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# A Study on Islamic and Christian Missionary Work in the Top Twenty Global Economies

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Missionaries travel to promote religion or 'faith' among people worldwide. They also spearhead further education, social justice, health care, and economic development projects. However, over the years, missionaries have faced a backlash in several countries due to rising concerns for national security, secularism, and general attitude towards missionary work. In response to such concerns, our study investigates the approach of the world's top twenty economies towards missionary work. The study explores if such countries permit missionary work, and if 'yes,' then 'how' missionaries are permitted to travel and under what conditions they are allowed to work in host countries. Finally, the study compares the motivational factors and activities of leading Christian Missionary & Islamic (*Dawah*) organisations in such countries. The study uses a desk research technique involving a qualitative approach whereby the secondary data were collected from authentic sources to achieve the objectives. The study's findings indicate that most of the world's top twenty economies, except two countries - China and Saudi Arabia - facilitate missionary travel through special missionary visas or other work-related visas. The study found differences in motivation among Christian missionaries and *Dawah* organisations. While the Christian missionary organisations aim to address dwindling religiosity and falling attendance in churches, the most crucial priority for *Dawah* organisations, is building better relations with locals to counter Islamophobia against the backdrop of 9/11 and other terrorism-related incidents.

**Key Words:** missionary tourism, spiritual tourism, missionary motivations

## Introduction

Religious tourism dating back to Roman times is credited with paving the way for modern tourism. The instructions for missionary travel to spread the Gospel are ordained in the Bible as 'The Great Commission'. These missionary tours have been called the 'heart' of Christian Tourism and are an important religious or spiritual tourism segment (Rivers, 2014). In Islamic scriptures as well, the concept of spreading the message (*Dawah*) has been stressed in the 'Qur'an' and also in the 'Book of Traditions' called *Hadith* (Schacht, 2016). In earlier times, *Dawah* resulted in Islamic conquests and the expansion of Muslim empires, currently, it is carried out as an independent activity by religious and professional organisations.

Religious tourism primarily results from visiting religious places. Appreciating nature & culture, self-education and unwinding from stress are the other motivations that

prompt travellers to pursue religious tours (Terzidou *et al.*, 2018). Such opportunities orient spiritual travellers toward personal growth and exploring the answer to life's complex problems (Norman, 2011). Traditionally, religious travel is vital for spiritual growth and restoring religious faith among believers (Jesurajan & Prabhu, 2012). Missionaries (members of religious groups sent to different countries to promote their religion or 'faith' among other communities) have played a prominent part in promoting religious tourism. Besides promoting religion, missionaries spearhead social and economic projects like education, social justice, and health care (Hsia, 2014).

In the last few decades, there has been a changing trend in missionary tourism around the world. In the USA, 'Short Term Missions' are gaining popularity, whereby such tourists experience ministry overseas for a short period (from one week to two years). The volume of such

missions can be gauged from the fact that twenty-nine percent of thirteen to seventeen year-olds in the United States are involved in such missions (Fanning, 2009). In Islamic cultures, especially in South Asia, similar trends are observed whereby such missionary trips (Da'wat-e Islāmī) provide an opportunity to isolate participants from their daily routines. Such odyssey experiences allow one to let go of one's past life and present challenges by moving through new spaces. Male members go on short trips, the duration of which can be either one-day neighbourhood missionary trips or thirty-day inter-city (Cho, 2022).

Three world religions - Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism - are grouped under missionary religions, while other religions are classified as non-missionary. The missionary concept evolved in the 16th century and was primarily used for travellers involved with Christian missions; however, the term became acceptable for other religious groups as well (Packrats, 1988). Several controversies involving missionary work have been reported in different countries. Recently, *Tablighi Jamaat*, an Islamic Missionary organisation, organised a congregational meeting of over two thousand members, in New Delhi during the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation was blamed for spreading infections across the country. Further, an investigation revealed how members of such organisations violated visa norms by being involving in evangelical activities - tourist visas do not permit travellers to get involved in such work.

In Myanmar, Pro-Chinese supporters are investigating the motivations of Christian missionaries and are punishing local officials for assisting such missionaries (AsiaNews, 2022). Christian missionaries from South Korea were expelled from northeast China after raids on their homes. Like *Tablighi Jamaat* members in Delhi, the Chinese Government cited how missionaries violated Visa norms as they had arrived on student and tourist visas (China, 2022). Incidents such as these reflect changes in countries' outlook toward missionary work.

Several notable works on missionary activity are reported in the literature. The work by (Jedwab *et al.*, 2022) focused on the link between economic development, eradication of diseases like malaria, and evangelisation. Missionary gender identity within African and indigenous colonies

is explored elsewhere (Tonono, 2020). Another study (Maloka, 1994) investigates the work of evangelical missions with gold mine workers. From exploring the literature it appears that most recent missionary studies focus on evangelical work's historical perspectives and in developing countries, with very few studies based in developed countries. Our study, therefore, attempts to bridge the gap by taking stock of missionary work in the world's top twenty economies by investigating the following objectives.

- To evaluate the missionary travel permission policy in the top twenty economies.
- To compare the motivations of Christian and Islamic missionary organisations in the world's top twenty economies.

## Review of Literature

### *Religious Tourism: An Overview*

Religious tourism, comprising pilgrimage, mission based journeys, visits to monasteries, and other religious institutions, has been estimated to contribute twenty-five percent of total global tourism (CBI, 2020). Researchers have described the purpose of religious and spiritual tourism as the reinforcement of values restoring individual & social identity (Liutikas, 2017). Pilgrim's motivations arise from spiritual needs, however, other motivations like economic, holidays, or cultural pursuits have gained popularity among such tourists in recent decades (Wang et al, 2015).

