

Review of Daniel Muñoz, 'North to South: a Reappraisal of Anglican Membership Figures', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2016, vol 14, no. 1.

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A recent contribution to debates about Anglican growth and decline is an article by Daniel Muñoz in the *Journal of Anglican Studies*.¹ Muñoz's work has been used by a range of journalists and church leaders.² Muñoz asks a number of important questions of Anglican figures, but the data it offers and the overall narrative it promotes are deeply flawed. This review offers an assessment of 'North to South' in the light of the most recent research on global Anglicanism, particularly that from the volume *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion, 1980 to the Present*, (Routledge 2017). This volume is the product of an international, diverse and experienced team of researchers, drawn from the universities of Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh and London as well as many other centres for research.

'North to South' rightly questions the reliability of Anglican data, asking how robust are previous figures given for the number of Anglicans and whether conflicts within contemporary Anglicanism can warp assessment of such figures. But, alongside good questions, this research offers alternative data sources which are seriously problematic. The article concludes that some western provinces of Anglicanism are not declining and that expanding churches in the Global South are much smaller than is often assumed.

A wide range of researchers, including the team behind the new volume, *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion, 1980 to the Present*, offer substantial evidence that many Anglican provinces in the Global South have expanded to a large degree since 1980 and that western Anglicanism has declined overall by a substantial amount and in some areas is declining rapidly. It provides very substantial evidence from a wide range of sources to show that the Communion is now largely based outside the west and that the non-western segment of Anglicanism is growing steadily larger.³

1 Daniel Muñoz, 'North to South: a Reappraisal of Anglican Membership Figures', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2016, vol 14, no. 1.

2 For example, see: Andrew Brown, *Guardian*, 17 Sept 2015 at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/17/dissolving-anglican-community-archbishop-canterbury-anglicanism> – accessed 29 February 2016; Ruth Gledhill, *Christianity Today*, 12 November 2015 - <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/anglican-membership-figures-could-be-out-by-millions/70392.htm> - accessed 18 November 2016.

3 The evidence offered by 'North to South' runs contrary to the bulk of the work in *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion, 1980 to the Present*, (Routledge 2017), but also to works such as: Markham et al. (ed.), *Companion to the Anglican Communion*; Sachs, *Transformation of Anglicanism*; Kaye, *Introduction to World Anglicanism*. Most academic studies of contemporary Anglicanism speak in terms of a marked shift from western to non-western Anglicanism.

The individual chapters in *Growth and Decline*, particularly those on Nigeria and Kenya, offer a detailed comparison with the Munoz data. More generally, the problems in the data and argument used in Muñoz's article can be summarised as follows.

First, there is very little comparison the work of other studies of Anglicanism and other religious demographers - much of which does not fit the picture presented. The article does not consider widely cited works which offer a very different picture to that of 'North to South'.⁴

Second, the core data used comes from Anglican church websites, plus data from a minority of the Anglican provinces which provided the author with data, most of which were from the west. Such a limited data-set cannot support conclusions made about the communion as a whole. The data was little checked against the views of people on the ground. By comparison, scholars such as Joseph Galgalo used extensive interviews to check numerical data and produced figures for Kenya, for example, which are markedly different from those of Muñoz.⁵

Third, data sources from different time periods are treated as comparable, yet it is not meaningful to compare, for example, data from 1995 and data from 2013, due to the rapid pace of change between those years.⁶

Fourth, the article uses estimates of congregation size achieved by counting the number of people visible in website photographs of congregations.⁷ This is a highly unusual source for assessing congregational size and it is highly unreliable for many reasons.⁸ Conversely, such data would be much improved if it could be checked with leaders and officials from the areas concerned.

4 For example: Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); T. M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

5 J. Galgalo, Kenya, in Goodhew (ed.), *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion*, 115.

6 Muñoz, 'North to South', p. 88.

7 Muñoz, 'North to South', p. 81.

8 It is unclear how counting people in website photographs can offer accurate data on actual attendance; the estimates do not appear to have been checked with individuals on the ground; there is no discussion of the extent to which multiple congregations may be using a particular church; there is no discussion of churches who are not portrayed on the web; it is unclear whether the author was able to ascertain that the web-based images were of the congregation concerned or generic images utilised by those operating the websites.

Fifth, the article divides the church between an ‘outer’ grouping who are seen as having a vaguer affiliation and an ‘inner’ more committed grouping. However, the means by which people are assigned to ‘outer’ or ‘inner’ categories is imprecise and it is unclear the extent to which ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ categories operate the same in differing contexts. In England, Anglicanism’s established status and relatively detailed data means that such a distinction can be made. But this distinction works very differently for the rest of Anglicanism, which has not been ‘established’ in the same manner and where the boundary between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ groupings operates differently. For most of Anglicanism, not being established, the ‘outer’ grouping is both smaller and culturally closer to the ‘inner’ grouping than is the case in England. Whether ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ groupings function similarly in vastly different countries is debatable, making comparisons between different countries insecure.

Sixth, membership of a church and attendance at a church are treated as synonymous.⁹ However these are not comparable measures. Many will be members of a church without attending it every week, so membership and attendance figures will be different for a single congregation/diocese/province. Usually, membership is significantly higher than attendance.

Seventh, there is no discussion of other metrics of growth and decline such as the rise/fall in the number of dioceses and of the number of churches and how this correlates with the data. Thus, the number of dioceses and churches has dramatically risen in Nigeria in recent decades¹⁰, but Muñoz’s argues that this has not led to a corresponding rise in attendance. The logic of such low attendance figures for Nigerian Anglicanism is that Nigerian congregations must have got much smaller in recent years – yet there is much evidence to the contrary.¹¹

Eighth, there are a number of points where conclusions are based on extrapolations from an assumed ‘average parish’, yet the huge variety within Anglicanism means that calculating what is ‘average’ is extremely problematic.

Ninth, the article contains a number of questionable statements, such as the view that in Africa Anglican church membership is ‘often connected with tribal affiliation’¹² or the view that African nations, such as Kenya, are now seeing marked secularisation and a decline in churchgoing.¹³ There is increasing wariness of speaking of ‘tribalism’ in academic circles, for fear such language carries racial codings. Colonial actions did much to promote and on

9 See, for example: Muñoz, ‘North to South’, pp. 83-5.

10 See: R. Burgess, ‘Nigeria’, in Goodhew (ed.), *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion, 1980 to the Present*.

11 See: Burgess, ‘Nigeria’.

12 Muñoz, ‘North to South’, p. 74

occasion even construct tribal identity, which has sometimes lessened with independence. Beyond this, whilst ethnicity plays a part in African church attendance, to argue that it is a cause of church membership could be seen as highly patronising – as if many African Anglicans were incapable of genuine religious conviction. In a British context of ‘Brexit’, it might be argued that westerners are in no position to criticise others over ‘tribalism’. The claim that Africa is seeing ‘secularisation’ runs against much other evidence and requires much stronger evidence to be trustworthy and begs the question of whether ‘secularisation’ in Kenya means the same as ‘secularisation’ in the west.

Tenth, the bulk of the research for this paper was largely via the internet across a four month period.¹⁴ There is no evidence of detailed, long-term contact with individuals and congregations from the countries being studied. If detailed, long-term contact were possible, this would markedly increase the robustness of the conclusions.

Overall, Munoz’s ‘North to South’ asks some good questions but provides answers that are seriously problematic.

13 Muñoz, ‘North to South’, p. 85. This view is based on a little used source and does not consider a wide range of materials which argue differently, compare: T.M. Johnson and K.R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910-2010*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 114-17.

14 Muñoz, ‘North to South’, p. 78.