

BRIC nations may help clarify direction of global Christian growth

October 12, 2010

WACO—Four emerging economic powerhouses popularly known as BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—may provide building blocks for understanding developments in 21st century global Christianity, missions expert [Philip Jenkins](#) told a Baylor University symposium.

Traditional missions activity followed a track from the Northern Hemisphere—particularly the United States and Europe—to the Southern Hemisphere, said Jenkins, professor of humanities at Pennsylvania State University and author of two-dozen books. He spoke at an Oct. 11 symposium on world Christianity sponsored by the [Baylor Institute for the Studies of Religion](#).

Philip Jenkins

“One hears a lot about reverse evangelism, from the global south to the European north,” Jenkins said. “But the big story is south-to-south evangelism, such as from Brazil to Africa.”

Rather than looking at old distinctions—the Third World in contrast to the major antagonists in the Cold War or the poor Southern Hemisphere in contrast to the industrialized Northern Hemisphere—Jenkins suggested looking at the fastest growing developing economies and examining how Christianity is flourishing there.

“Scholars of Christianity have struggled to escape from the traditional obsessions of Euro-American churches, the world of the rich and powerful, to acquaint themselves with the very different realities of Africa, with the

world of the poorest,” he said.

“Perhaps now, we need to think of another set of unfamiliar circumstances—that of the almost-rich, almost-powerful and increasingly Christian.”

According to the [World Christian Database](#) , Brazil ranks second only to the United States in terms of Christian population, with 177 million Brazilian believers, compared to 260 million American Christians, he noted. China and Russia each have an estimated 115 million Christians, and the 58 million Christians in India equals the number in Germany and surpasses the Christian population of Britain.

Historically Roman Catholic Brazil, Orthodox Russia, Hindu India and officially atheist but traditionally Buddhist China have “radically different religious backgrounds,” Jenkins noted. “But all have to address similar questions about new religious movements.”

The fastest growing religious movements in these nations—typically evangelical and charismatic Christian churches—are not affiliated with the state, and they often are emerging in spite of strong state mechanisms, he noted.

“Those Christians are used to having minority status in a society with different cultural assumptions,” he said.