Travel plays a vital role in the spiritual journey as it allows travellers to unwind from daily routines and promote inner peace (Cheer et al, 2017). Such journeys have a long history, however, as of now, a wide range of opportunities, like wellness vacations through meditation and other healing elements, are also included under the spiritual umbrella (Hoheb, 2020). There is a vast market potential for spiritual tourism worldwide, with over six hundred million pilgrims visiting the most prominent pilgrimage sites worldwide (Heidari et al, 2018).

Religion as a research discipline has existed for centuries since researchers started proposing its concepts and theories. While classical studies focused on the

development of theories (Büttner, 1974), several other studies reported on the conceptual development - notably pilgrimage, rituals, and religious tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979; Turner, 1969). Since religion and travel have been closely linked, modern-day tourism can be traced to historical pilgrimages and journeys (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Luz, 2020).

Since the beginning of humanity, such journeys were embarked on in a quest for meaning and a desire for self-transformation, which is deep and lasting (Collins Kreiner, 2019). Religion has occupied the first place among all other motivations for travel and is therefore, the oldest form of mobility (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). This evolution of tourism has attracted scholarly attention from diverse fields such as psychology, religious studies, sociology, and tourism (Huang & Pearce, 2019). However, scholars are often in contention concerning the ties between tourism and pilgrimage; scholars are thereby paying attention to classifying issues that separate pilgrims from tourists. In this regard, motivation and the activities at the sacred centre are suggested to differentiate between the two (Luz, 2020).

Some studies indicate that pilgrimage and other activities like missionary travel, faith-based events and gatherings are part of Religious Tourism activities (Tomljenović & Dukić, 2017). In more recent times, studies have emphasised the secular motivation behind religious tourism, suggesting that visitors seek spiritual guidance to elevate their faith in holy places (Digance, 2003). This has given rise to secular visitation, which encompasses voyages to non-religious but sacred places (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). It is asserted that people with a solid religious orientation are likely to experience less anxiety, depression, and illness and to experience better life satisfaction. Thus, internal religious orientation, i.e., believing in God's presence, positively impacts visitors' mental health (Huang & Pearce, 2019).

While religious tourists seek peace of mind, enlightenment, meaning, and purpose in life from travel, contemporary research often adopts a marketing approach wherein religion is seen as a product with features (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Furthermore (Patwardhan *et al.*, 2020), some claim that visitors' emotional experience of a sacred site reinforces their sense of belonging to the

site and triggers future visit intention. Haq and Wong (2010), adopted a marketing approach to exploring the promotion of Islam as a 'product' in Australia. Nonetheless, it becomes imperative for academics and marketers to explore this field of tourism further *vis-à-vis* the multifaceted aspirations of tourists (Rashid, 2018).

### *Role of Christian Missionaries*

From the missionary perspective, religions have been classified as missionary and non-missionary. While Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism are identified as missionary religions, all other religions are non-missionary in nature (Sharma, 2012). Christian missionaries have a special place in their religion's theology, traditions, and faith. According to Svoboda *et al.* (2020), missions are its blood if pilgrimage is the heart of Christian tourism. The objectives of Christian missionaries are spreading the Gospel, constructing churches in Christian and non-Christian communities, and providing humanitarian aid to the poor. The role of missionaries is prominent, especially against the backdrop of a decline in the number of professing Christians in the West (Dellato, 2021; Imtiaz, 2018). Reports suggest that in 2011, seventy-five percent of Americans identified themselves as Christians. However, since then, there has been a steep decline in the number bringing it to sixty-three in 2021. Within the same decade, the number of atheists rose to twenty-nine percent from eleven percent (Dellatto, 2021). Missionaries, therefore, are expected to play a prominent role in bringing believers back to the religion (Gilman, 2019).

Missionaries testify that Gospel has been sent down to earth through the Prophet of the Lord, and it is the responsibility of missionaries to baptise people and teach them to do things that the Lord has commanded (Church of Jesus Christ, 2019). In Christianity, 'Catholics,' 'Baptists,' 'Evangelicals,' and 'Mormons' are all involved in the missionary work of 'preaching the gospel to every creature.' However, the motivation can vary across denominations.

In addition to restoring faith in people, missionaries are motivated by the desire to travel abroad and the desire to gain social capital (Imtiaz, 2018). They also emphasise extending social services like establishing schools and

hospitals (Wagner, 2003). Missionaries are also motivated by the need to have their sins forgiven by the Lord, as mentioned in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. One who works for the salvation of others will bring salvation to their souls and have their sins forgiven. Thus, the church is responsible for propagating faith and, therefore, missionary work. However, there also exists a missionary-church relationship wherein missionaries receive financial support from churches based on the activities performed each year, e.g. baptism or churches planted (Nehrbass & Dunaetz, 2018)

### ***Concept of Missionaries in Islam***

The concept of 'mission' in Christianity includes offering religious instructions, aiding the elderly, and converting people (Ministers, 2020). In comparison, the missionary concept in Islam is called *Dawah* (call), which involves bringing believers to faith. Historically, *Dawah* involved commercial activities apart from promoting religion; however, in the twentieth century, *Dawah* has evolved to embrace social, economic, political, and cultural activities. The latest developments in the Islamic missionary system focus on universal invitation within the faith rather than the conversion of non-Muslims (U.K. Islamic Mission, 2020). The missionary systems of *Tablighi Jamaat*, established in 1927, are also based on the modern concept of *Dawah*, focusing on reaching out to ordinary Muslims and reviving their faith, particularly in ritual, dress, and personal behaviour (Sheriff, 2020).

