



In 2002 Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom* pointed out that while Europe may be the most Christian continent nowadays, by 2025 it will have slipped to third place behind Africa and Latin America. By 2050 there will be three billion Christians and only one in five will be non-Hispanic Whites. By 2025, Oceania will account for only 0.008% of the world's 1,362 million Catholics. The most typical Catholic will be a poor coloured woman living in the shantytowns of Kinshasa, Buenos Aires or Manila. We middle-class white "European" Catholics will be the exception. This poses serious questions for us.

It has become clear that our Society is also part of this shift from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere. Almost all the younger members are from Asia or Latin America. Our four "viable" vocations programmes are in Latin America, Fiji, Korea and the Philippines. This poses big challenges for us regarding the allocation of resources, the type of leadership we require and the direction our theology must take.

But we ought not despair at this change. It's sad that religion is increasingly marginalised in the West and that we have so few vocations, but global Christianity is not in decline, it is growing and renewing itself.

Recently, the historian Andrew Walls pointed out that Christianity has often avoided demise by shifting "just in time." The first occasion was during the Acts of the Apostles when the Church shifted its major axis from Jerusalem to Antioch. That move was "just in time." It saved the Church from becoming a footnote in Jewish history after the destruction of Jerusalem. This shift opened the Church to the Greco-Roman world. Later, when Rome was destroyed by the barbarians, it had shifted to Ireland with Patrick, Columba and Columban, who re-Christianised Europe. Now the shift from the North to the South may also have occurred "just in time" and we do not know what wondrous things the Spirit will bring.

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<http://www.columban.org.au/e-news/e-news-vol-2-no-4/from-the-director-just-in-time>