



# The Army Chaplaincy

Professional Bulletin of the Unit Ministry Team

WINTER-SPRING 2009

# **World Religions: The Impact of Religion on Military Operations**

## Next issue:

# Spiritual Resilience: Renewing the Soldier's Mind

Readers may download each issue or save individual articles from the public websites of the Chief of Chaplains (<http://www.chapnet.army.mil>) or the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School (USACHCS) (<http://www.usachcs.army.mil/TACarchive/TAC/tac.htm>). Guidelines for potential articles can be found at <http://www.usachcs.army.mil/TACarchive/tac/WritrGuide.htm>.

**The Army Chaplaincy (ISSN 1542-8907)** is an Army professional bulletin published for the Chief of Chaplains. Although it contains professional information for the support and strengthening of Army chaplains and chaplain assistants, the content does not necessarily reflect the official Army position and it does not supersede any information presented in other official Army publications. Unless otherwise stated, the views herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Defense or any element of it. Official distribution is to chaplains, chaplain assistants and to appropriate agencies, schools and libraries. Direct communication concerning editorial policies is authorized to Managing Editor, **The Army Chaplaincy**, ATSC-CMT, 10100 Lee Road, Fort Jackson, SC 29207-7090. Telephone: (803) 751-8194; DSN 734-8194. Fax: (803) 751-8890; DSN 734-8890. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: **The Army Chaplaincy**, ATSC-CMT, 10100 Lee Road, Fort Jackson, SC 29207-7090.

# Locating Christendom's Center of Gravity

## *Implications for Foreign Policy in the Global South*

By Chaplain (MAJ) Brian P. Crane

*"In a word, the world Christian situation is not what it was when your grandparents were born, or even when you were born"* – Mark Noll, March 2, 2005 at The Council on Foreign Relations, New York.<sup>1</sup>

Today, most of America's foreign policy and intelligence apparatus is focused on Islamic terrorism. Even the Army Chaplain Corps' tiny World Religions community has its eyes pointed to the Middle East. Meanwhile, religious tectonic shifts are happening around the world that may have implications for future contingency operations. Ironically, perhaps the most obvious oversight on the part of our own community is concentration on the world's second largest religion to the exclusion of the first. This seems natural since most of our corps, including myself, are protestant Christians descended from European migrants who often, mistakenly, assume that world Christianity looks much like us. The objection is, "Why study ourselves, we know Christianity?" However, this *a priori* assumption leads to two important misunderstandings. First, the geographic center of world Christianity is not Colorado Springs or Nashville or even Rome. The current geographic center of Christianity is central Africa.<sup>2</sup> Second, world Christianity is much like American Christianity. In fact, world Christianity is much more southern (African/Latin American) and is more Pentecostal/Charismatic than many realize.<sup>3</sup> Future military operations in Africa and South America (the Global South) need to consider the impact of the "new" Christianity. This essay is a brief look at "southern" Christianity on both continents with some thoughts about future implications for foreign policy and military operations.

### **Christianity in the Global South**

Christian identity in Latin America is historically linked, since colonial times, to Catholicism while Protestant identity arose, at least initially, in opposition to Catholic domination. Pentecostals have been particularly successful with the poor and the powerless (perhaps due to their emphasis on Lucan over Pauline theology and on supernatural gifts), however that situation is changing. Not only are Pentecostals growing, they are also entering institutions of power. The Pew survey confirmed what many Missiologists believe as the director of the study Luis Lugo says, "In Latin America, for example, Pentecostals now account for approximately three-in-four Protestants."<sup>4</sup> The attitudes and organization of these "new" Christians is also different than their Catholic predecessors, particularly their views of economic hope, moral standards, leadership roles for women and attitudes toward religious institutions.

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of the new Latin Christians is their view of future economic prosperity. "What's different about Pentecostals is their sense of economic hope, which is where they stand out. They tend to be more hopeful than the other populations, in these various countries, that their future is going to be better."<sup>5</sup> This belief may come partly from theology, the so called "prosperity gospel," but may also signal a rollback, at least in this sub-group, of the dominant "machismo" culture and a renewed empowerment of women. Lugo notes "Pentecostalism is so popular with women in many of these countries, because they do demand that—you know, no more alcohol, no more messing around sexually, no more

betting.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, the change in the family system<sup>7</sup> seems a reflection of what is happening in the church, “Pentecostals in six of the countries surveyed are more willing than the public overall to allow women to serve as pastors or church leaders.”<sup>8</sup> Empowerment seems to be a key difference between Catholic and Pentecostal expressions because Pentecostals see both evangelistic and prophetic roles as available to all believers. Finally, attitudes toward organized religious institutions are another key to understanding this movement. While many of the Pentecostals are connected with international religious bodies, the majority are not. It seems that one thing that carried over from early Pentecostal missionaries is an independent spirit.<sup>9</sup> That this independent spirit also appears to be not only a characteristic of Latin Protestant Christianity is also evident in Africa.