Islam is classified as a missionary religion; however, Islam uses the word 'Da'wah' instead of Missionary work. The verb form of *Da'wah* in Arabic is 'Yah 'u,' meaning 'invite or to call' (Wagner, 2003). Thus *Da'wah* means 'the invitation, calling or vocation.' A Muslim who performs *Dawah* is known as *Da'ee*. The primary purpose of *Dawah* is to encourage people to submit to Allah and worship Him only (Hameed, 2021).

Additionally, the last sermon by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed upon his followers to convey the message of Islam (Ekici, 2022). There is no such concept as mission (*Irsalayat*) and evangelism (*Tabshir*) in Islam. Thus, the two words do not describe the work of *Da'wah* and are strictly prohibited. The foundation of

*Da'wah* in Islam is that people cannot find true happiness away from God. Despite the popularity of many world ideologies, people still feel emptiness, especially in the West (Pinto, Fumincelli, Mazzo, Caldeira, & Martins, 2017). To fill this void, Muslims, therefore, abide by the duty of calling people to Islam without compulsion or coercion, to take humanity closer to God and fill in the void. However, Islam does not permit dishonest practices to entice people to Islam (Mohammad, 2013). The duty of the *Da'ee* is confined to reminding people to put all their faith in God for guidance.

*Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. Moreover, He knows most of the [rightly] guided (Qur'an 28:56).*

The Prophet (PBUH) advocated that the most effective manner of inviting people to Islam is by living the life of an exemplary Muslim, i.e., being kind, compassionate, helpful, and truthful in spreading the word of God. Allah states in the Qur'an;

*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in the best manner possible. Indeed your Lord is the most knowing who has strayed from his way, and He knows of who is [rightly] guided (Qur'an 16:125).*

### ***Are Missionaries Tourists?***

The COVID-19 crisis identified a number of faults with missionary travel in India. The two thousand members of the Islamic *Dawah* organisation *Tablighi Jamaat*, from over a dozen countries assembled in the heart of India's capital city New Delhi. As the lockdown was announced, the members were restricted to staying inside the Head Quarters of *Tablighi Jamaat*, which led to a spike in COVID-19 among the members. The police authorities registered cases against these overseas members for violating the conditions under which their tourist visas were granted. The Indian tourist visa allows visitors to visit religious places and spiritual centres.

Additionally, this Visa permits attending religious events and festivals- but missionary activities are not permitted. Missionary work in India is legislated under a separate 'missionary visa' category for members of registered Christian Missionary organisations only (Talwar, 2020).



Similarly, Christian missionaries from South Korea were expelled from northeast China after raids on their homes (Harris, 2017). The Chinese Government cited that the Christian missionaries violated Visa norms because they had travelled on student and tourist visas and were found to be involved in proselytisation.

### Methodology

Our study extracted data from multiple sources, and for this purpose, it adopted a desk research technique for data collection. The method is recommended as the starting point for a research process, to avoid reinventing the wheel. Additionally, when using secondary sources, the researcher has an opportunity 'to stand on the shoulders of giants' (Stickdorn, 2021). The nature of the topic led to assessing various data sources. The sources include websites of Missionary & *Dawah* organisations and leading scholarly articles from Journals, conferences, media reports and the Government websites of respective countries. The following search terms were used: 'missionary tourism,' 'Christian Missionaries in (name of the country),' '*Dawah* in (name of the country),' and 'Missionary Visa in (name of the country).' Only authentic data sources, like websites of registered missionary organisations with a history of missions in the top twenty economies were assessed to ensure the extraction of only real and meaningful data.

First, a list countries was compiled to identify the types of visas issued to missionaries by the top 20 economies of the world. The website of the World Bank, the most

authentic source of such information, was accessed to download the data of the world's top twenty economies. The leading policy-making agencies, newspapers, and trade journals were also assessed. Finally, the websites of respective countries and embassies were examined to extract data about missionary visas. Since our study explores the motivational factors of missionaries in the top twenty economies of the world, evaluating how missionary travel is facilitated in such countries, a qualitative approach is adopted.

### *Data Analysis: Missionary Travel Permission Policy in the Top Twenty Economies.*

The details of the world's top twenty economies in terms of GDP as ranked by the World Bank are presented in Table 1. The table also explains the type of Visa available for missionaries in such countries. The data analysis revealed that missionaries travel to these countries using various visa options. Out of the sample of twenty countries, fourteen countries (70%) offer a Missionary / Religious Visa for missionary work, including the USA, India, Japan, United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Korea, and six countries that belong to the European Union (Germany, France, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, and Switzerland).

Four countries offer regular / work visas for missionary work instead of missionary visas. These countries include the Russian Federation, Mexico, Turkey, and Indonesia. However, there is a difference in how missionary work is regulated within these countries. In contrast, Russia

**Table 1: Top 20 economies in terms of GDP according to the World Bank**

Rank	Economy	(\$US Million)	Code	Type of Religious Visas	Conditions
1	United States	21,427,700	R1	Temporary Religious Worker Visa	Allows religious workers to work in the USA for five years and eventually become eligible for green cards. Their religious group will pay wages and reimbursement from outside the United States.
			R2	Dependants of Religious workers	Under 21 Years of age- not allowed to work
			B	Visitor	For missionaries, exchanging pulpits temporarily, or evangelical tourists. The parent organizations outside the USA sponsor the wages of missionaries.
2	China	14,342,903		NA	Religious activities, including work of missionaries, are banned.

