymous” regard which stifles North-South relations. The Believers Church, therefore, when serving as broker must exercise humility, patience, and a realistic understanding of her own identity, not expecting more from southern Christian communities than they do from their own. Such avoidance of anonymous regard and moving to more accurate understandings of ourselves and our southern brothers and sisters is necessary if the Believers Church is to seize this kairos moment.

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41 Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.
43 Ibid. 133.
The recent southern shift in world Christianity that has heralded the end of Christendom has also brought unprecedented challenges. Even so, it has also brought to the Believers Church a kairos opportunity. Resulting from her more globally understood and translatable ecclesiology that does not rely on Christendom, the Believers Church is strategically placed to serve as a broker across the emerging North-South Christian divide. Certain communities within the Believers Church have already taken up this role, yet these efforts need to be broadened and refined. This will require new postures and attitudes, yet the Believers Church has long been known for her courage. "When opportunity knocks the wise build bridges while the timorous will build dams. It is a new day.""44

44 Sanneh, "Disciples of All Nations," 287.