

Atlas of Global Christianity

Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds. *Atlas of Global Christianity*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. 400 pp. + CD-ROM. \$250.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780748632671 (set).

In 1910 the World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh. The *Statistical Atlas of Christian Missions* (Edinburgh, Scotland: World Missionary Conference, 1910) was presented to the conference. The *Atlas of Global Christianity* is published on the occasion of the 2010 centenary of the conference as a successor to that work, as a retrospective review of one hundred years of Christianity, and as a look forward to the development of global Christianity in the near future. The editors claim that it “aims, through a combination of maps, tables, charts, graphs and text, to present a comprehensive analysis of Christianity in the modern world” (xi). It is both more and less than that. It is also a comparison of Christianity in relation to other religions (Part I), an historical overview of changes in Christianity since 1910 (throughout), an introduction to the study of global Christianity (essays), and at times a roadmap for the promotion of Christian mission (Parts II, III, and V). Where it falls short is as a “comprehensive analysis”; it would be more accurate to call it a comprehensive overview and introductory analysis of global Christianity.

The *Atlas* is published as a full-color oversize (36 cm height x 26 cm width) volume of text, maps, and other illustrations along with a supplementary CD-ROM with the same maps and illustrations plus software to view and manipulate the illustrations. The text volume of the *Atlas* is divided into five parts: “Religion,” “Global Christianity,” “Christianity by continent and region,” “Peoples, languages and cities,” and “Christian mission.” Each part has one or more essays on various topics relating to the section plus maps, charts, and other illustrations with explanatory text. The essays are signed and are written by one or more of the sixty-four contributors to the *Atlas*. Many of these men and women are from North America or Europe, but there is a fair representation of people from all around the world. There is no attribution for the explanatory text on the maps pages with one exception: the text of the “Religious Freedom Index” map was written by Brian J. Grim, the creator of the Restricted Religious Freedom Index, which is the source of the data for the map. The map texts otherwise were written by the editorial staff. The text volume also contains introductory matter and a number of appendices, including a select bibliography, glossary, country-by-country statistics, an index of proper names, and methodological essays, sources, and notes.

The core of the *Atlas* is the data used to generate the maps and other illustrations. The *World Christian Database* (*WCD*) and the *World Religion Database* (*WRD*) are the sources of all religious demographic figures. Todd M. Johnson is the editor of the first database and co-editor of the second. Both databases have been available for annual subscription (\$2,100 and \$2,250) through Brill Online since 2007 and 2008, respectively. Although there have been some questions raised about the accuracy of the *WCD* estimates, construction of categories, and potential biases, the most thorough analysis of the *WCD* gave the database a generally positive review (Becky Hsu, Amy Reynolds, Conrad Hackett and James Gibbon. “Estimating the Religious Composition of All Nations: An Empirical Assessment of the World Christian Database.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47 (2008): 678-693). The review concludes that the data in the *WCD* are “generally plausible and consistent with other data sets” (678). There are some exceptions for specific countries and for specific categories; for details see the full review.

There are no similar analyses for the *WRD* at this time. The *Atlas* states that the non-Christian religion data from the *WRD* are constructed using the same methodology as for the *WCD*, so the data might be reasonably assumed to be similarly reliable but with similar problems of variation by country and of categorization.

Many of the variables of the data selected for presentation in the *Atlas* are included in the country-by-country statistics appendix (329-341). There are thirty-nine categories listed, all of which are divided into two or more variables (numbers and percentage change), and most of which include both 1910 and 2010 figures. The 2010 figures are based on projections of growth or decline based on the data from 2000 and 2005. The projections were reviewed for each country to account for anomalies or events that would affect the growth or decline of the variable being measured. The statistical table enhances the usefulness of the work as a whole because the table is the only way to easily compare variables across one country or region.