**Table 1: Top 20 economies in terms of GDP according to the World Bank**

Rank	Economy	(\$US Million)	Code	Type of Religious Visas	Conditions
3	Japan	5,081,770		Religious Activities Visa	Religious Activities Visa is a work category for members of foreign religious organisations who wish to undertake religious work in Japan. Monks, Bishops, and missionaries are included in this criterion.
4	Germany	3,845,630	Schengen	Cultural Film Crew Sports and Religious Events	No special missionary visa category.
			Long-stay visitor visa	Type of work visa	Facilitated by Christian missionary / religious organisations.
5	India	2,875,142	M-1	For Missionary / Religious workers of approved organisations.	The missionary work cannot include proselytisation. A letter of invitation from the missionary organisation is mandatory. Five-year visa tenure is applicable for U.S. nationals, and citizens of non-US countries get one year.
			M-1 X	For dependants of Missionary / Religious workers of approved organisations.	
6	United Kingdom	2,827,113	Tier 2	Minister of Religion visa	Job offer with any of the following: i) A faith community ii) Minister of religion iii) Missionary iv) Member of a religious order in the U.K.
			Tier 5	i) Temporary Worker ii) Religious Worker visa	Missionaries are allowed to work in the U.K. for up to two years.
7	France	2,715,518	Schengen Visa	Cultural, Film Crew, Sports, and Religious Event Purpose	No special missionary visa category.
			Long-stay visitor visa	Type of work visa	Facilitated by Christian missionary / religious organisations.
8	Italy	2,001,244	Schengen Visa	Cultural Film Crew Sports & Religious Event Purpose	No special missionary visa category.
			Religious Visa	Missionary visa	Permission to live and work under a missionary visa.
9	Brazil	1,839,758	ITEM VII	Visto Temporário VII.	Missionaries are allowed to travel under a special VITEM VII category visa.

Table 1: Top 20 economies in terms of GDP according to the World Bank

Rank	Economy	(\$US Million)	Code	Type of Religious Visas	Conditions
10	Canada	1,736,426		Religious and Charitable work visa	Temporary permission for religious, charitable and missionary work.
11	Russian Federation	1,699,877		No Missionary visas	Missionary activities cannot be conducted on behalf of a representative office of a foreign religious organization.
12	Korea, Rep.	1,642,383	D-6 Visa	Religious Works Visa	Engagement in religious activities. Applicant must be dispatched from a foreign religious or social services organisation. Invitation by a religious or social services organisation for engagement in social services.
13	Spain	1,394,116		Residence Visa for Religious Activities	Religious Activities allowed missionaries without any incentives.
14	Australia	1,392,681	Temporary Activity visa (subclass 408)	Religious Workstream	Missionary travel is permitted.
15	Mexico	1,258,287		No religious visas	
16	Indonesia	1,119,191	C312 (Temporary stay visa for work)	Carry out tasks as clergy	Carry out tasks as clergy. No specific missionary visas
17	Netherlands	909,070	Schengen Visa	Cultural Film Crew Sports & Religious Event Purpose	No special missionary visa category.
			Spiritual counsellor		Missionary / religious travel is permitted on a special Visa for up to three years.
18	Saudi Arabia	792,967		Haj Umrah Visa only for pilgrims.	No specific missionary visas
19	Turkey	754,412			No specific missionary or religious missionary
20	Switzerland	703,082	Schengen Visa	Cultural Film Crew Sports & Religious Event Purpose	No special missionary visa category.

allows missionaries to operate under civil laws and offers detailed guidelines for missionary work. The Russian Visa for missionary work includes a penalty clause for failing to fulfil the Visa conditions. The Governments of Mexico, Turkey, and Indonesia offer no such regulatory

guidelines for missionaries. Furthermore, among these top 20 countries, Saudi Arabia and China do not provide Visas or allow missionary workers from other countries. However, Saudi Arabia offers *Haj* and *Umrah* Visas for Muslim pilgrims under religious Visas.



## Motivation of Christian and Islamic Christian Missionary organisations in the World's Top Twenty Economies.

### *United States of America*

The USA has witnessed a huge interest in Faith-Based Initiatives by missionaries acting as welfare service providers. Such initiatives have led to increased religious congregations, and there is evidence of such organisations promoting the economic well-being of people (Iliev, 2020). Considering the importance of pastoral work, the US visa policy allows five years of religious work visa. Such permission finally benefits religious workers to obtain a US Green card (US DoS, 2019). The pastoral work includes missionary work, exchanging pulpits, and temporary or evangelical tourism. Apart from being open to receiving missionaries, the USA has also been a world leader in sending missionaries abroad. However, there is a growing concern about the declining attendances in Churches, which has plummeted to as low as 18%.

Further, the concern that the USA is becoming 'un-churched' and 'un-reached' at a faster rate than ever before is a significant concern of missionary organisations (ABWE, 2020b). In contrast, the motivational factors for a leading *Dawah* organisation - ICNA - for missionary work in the USA include improving the image of Muslims and Islam. The organisation is involved in *Dawah* against the backdrop of surveys indicating that 50% of Americans regard Muslims as extremists, 130 Million Americans do not know what a Muslim is, and fake news targeting Muslims, is believed by 50% of Americans (ICNA, 2020).

