

World Christian Database: Methodological notes on “personal contact”

(Extract from the Atlas of Global Christianity, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p.350)

PERSONAL CONTACT

In recent years the concept of translation has become one of the significant motifs in Christian mission, not only for Bible translation but for the serial expansion of Christianity around the world. The starting point of translation is personal contact, in which a Christian, from any other culture or tradition, learns the language and culture of the people he or she is trying to reach. In normal missionary practice, this means making friends. With this in mind, we have recently been asked, ‘How many Muslims have a Christian friend? How many Hindus personally know a Christian? How many Buddhists have significant contact with Christians?’

Considering these questions carefully, we realised that the concept of personal contact was built into the measurements we had previously made related to evangelisation of ethnolinguistic peoples. For our study of evangelisation mentioned above, we isolated 20 variables measuring evangelisation among every ethnolinguistic people in the world (Barrett and Johnson, *World Christian Trends*, 756–7). Two of these variables relate very closely with personal contact between Christians (of all kinds) and non-Christians.

The first, ‘discipling/personal work’, is an indication of how much contact local church members have with non-Christians. The second, ‘outside Christians’, extends this concept further by looking at the presence of Christians from other peoples who live nearby. Under normal circumstances, the more Christians there are nearby, the more likely the contact between Christians and non-Christians.

Thus, for every non-Christian population in the world there is an indication of Christian presence and contact. A formula was then developed to make an estimate of those personally evangelised (contacted) by Christians. The formula applied to each ethnolinguistic people is $(\text{Population} * [\text{Disciple Code (0-10)} + \text{Outside Christian Code (0-10)}]) / ([100 - \text{Christian Percentage}] * [\text{Percentage Non-Christian}])$. Separate values for these two codes are reported for each ethnolinguistic people. These are added up for each country, region, and continent, producing a global total reported in this atlas.

Listing of the world’s peoples with these variables appear in Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, ‘Part 8 Ethnosphere’ vol. 2, 30–241 and in the online *World Christian Database*. For a more complete treatment on this subject see Todd M. Johnson and Charles L. Tieszen, ‘Personal Contact: The *sine qua non* of Twenty-first Century Christian Mission’, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 2007, pages 494–502.