In this paper I will argue that Andrew Walls’s thesis, which is the center of Christianity is shifting from the global North to the global South and East (GSE), is true. I will look to explain his thesis through statistical analysis, historical evidence, and the importance of the vernacular for self-theologizing. Then, I will draw conclusions for the changing face of twenty-first century Christianity, including the impact on theological education, ecumenism, and missions.

One way to articulate the global shift of Christianity is through statistics. In 1900, 70% of the Christian population resided in Europe; now, two-thirds are in the GSE. Philip Jenkins reveals that the number of African Christians has grown from 10 million in 1900 to 360 million in 2000.¹ Mark Noll shows that, on a typical Sunday, there are more Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Pentecostals in various countries in the GSE than compared to the number of attendees in the Western countries where the denomination originated.² Furthermore, the largest attended churches in the West are made up of GSE immigrants. So, not only do the statistics identify a geographic shift in the center of gravity of Christianity, but also a rise in GSE Christian influence in the West.

While Christianity is growing in the GSE, it is declining in the West. Lamin Sanneh believes that secularism has replaced the Christendom model in the West.³ As a result, Andrew Walls sees the Western modern missionary movement as “the last flourish of Christendom.”⁴ While Christianity has been able to thrive in pluralistic environments in the GSE, pluralism has

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been a “new issue for the West.”  

David Bosch sees the Enlightenment having created a superiority complex in the West that requires a repentance of deep-rooted problems such as ethnocentrism. He says, “They confused their middle-class ideals and values with the tenets of Christianity.”  

Lois McKinney Douglas explains that these principles have been “too pragmatic, too much social sciences...that we lost sight of what God is doing in the world.”  

This Enlightenment-based Christendom approach has brought the rise of secularism and the decline of Christianity in the West.

Thirdly, the use of the vernacular has been significant for inculturation leading to self-theologizing. Sanneh, a leader in translatability and the migration of Christianity, believes the global shift happened because of the ability of the vernacular to help the GSE populations “turn away from external direction and control.” Therefore, he says, “World Christianity was thereby weaned of the political habits of Christendom.” With the use of the vernacular, local theologies emerged, especially liberation theologies that illuminated the unjust structures of power by the West.

By drawing on the three themes above, I can affirm Walls’s thesis with one criticism. The bias of Western theology as normative remains the majority view of Western Christians because of a history of missionary paternalism and a long tradition of being the Christian center of the

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6 Ibid., 301.
8 Sanneh, Whose, 24.
9 Ibid.
world. Noll and West African Tite Tiénou voice the West’s need to overcome ethnocentrism and let go of seeing the GSE as exotic. Tiénou says, “The West are good communicators and bad listeners.”¹¹ In a similar manner, Noll argues for the West to let go of the “delusions of Western “paternal benevolence” and “hegemonic imperialism” for the sake of genuine Christian partnership.¹² If this process can happen, the thesis will be fully realized with four strong implications for the twenty-first century.

The first implication will be that more expressions of Christianity will emerge from the non-West. Diane Stinton reveals that theologies in Africa do not have the same Enlightenment-formed “dichotomies between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural.”¹³ For example, African theologians such as Sanneh, Kwame Bediako, and John Mbiti give priority to the *missio dei* over human reason. In addition, Jenkins uses the statistics to demonstrate that Christians will increasingly come from “the ranks of the poor.”¹⁴ Therefore, an awareness of the growing disparity between rich and poor will come largely from Christians, who will call for Christianity to address the world’s unjust economic and political structures.¹⁵

The second implication will be changes in Christian education. The previously mentioned *missio dei* will become more central to theology because Christians from the GSE seek the

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spiritual more in their everyday world. For example, Mbiti says, “it was God who brought missionaries to Africa.” In addition, Noll argues that new major categories of interest will include the debate over individual or group salvation, as well as renewed interest in how one reads the Bible. From these questions, Walls sees a need for practical tools to reinvent mission studies, where theological and church history education does not bear the “fossil marks of Western history and culture plainly upon it.” It is what Craig Ott calls a “harmonizing effort of common inquiry from multiple perspectives and in mutual respect in the quest for greater faithfulness to Christ and his purposes for the church.”

A third implication is ecumenical growth. As Kosuke Koyama has said, there is “no handle on the cross.” No one culture has a privileged position. Tennent writes, “We must find new ways...of engaging in a more globally informed discourse with committed Christians from around the world.” This has been the case throughout history. Walls says, “the new conciliarism is a recurrence of a well-established feature of historic Christianity: the consciousness of belonging to a community, a people of God, transcending the local one.” This

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18 Walls, *Missionary*, 158.
will be accomplished by unity through diversity.\textsuperscript{23} Through ecumenism, all nations will be blessed through what David Bosch calls “interculturalization.”\textsuperscript{24} Walls agrees that a shared reading of the scriptures will be beneficial for “mutual enrichment and self-criticism.”\textsuperscript{25}

Lastly, Samuel Escobar notes the emergence of young and flourishing mission organizations that are from the non-Western world.\textsuperscript{26} He believes that those with the most relevant ideas are most likely not in positions of authority. Escobar and Timothy Tennent are prophetic in their understanding of what the rest of the world has to offer once the fear of the West subsides. Tennent argues for the West to have a “missions selah.”\textsuperscript{27} He writes, “We need to play the harmony, not the melody.”\textsuperscript{28}

In conclusion, a look at the statistical, historical, and linguistic changes in Christianity reveal Walls’s thesis to be correct. The center of Christianity is shifting to the GSE. By surveying the implications, I believe this shift is for the benefit of all Christians and non-Christians around the world. Soon, Western students will be writing not about rational explanations for this shift, but about a spiritual understanding of God’s divine plan for transforming the world.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Whiteman, “Anthropological,” 68.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 456.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Walls, \textit{Missionary}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Samuel Escobar, \textit{The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone.} (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 166.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Tennent, \textit{Invitation}, 50.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
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