### *China*

China does not offer missionary visas, taking an extreme view against religious work and missionaries. It further demands that tourists who are spiritual professionals or journalists furnish a personal statement and a letter from their employer on company letterhead indicating that they will not get involved in any form of activity related to their profession (CIBT Visas, 2020). Recently, incidents of crackdown on International Christian missionary organisations and forcing them to quit the country have been reported. In the absence of foreign missionaries, local Chinese ministers have taken responsibility for offering such services. However, the lack of training,

education, and support hinders their work and travel abroad to train. Missionaries, however, are finding other routes to China, like teaching positions and business connections (Cheng, 2019).

The Chinese Government has also cracked down on Mosques and the 'Islamic way of life' to prevent the 'Arabisation' of Chinese culture. This policy bars the Islamic financial system, kindergartens or after-school programs by private Islamic organisations, and the teaching of religion & Arabic language in schools. The Chinese Government has banned sending students abroad to study theology (Myers, 2020). However, Islamic *Dawah* organisations in Saudi Arabia consider China a fertile ground for *Dawah*. In recent years, thousands of Saudi travellers have visited China for tourism, business, and amateur *Dawah* work. The Saudi-based *Dawah* organisations have approached thousands of Chinese workers in Saudi Arabia who have converted to Islam. Such groups have even managed 'mass conversion' of Chinese workers with great fanfare and celebrations (Al-Sudairi, 2017).

### *Japan*

According to the leading missionary organisation 'Japan Mission,' missionary work in Japan has a two-fold purpose. First, to evangelise the people moving away from religion, and second, to help the churches. The strategy to counter the problem of small congregations in churches is countered by making more churches that are spiritually thriving centres of hope and meet local people's expectations (*Need in Japan* 2019). Japan offers a 'Religious Activities Visa' for workers (Monks, Bishops, and missionaries) of foreign religious organisations who wish to undertake pastoral work in Japan. The necessity for missionary work in Japan results from the aging and retiring of Japanese pastors and the reluctance of the new secular younger generation to take up the roles (ABWE, 2020). Similarly, Islamic missionaries have different reasons to explore Japan; the most prominent reason is the deep-rooted resentment of second-generation Japanese Muslims who blame Islam for the current socio-political position they are in, which makes them feel neither genuinely Islamic nor part of their Japanese ethnic culture (*Dawah mission*, 2015).

### **Mexico**

Mexico has a lenient approach towards missionary activity even though there are no separate visas for either missionary or religious vocation. Some missionaries travel on short tourist visas that are valid for less than seven days and are free of cost. Since Mexico offers Visa arrival facilities to many countries, such tourists are also involved in missionary activities (Go Missions, 2020). The attitude of Government agencies towards missionary work has improved over the past number of decades, due to which these religious bodies work with more confidence. The reason behind this confidence is increasing crime-gang wars, drug trafficking, kidnappings, and violence, which the Government has not been able to control.

Apart from Christian Missionaries, Muslim missionaries are also very active here who initially came from Spain in the 1990s. Currently, Islamic missionary groups from the USA are more prominent in the country (Pizzey & Rojas, 2020). Islamic missionary activities have witnessed huge success by being able to triple the Muslim population in Mexico in the last fifteen years. The missionary work in Mexico has increased literacy and educational attainment rates at primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Additionally, missionary work has acted as a catalyst for long-term economic development by making education accessible to those in need (Waldinger, 2017).

### **Germany, France, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, and Switzerland (European Union Countries)**

The European churches were under social and intellectual attack in the 19th century due to the changing lifestyles resulting from industrialisation. Several politicians claimed that the churches were the bulwarks of a society that needed to be overthrown to provide justice to the working class. Amidst such attacks, Karl Marx (1818–83) argued that religion was the opium of the masses (Pradella, 2020). However, groups of ‘Christian Socialists’ and clergymen offered to sympathise with the working class and attempted to regain the creditability of the church in the life of people. Their efforts also countered the onslaught from modernists, for whom advance in science was more meaningful than the Bible and Church (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021). The challenges of missionaries in Europe continue to be more profound as they have to address problems of falling attendance of

devotees in churches and cathedrals, dwindling devotion to the Gospel, lack of religious practice, and poor attitude toward the religious scriptures (Salmon, 2017).

On the other hand, *Dawah* organisations want to prevent the growing European Muslim population from drifting away from Islam and assimilating into European culture. However, Islam, with twenty-five million followers in the European Union, has the credit of being the largest minority group. Muslims outnumber European Jews, and Islam continues to spark debates, and controversies, ignite fear and cause an air of hatred. The cocktail of suspicion and mistrust has resulted in European Muslims being perceived as threatening national identity, domestic security, and social fabric (Wingate, 2019). With the backdrop of such a bleak scenario, Islamic missionary work in Europe is full of challenges. Such challenges have led to the invention of ‘Euro-Islam’ – a template for reconciling Islam and modernity proposed by Swiss intellectual Tariq Ramadhan. The template recommends ‘Europeanisation of Islam,’ which loosely refers to respecting local culture and withholding personal religious values simultaneously (Brahimi & Brisson, 2020).

Modern Europe comprises twenty-six countries based on the 1984 agreement to create a ‘visa-free passport-less zone.’ Most of these countries are part of the EU Zone; however, countries like Switzerland and Lichtenstein, which are not part of the European Union, still enjoy free movement within this territory as they are part of the Schengen Zone (Schengen, 2020). While these countries have facilitated a ‘visa-free passport-less zone’ for their citizens, external travellers can obtain a Schengen Visa, which can be used to travel to any of these countries.