Christians in Africa, based on history, sometimes see themselves as pre-western. For example, most Ethiopian Christians date their beginnings back to evangelist Philip’s encounter with a court official (Acts 8:26-39). Nevertheless, while the growth of Protestant Christianity in Africa is linked with Colonialism and missionary efforts, the spectacular growth of the Independent Prophetic churches seems to have outpaced even the foreign initiated churches.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the growth of both Islam and Christianity in Africa presents an interesting phenomenon as Lugo says, “To put it very simply, we are running out of animist in Africa. . . Islam and Christianity . . . two very large and very outwardly oriented forces have basically captured the African continent. . . your getting very close to a zero-sum game. You can only keep growing at the expense of the other large community, and that I think is going to generate increasing tensions.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The Clash of Religions**

Pentecostals seem destined to grow both in Africa and Latin America. In Latin America, this growth will challenge the dominance of the Catholic Church. In fact, in the case of Guatemala, it has already eclipsed it, as Lugo notes, “We actually found that Catholics now constitute a minority in Guatemala, 48 percent, and Protestantism has been growing apace there, driven by Pentecostalism.” So does the growth among Pentecostals automatically mean conflict? Experts agree it does not.<sup>12</sup> While individuals and small groups have clashed on occasion, Pentecostals, only now moving into places of power, seem, at least currently, more interested in evangelism than political power.

Christianity in Africa, in competition with Islam, is already in conflict. Nigeria, evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, has already had significant clashes. However, even these have only been ad hoc crowds stirred to action by isolated incidents. In fact, in many of these conflicts, religion is rarely the single animating factor; tribal, economic and other issues often play a role. Two reasons seem to stand out for the lack of organized violence; belief, to some extent, on the part of actors on both sides that violence is incompatible with their faith, and few central authorities with the power to incite widespread violence. So if Christianity and Islam are so decentralized what is the potential for large scale religious conflict? Leadership seems the key on both continents for current and future potential conflicts.

### **Center(s) of Gravity**

While the term “Christendom” itself implies a religious and political center, the current reality is plurality; Christianities rather than Christianity. So the idea of Christendom, in the historical sense, a worldwide body headed by a single leader or unified leadership seems a relic of the pre-globalization era. The data<sup>13</sup> shows that Christianity, as a faith, will continue to grow, fueled by both evangelism and birth rates in “the two-thirds world” and, despite the growth of Islam, will remain the dominant global religion. As noted above, Christianity will also continue to diffuse, despite talk of reconciliation between the Orthodox and Catholic communion, due to growth of Pentecostals and Independent Renewalists. Though the Catholic Church will wield considerable influence in world affairs, it does not speak for Christendom in any meaningful sense and therefore doesn’t seem to qualify as “the” center of gravity.<sup>14</sup> If leadership were to arise that could influence

world Christianity in the future it could signal a dramatic shift in the geo-political situation.

## Foreign Policy

So what does this shift in Christianity mean for foreign policy makers and military commanders?

Scholars, such as Freston,<sup>15</sup> believe that Pentecostals will have little impact on government policy because they are centered in the poor working class, possess little education and – most importantly – are too decentralized to make much impact on policymakers. While this assessment is true, for the time being, analysts should not assume that leadership will not emerge in the future to change this situation, quickly even, where Christianity is a minority faith. An excellent historical example was Syngman Rhee, a master of the power of political symbolism, who “at his inauguration as the first president of the Republic of Korea...took the oath of office with his hand on the Bible, a gesture unprecedented in Korean history.”<sup>16</sup> Korean Christians also demonstrated their ability to effect change even under a military dictatorship as Park notes, “Korean Christian activists played an important role in the anti-government movement by transmitting news of South Korea to the United States and other Western democracies and by bringing foreign pressure to bear on the Korean government.”<sup>17</sup> Christian activists in the future could certainly learn from the Korean Christian model.

Despite the lack of an organized center, Christianity in the global south is already impacting national and regional politics, though often in opposition to influence by Western Christianity. For example, in South Korea, only 16 percent of Pentecostals and 10 percent of Charismatics say they favor (the) U.S. led efforts to fight terrorism. In the U.S. and the Philippines, by contrast, at least seven – in – ten Pentecostals (and nearly as many U.S. and Filipino Charismatics) support U.S. efforts to fight terrorism.<sup>18</sup> However, there are times when fundamentalist American Christian belief and two-third world Christian ideas do match. For example, both in America and in most countries in the Global South, Pentecostals are somewhat more likely than non-renewalist Christians to sympathize more with Israel than with Palestinians.<sup>19</sup> The primary concern is violence; however Pentecostals, and all renewalists, who seek to revive primitive Christianity, are fundamentally pacifist. While this position has shifted to a just war tradition among most American Pentecostals, throughout the two-thirds world this is not the case.<sup>20</sup>

