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Christianity is at a hinge point in its history. It's happened before, when major cultural, social, political, and theological forces have reshaped the practice and understandings of Christian faith in ways that have left an indelible historical mark. One thinks, for instance, of the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 CE and its dramatic aftereffects, or the East-West Schism of the global church in 1054. The Protestant Reformation, most often commemorated by the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses by Martin Luther in 1517, marked a decisive turn in Christianity, not only theologically but also with cultural, social, and political ramifications. We can also name the "discovery" of the New World, the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, and colonialism as developments that precipitated dramatic changes in how those who confess Christianity practiced their faith and understood the world.

Today, Christianity is undergoing another major historical shift. For the first time in more than one thousand years, a majority of the world's Christians are living in the Global South. This trend is accelerating, constituting the most dramatic

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geographical shift in the history of Christianity. For four hundred years, Western culture shaped by the Enlightenment has been the comfortable home for the dominant expressions of Christianity in the world. Now all that is changing. Christianity has become predominantly a non-Western religion.

The demographic facts of this major geographic shift have been well documented and are now being more widely understood. But this shift is about far more than geography. The future of Christian faith in the world is being driven by diverse, expanding groups of believers centered in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. How they see the world and how they practice their faith are different from well-established forms of Christianity in the West. Moreover, in a globally interconnected world, and with the religious impact of migration, this shift is impacting the future of Christianity in the United States. That will only increase in the decades to come.

This book's purpose is to focus on how US congregations are challenged to change at this watershed moment in Christian history. I want to explore what this shift in world Christianity means for congregations, large and small, across the country. The words in this book are written for pastors, elders, deacons, seminary students, and others who are living out their faith in one of America's 350,000 congregations and honestly wondering what the future holds.

When I was at the beginning of my career, working as a young staff person in the US Senate, Alvin Toffler published *Future Shock*, a book identifying the dramatic but unrecognized changes created by the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial

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society. Then, in the next decade, John Naisbitt published *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*. It explored shifts happening in the worlds of business, technology, and politics that would impact the future, and it proved to be prophetic. Each had a profound and widespread impact.

Recalling both those books, I became convinced that a similar approach was needed to explain and explore what this shift in global Christianity means for the future of US congregations. This future is already impacting Christianity in the United States in ways that are often unnoticed and unappreciated. In this book, I have identified what I believe are the ten major trends, or challenges, that require our awareness if we wish to participate in changing expressions of Christian faith that are being driven, ultimately, by God's Spirit—that Spirit that is always shaping, molding, infusing, and renewing the church.

I bring to this book both careful research and a lifetime of experience. For seventeen years as general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, along with my colleagues I kept asking: What makes congregations tick? Why do some wither and others thrive? How are they revitalized? What are the challenges not even on their radar that congregations must face? Further, for more than thirty years, including throughout my service as general secretary and continuing to this day, I've been deeply exposed ecumenically to the life and witness of the world church. It's been my joy to interact with church leaders, pastors, and congregations in all parts of the world. And I have consistently asked them how are they living out their faith within their particular setting, settings often so different from those in the United States.

Moreover, it was my privilege to be a fellow at the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, where I was able to draw on its vast resources to research developments in world Christianity, including the religious impact of migration on US society and its congregations. From the providential gifts of this background, I've been asking, How will the historic shift in world Christianity impact US congregations? What are the challenges that we must face for the future?

Inviting Conversation and Change

This book, *Future Faith*, is the result. I hope and trust that it may start a conversation. It's designed with that in mind, so questions around each of the ten challenges are included to spark discussion in congregations, small groups, book clubs, or classes. While this is my attempt to outline the contours of future faith and necessary questions that we must engage, I'm certain that others may offer different perspectives and identify other questions. I welcome such exchange, because we need shared wisdom to decipher the shape of things to come.

Some global developments presenting external challenges to world Christianity are not addressed in this book. These include the rise of Islam, the persecution of Christians in some parts of the world, the growth of worldwide urbanization, the growing economic inequities in our globalized economy, and other trends. Considerable attention has been given to such questions elsewhere. This book's purpose, however, is different, focusing primarily on how the dramatic movement of world Christianity

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to non-Western cultures of the Global South present challenges and opportunities to the practice of faith in US congregations.

People often talk about “the view from thirty thousand feet.” United Airlines credits me with flying two million miles, so I’ve had a lot of opportunity to gain such a perspective. Here’s what I see. In most parts of the world, Christian faith is thriving, with new and vibrant expressions marked by surprising and unanticipated developments. Such changes are not without their own set of new problems, serious conflicts, and enormous complexities. But looking to the future, Christianity’s global trajectory displays clear signs of vitality and promise.

Within the United States, however, as well as in Western Europe, the picture is different. Congregations often struggle, and established expressions of faith seem to be sputtering in the midst of rising secularity. The problem is compounded because most Christians in the United States instinctively believe that we are at the center of the Christian world. Realizing that we are not and embracing the re-centering of global Christianity as God’s gift to the whole church open pathways for our renewal. We can choose to ignore the surging new realities of world Christianity, living in the theologically and culturally narcissistic isolation of an Americanized Christian bubble. Or we can open ourselves to face the challenges presented by the Spirit’s movement in reshaping the global church at this hinge point of Christian history.

My hope and prayer is that individuals and faith communities will address these ten challenges as opportunities to embrace a new future reshaping Christianity in the twenty-first century. The prophet Isaiah said, “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now

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it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa 43:19 ESV). That is the fundamental question facing US congregations. It’s now our opportunity to discern and welcome the new things God is already doing and discover these pathways promising renewal in our life together for the sake of this world, so loved by God.