### **India**

The recent controversy involving the *Tablighi Jamaat* (the leading *Dawah* organisation of India) event in New Delhi during the COVID-19 crisis has led to a redefining of conditions for tourist visas in India. The foreign members of the organisation arrived in India in early March 2020 on a tourist visa for *Dawah*. As several members of the organisation tested positive for COVID-19, it was believed that they passed it on to locals across the country. The episode led to a rethink on

whether tourist visas can be used for *Dawah*. India offers a missionary visa to Christian missionaries exclusively, due to which overseas members of *Tablighi Jamaat* visit India on a tourist visa.

Due to the *Tablighi Jamaat* event, an amendment in visa policy was subsequently made that restricts foreign nationals from engaging themselves in 'Tabligh Work.' The *Dawah* workers / missionaries shall no longer preach religious ideology, make speeches in sacred places, distribute audio / visual or printed material about religion, and spread conversions. However, missionaries / *Dawah* workers can attend religious activities and visit spiritual places (TheWire, 2020). Against the backdrop of the discussion, *Dawah* or missionary work can no longer be carried out while traveling to India on tourist visas. However, Christian missionaries intending to travel to India for religious purposes or to join a foreign missionary organisation approved by the Government of India are still offered missionary visas. The registered missionary organisations are expected to ensure they are not involved in proselytisation. While US passport holders are offered five years visas under the Indo-US bilateral agreement, all other passport holders are issued a one-year missionary visa (Indian Visa, 2020). Since, in almost all countries missionaries are required to travel on special missionary visas, which are practically like work permits, it is questionable whether they can be classified as tourists.

India offers missionary visas, M1 tourist visas for missionaries of approved organisations, and M1-X Visas for the dependants of missionaries. However, the missionaries are not allowed to undertake proselytisation. The visa application process requires missionaries to be invited by a locally registered missionary organisation. Christian missionaries in India were instrumental in bringing new education systems - establishing high-quality schools and hospitals. However, as the laws regulating the missionaries toughened over the decades, the international missionary organisations passed on their missionary responsibilities to local organisations. While Christian Missionaries travel to India on Missionary Visas- *Dawah* in India is undertaken by India-based *Tablighi Jamaat* (Khan, Chelliah & Ahmed, 2018). This organisation is among the world's largest missionary organisations, with 80 million members worldwide.

However, *Tablighi Jamaat* members do not approach members of other religious communities- but are focused on fellow Muslims who have been distracted by worldly affairs to bring them to the right path of Islam (Hasan, 2020).

### *United Kingdom*

The UK allows religious workers to travel using a 'Minister of Religion' (Tier 2) visa, including religious order members and missionaries. This Visa allows work for three years and one month, however, the Visa can be extended. Another category of Visa (Tier 5) is meant for temporary religious workers involved in preaching and on assignment in a religious order. Despite a long tradition of Christianity, it is predicted that the number of Christian populations will decline to 45% by 2050 from 64% (Wyatt, 2015).

Considering the challenge of rising secularism in the Christian communities, the leading missionary organisations organise short-term mission experiences across the U.K. to reach out to the next generation (Omusa.org, 2020). In contrast, *Dawah* agencies work towards the social and economic uplift of the Muslim community. Such measures include free education to the children of low-income families, helping needy people, and making information about Islam available to schools, libraries, prisons, hospitals, churches, or anyone who requests it (U.K. Islamic Mission, 2020).

### *Canada*

Canada is witnessing massive changes in societal norms and values, reflected in its attitude towards issues like medically assisted procreation and the declining importance of family and marriage. Granting acceptability to such issues through legal frameworks worries the churches. In response, Christian churches are voicing concerns for upholding the protection of a spiritual way of life in all aspects: conception, marriage (man & women exclusively) and natural death while opposing surrogate motherhood, same-sex marriages that are legalised at present in Canada (Zengarini, 2022).

Canada allows missionaries to operate under a special Religious and Charitable work visa. Under the Visa, religious activities can be carried out by the members

of religious and similar organisations. However, the details of such duties need to be specified. Physically, Canada is the world's second-largest country and has opened its doors to Asian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic immigrants. However, only 8% of Canadians consider themselves evangelical believers; over 50% do not consider themselves members of any religion. The need to address the 'spiritual famine' problem in Canada motivates Christian missionary organisations to send missionary teams to different Canadian metropolitan centres (ABWE, 2021).

The *Dawah* organisations, on the other hand, desire to

*convey the message of Islam, engage the Muslim Youth through spiritual activities to build a strong and healthy Muslim community and change the world through Dawah* (Support ISNA, 2020).

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populated country and the country with the largest Islamic population, offers temporary work visas for clergies. No further activities are allowed under the Visa- except working as a clergy. Indonesia also has a significant number of Protestant Christians and has been a popular destination for Christian missionary organisations like 'Alliance Churches,' a US-based international missionary organisation. Since 1928, the organisation claims to have established over 3000 churches in Indonesia (Stumbo, 2019). The activities of missionary organisations include reaching out to youth through mainstream and religious education. Other societal activities include providing fishing boats, ice manufacturing & rice processing units and spearheading other similar entrepreneurial projects. Such initiatives help the missionaries to establish rapport in otherwise 'highly resistant' regions (The Alliance, 2020).

As the most populous Islamic nation, Indonesia has close ties with Saudi Arabia. The relationship with Saudi Arabia has led to Indonesia benefiting from initiatives like scholarships for thousands of poor school and university students and rebuilding tsunami-devastated regions like Aceh. Saudi Arabia officially offers *Dawah* activities and has established several institutions staffed by Saudi citizens (Varagur, 2020).