While the future seems uncertain, analysts must watch events in both the Middle East, Asia (the Muslim World) and also in the Global South. Of particular interest, Roman Catholic–Pentecostal dialogue in Latin America, Muslim–Christian dialogue, growth and theological trends in these communities and perhaps, most important, emerging leaders.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>(Mark Noll 2005), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Much of this article is based on the work of a major research project by the Pew Forum (see bibliography). In the report Luis Lugo, the principal author says, “Christianity is going south – I mean literally... (I)t remains in the first 1,000 years... within Asia Minor... then it goes West... Western Europe that’s the next phase. Then it turns south so that by 1950 it’s over the Iberian Peninsula. And since then it’s taken a radical southern and eastern turn. So that statistically speaking if you were to divide the Christian community into quadrants, the point that would give you equal portions on all sides is almost precisely over Timbuktu in Mali.” (Lugo, *The Global Rise of Pentecostalism* 2006), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Jenkins says, “Membership in Pentecostal and independent churches already runs into the hundreds of millions and congregations are located in precisely the regions of fastest population growth. Within a few decades, such denominations will represent a far larger segment of global Christianity, and just conceivably a majority.” (Jenkins 2002), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>(Lugo, Stencel and Chah, *Spirit and Power: A 10 - Country Survey of Pentecostals* 2006), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>(Lugo, *The Global Rise of Pentecostalism* 2006), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Family systems theory: change in the status-quo will cause the system to reorient to a new homeostasis.

<sup>8</sup>(Lugo, Stencel and Chah, *Spirit and Power: A 10 - Country Survey of Pentecostals* 2006), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>This seems the result of both intended and unintended actions. Early Pentecostal missionaries established schools and ordained national pastors based on the “indigenous principal” but may have also modeled an independent nature due to their own history, i.e. they were often outcasts from other denominations.

<sup>10</sup>(Burgess and Van Der Maas 2002), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>(Lugo, *The Nexus of Religion and Foreign Policy: The Global Rise of Pentecostalism* 2006), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>(Freston, Garrard-Burnett and Spencer 2006), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>The data in the Pew study confirmed the figures in The World Christian Database, the starting point for the study. (see <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>)

<sup>14</sup>(Clausewitz 1976), p. 595. Clausewitz defines a “center of gravity” as “the hub of all power and movement” which implies some unity or leadership element. This does not mean that the Pope will not continue to exert influence, however, influence does not equal control.

<sup>15</sup>(*Moved by the Spirit: Pentecostal Power and Politics After 100 Years* 2006), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>(Park 2003), p. 173.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup>(Lugo, Stencel and Chah, *Spirit and Power: A 10 - Country Survey of Pentecostals* 2006), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>(Lugo, Stencel and Chah, *Spirit and Power: A 10 - Country Survey of Pentecostals* 2006), p. 9. This attitude, while political, comes from belief that Israel is the “chosen people” and therefore important for Christian eschatology (Christian Zionism).

<sup>20</sup>(Freston, Garrard-Burnett and Spencer 2006), p. 4. While Garrard-Burnett notes some cases of violence in Mexico among rebels these cases are small isolated exceptions.

## **Bibliography**

Burgess, Stanley M., and Eduard M. Van Der Maas. *The New Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War (Translation of Vom Kriege) by Howard and Paret*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Freston, Paul V, Virginia Garrard-Burnett, and David Spencer. “Christianity and Conflict in Latin America.” *Religion, Conflict and the Global War on Terrorism in Latin America*. Washington, DC: National Defense University and the Pew Forum, 2006. Transcript.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Lugo, Luis. “The Global Rise of Pentecostalism.” *The Nexus of Religion and Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006. 5.

Lugo, Luis, interview by Walter Russell Mead (Council on Foreign Relations). *The Nexus of Religion and Foreign Policy: The Global Rise of Pentecostalism* (October 16, 2006).

Lugo, Luis, Sandra Stencel, and Timothy S Chah. *Spirit and Power: A 10 - Country Survey of Pentecostals*. Pew Research Center Project, Washington: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006.

Mark Noll, Michael Nazir-Ali, Walter Russell Meade. "Faith and Conflict: The Global Rise of Christianity." *Council on Foreign Relations (Transcript)*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2005. 1-7.

"Moved by the Spirit: Pentecostal Power and Politics After 100 Years." *Pew Forum (Transcript)*. Washington: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006. 1-8.

Park, Churn Shin. *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.



*Chaplain (MAJ) Brian Crane hails from Tucson, Arizona. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Sacred Music from Southwestern University, a Master of Divinity from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary and a Master of Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary. Since 1976, he pastored in Arizona, Florida and Maryland and while in the National Guard and has served on active duty since 1996. He is currently a World Religions instructor at the Army's Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS.*

---