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is officially an Islamic country and does not appreciate other religions. There have been instances whereby members of the Christian community were caught in the act of worship and were punished. In 2014, twelve Ethiopian Christians were deported after being caught worshipping. However, recent moves toward the modernisation of Saudi Arabia by Prince Mohammed bin Salman have led to advances in religious freedom. Additionally, the US Government has asked for an ending of the ban on Churches, which was politely declined as it could lead to attacks by militant groups (Bostock, 2021).

Under the category of religious visas, Saudi Arabia, where the holiest Islamic shrines are located, offers Hajj and Umrah visas to pilgrims. The Visa clarifies that visitors are expected to perform pilgrimage only and return to their respective countries. Going on Hajj pilgrimage is mandatory once in a lifetime for all Muslims. This makes it an obligation for Saudi Arabia to offer such visas. Saudi Arabia provides no missionary visas, however, recent reforms have led to Saudi Arabia hinting at embracing religious plurality after top Saudi officials had a meeting with US evangelical leaders (Kinani, 2018) and additionally promoting interfaith dialogue (USCIRF-Saudi Arabia, 2020).

### **Australia**

Australia allows missionary travel under a religious work visa called a 'Temporary Activity Visa.' The visa allows the promotion of spiritual leadership, the implementation of religious activities, the offer of pastoral care and proselytising. Australia, an economically 'well-off' country, is also a popular tourist destination. In the mid-twentieth century, remote aboriginal communities resisted the Federal Government's desire to assimilate them into 'white Australian culture.' Resistance to the efforts of Christian missionaries led them to be subsequently forced to come around to 'Aboriginal culture.' The Australian missionaries had a difficult time, initially because of their English language and despite some acceptance, the Aboriginal people have stuck to their culture while maintaining a façade of Christianity (Rademaker, 2020).



The immigration of people from China, India, and the Middle East resulted in an explosion of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. At the same time, Christianity is shrinking sharply and is now a minority religion. Against this changing demography, several missionary organisations have developed innovative approaches like 'Workplace Evangelism,' which includes 'Biblical talks' during lunch breaks, in board rooms, and prayer groups. Such organisations also organise 'Scripture classes' for public schools, 'Sports Evangelism' during major sports events like the Olympics and World Cup Tournaments, and 'missionary sending,' whereby the organisations facilitate the movement of missionaries to Asia and the South Pacific (The Spiritual, 2020).

Australia is a melting pot of several communities that attract *Dawah* organisations to promote the message of Islam. Such organisations use lectures, debates, and speeches to reach out to the local populace (iERAuk, 2018)

### **Russia**

Russia allows missionary work under detailed guidelines because of the changes in federal laws to prevent terrorism and promote safety. The visa category for missionaries traveling under 'humanitarian entry visa' was amended in 2016. Federal law amendments resulted in the scrapping of religious visas previously obtained under the 'humanitarian entry visa' category (Stahle, 2008). The new federal law defines missionary work as any act that involves the dissemination of religious beliefs to people of other faiths by religious organisations or individuals through mass or digital media (Roudik, 2016). In addition, the guidelines provide clear instructions on how and where foreign nationals can proselytise in Russia. The new changes prohibit missionary work from violating laws and promoting extremist activities (Elliott, 2003). The punishment for not abiding by such laws includes fines, property seizure, and deportation. Such harsh measures under the guise of counter-terrorism have empowered the authorities to curb civil liberties, leaving some religious groups defunct (USCIRF, 2016).

### **Turkey**

The Republic of Turkey has a population of 75 million-but between 120,00 and 320,000 are Christians (c.0.02%)

despite a strong Christian past. The Apostle Paul was born here; the seven churches of the Revelation were here; hundreds of other churches were scattered throughout the country in the past, but almost nothing remains (Reach Turkey Mission, N.D.). Turkey does not issue any religious or missionary visas. However, foreign missionaries are active in Turkey and receive cooperation from the Turkish Government. The prominent Christian missionary organisation, 'Global Ministries,' operates in thirty countries and works with local secular Muslim groups. These missionaries work in health and education but engage in missionary & religious activities as well (Global Ministries, 2014).

Despite a poor record of granting permissions to foreign missionaries, there has been a sharp reduction in such denials over the years. Foreign missions need more missionaries to train Turkish pastors. At the same time, there are instances when agencies profile Christian groups. The trust issues between the state and the missionary groups impacts Turkey's foreign policy (Casper, 2022; Bozkurt, 2021). However, *Dawah* activities are organised by International Islamic organisations like iERA in Turkey, which involves local youths spreading the message of Islam among the local Turkish and tourists (iERA, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to the existing research studies available in the literature that focus on missionary work in developing countries, our study has provided insight into such work in the leading world economies. Additionally, the study investigated the motivations of the Christian and Muslim missionaries in such countries. The study results indicate that almost all countries treat missionary work as employment in contrast to the popular perceptions about 'Missionary Tourism'. No country except Mexico allows missionaries to travel under a tourist visa. Therefore, missionary visa requirements are not much different from work visas. Missionaries, therefore, are treated like overseas workers rather than tourists. Almost all countries that offer missionary visas expect missionary travellers to furnish supporting documentation like invitation letters / job offers from registered organisations, and missionaries are provided with the terms and conditions of work and the duration they are expected to work. These



results confirm that controversies surrounding the travel of *Tablighi Jamaat* on a tourist visa in India or South Korean Christian Missionaries in China were no doubt in contradiction to the conditions of a tourist visa.

The policies of countries like the USA, the UK, Italy, Brazil, Canada, Korea, Spain, Australia, Mexico, Indonesia, and the Netherlands strongly favour missionary work through special visas and work entitlements. Such countries additionally do not have separate policies for non-Christian missionary work. Countries like India and Russia offer visas to missionaries who only have invitations from local (Christian) missionary organisations. The policy leaves non-Christian missionary work out of scope in such countries. Additionally, missionary workers cannot do proselytisation while in India and Russia. France does not have a special missionary visa, but Christian Missionaries can be provided with long-term visitor visas. The analysis has revealed that out of the twenty top economies, only two countries - China and Saudi Arabia - do not permit missionary work. The findings are consistent with the Clash of Civilizations thesis, in which Huntington sees Islamic and Chinese civilizations as allies whose values conflict with other civilizations, particularly the West. Huntington (2014) identifies 'Cultural characteristics and differences' as one of the six areas of conflict with the West that are 'less mutable' and remain unresolved in comparison to other differences like political and economic ones.

Differences in motivation can be found among the Christian and Islamic Missionaries worldwide. In the USA, European Union, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (all fully democratic countries), Christian missionary organisations fear dwindling religiosity among people, which is reflected in falling attendance in churches. Islamic *Dawah* organisations, on the other hand, are more interested in building better relations with locals to counter Islamophobia against the backdrop of 9/11 and several terrorism-related events. These organisations are also interested in taking Islam's message to the second generation of 'immigrants' from such countries. In Japan and Korea, the missionary organisations intend to address the problem of retiring pastors and reluctance on the part of the new secular younger generation to take up the roles. *Dawah* organisations in these countries, on

the other hand, want to focus on the second-generation Muslims suffering from a crisis of identity.

Mexico and Indonesia - the most prominent Catholic country in the study and the other with the largest number of Muslims are popular among Christian and Muslim missionaries. In Mexico, the lenient attitude of the authorities in allowing missionary and *Dawah* workers to operate without restrictions, including travel on tourist visas, has resulted in the visible influence of these organisations. Similarly, Indonesia has the most significant number of Protestant Christians in Asia, with the largest Muslim population. Despite no missionary visas offered by the country, the International Christian missionary and *Dawah* organisations have been successful through economic initiatives.

### Implications

Mission organisations undoubtedly make a tremendous contribution to the social fabric of communities worldwide. Most countries (except a few) allow such work, considering its social, religious, economic, and political significance. In the past, missionary work has resulted in tremendous benefits for the host countries in the form of economic prosperity due to increased literacy rates and promotion of education, despite some drawbacks and criticism. Religion plays a prominent role in societies and fosters values among the masses - missionaries can play a prominent part in promoting such values and ethics. Allowing missionaries to travel under a special category of Visa by most countries, confirms the significance of such work. However, such work can also come under suspicion when missionaries move into other cultures. Missionary organisations' primary responsibility is to clear these doubts and not pressure the Governments to permit such work without establishing trust.

Our study identified the fault lines within different cultures and civilisations regarding missionary work. Our study also highlighted the clashes of missionary organisations with law enforcement agencies and hostile groups in some countries. Even though there is strong evidence of missionary works promoting ties between the countries, for example, the USA developed allies like South Korea, Japan, Germany, Turkey, and the UK

(Taylan, 2018); however, can missionary work continue to be used for building bridges between civilisations? What other alternatives should countries consider for making allies and forging better relations? Even though such questions are crucial to address in the backdrop of the findings of our study, we recommend missionary organisations look beyond such aspects feared by the host countries, the most prominent ones being proselytisation.

The missionary / *Dawah* organisations worldwide need to look beyond the number game and try to address the pressing issues the world faces at present. Such organisations must address challenges such as the trust deficit, terrorism, and religious discrimination on the one hand- and promote education, interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchange on the other. Given the mistrust and insecurities communities around the world are witnessing questions need to be raised about approaches such as door to door visits, stopping people on the street, warning tactics (world coming to an end), and other means - are these still to be used?

Even though television and other platforms are already used for missionary purposes, missionary and religious organisations need to consider using online platforms to impart religious education and training to local clergy. On the ground, they can focus on social, economic, and educational objectives so that their travel becomes meaningful and no controversies occur in an already highly polarised world. If people find merit in the work of the missionary organisations and are impressed by their conduct - they shall embrace the religion (Ally, 2019).

The missionary organisations need to embrace U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, to which all member states are the signatories and focus on promoting prosperity and eradicating major issues such as poverty and hunger worldwide. After all, most missionary organisations also claim to have such a vision. Apart from offering religious discourse door to door or from pulpits – missionary and *Dawah* organisations need to address the problems of religious discrimination in communities. Right now, the world wants peace, and who else can be better in a better position to promote peace than Missionaries?

### Limitations and Future Directions

Despite several gaps being addressed by our study, our work still needs to overcome several drawbacks that future researchers can address. First, secondary data collected from authentic sources could be replaced by primary data to offer fresh insights into missionary motivations in different countries. Second, this study was limited to 20 countries. However, future studies can include more countries to have a more detailed overview of missionary travel motivations and better understand governments' attitudes towards missionary travel. Additionally, this study omitted the Buddhist perspective, despite its success worldwide - especially in Western countries. Future studies must investigate Buddhist missionary work. Furthermore, our study has only examined the current policies of missionary travel requirements; future studies could discuss the evolution of such policies over the years. Finally, future studies could explore the socioeconomic impact of missionary work on local communities.

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