The five parts of the *Atlas* are organized thematically, so comparing information on a particular country or region requires flipping pages between sections. This is a trade-off since the thematic presentation does allow for useful and easier comparison among countries and regions globally on any specific topic. For example, the primary maps for Christianity in Central America and South America are only four pages apart. Navigation within the text is helped by the presence of colored and labeled tabs along the fore-edge. The maps themselves are either a single page for regions or a two-page spread for global maps. The data are presented in various shades of a single color; for example, information about Christianity is in various shades of blue. In general, the shades of color presented are readable at the level of countries, with the exception of geographically very small countries such as San Marino which are hard to distinguish from surrounding colors. Province boundaries are included and show varying shades as appropriate for different data, but the provinces are not labeled with names. The usefulness and readability of the province boundaries vary on the size of the map and the provinces themselves. Some of the map pages incorporate supplemental tables that include selected data for provincial comparisons, e.g., the top ten provinces in Southern Europe with the most Christians in 2010. The map pages often include smaller supplementary maps and charts that present additional information and tables that present the same data in tabular form. The tables are useful because the shades of a single color used on the maps can at times be hard to distinguish; the difference in shade of blue between 75 to 85 percent and 85 to 90 percent Christian is subtle. Each map page also contains a column of analytical text. This text clearly describes the theme of the data visually presented in the maps and charts and provides background information and selected details about the topic regionally or globally.

The visual presentation of data in maps and charts and the presentation of data in tables comprises somewhat more than half of the content of the text volume. The rest of the space in the *Atlas* is given over to essays on various topics. There is one essay to introduce and analyze each theme presented visually. This means for each map in Part III, "Christianity by continent and region," there is a two-page introduction to Christianity in that area from 1910 to 2010. There are fewer articles in the other parts of the work, but every section has a reasonable number of them except for the first part, "Religion"; this part would have benefited from the same type of analytical review. This section does include a welcome essay on "Religious freedom" by Brian J. Grim, as well as a series of maps on this and related topics. Other exemplary introductions to broad themes are Andrew F. Walls' "Christianity across twenty centuries," Dana L. Robert's "Missionaries sent and received, worldwide, 1910-2010," and Jonathan J. Bonk's "Christian finance, 1910-2010." As in any collection of articles by many different authors, the readability and quality of analysis vary. None of the essays are poorly written but the focus of the analysis of the articles varies quite a bit from writer to writer. For example, Paul H. Gundani's introduction to "Christianity in Southern Africa,

1910-2010” focuses on the issues of new religious movements, indigenization, Christian doctrine in Africa, and politics, while Ogbu U. Kalu’s introduction to “Christianity in Western Africa, 1910-2010” focuses on the themes of African responses to Christianity and African charismaticism. The regional variations in the analysis of the data are understandable and highlight the differences between countries and regions, but it limits the comparability of the analysis between regions to the data and maps.

The supplemental CD-ROM contains an “Atlas Presentation Assistant” and the Adobe AIR software that is required to use the assistant. The Adobe AIR software includes versions for Windows, Mac, and Linux. The CD-ROM also includes all the illustrations (maps, charts, and tables) included in the text, and these may be viewed using any web browser. Adobe AIR is required to use the full presentation assistant. The basic purpose of the assistant is twofold: first, to allow the user to view the same data included in the printed maps at the country level, and, second, to allow the user to export images, either those used in the printed text or the country level maps, to use in presentations. The assistant fulfills these purposes, but it is clunky to use and there are some problems with the software itself. The main problem with the assistant is the awkward navigation which forces the user to navigate through the maps based on the sections of the printed text. For example, if you want to look at a number of different variables for Nigeria you will have to go to section 1 for the data on religious freedom, to section 2 for the data on Anglicans in Nigeria, and to section 4 for data on Christians in urban areas in Nigeria. When viewing the data for a specific region or country in one section it is not possible to view data from one of the other sections; this is a major hindrance to effective use of the assistant. In addition, when viewing a region or country, the countries and provinces are not labeled, although a country label will appear when hovering the mouse over one country on the map. This lack of permanent labels makes the maps less useful for presentations without further manipulation of the images in other software after exporting the images. Exporting images in the assistant is simple but the exported files (jpg or png) are low resolution; the resolution will probably only make them usable for presentations.

When using the presentation assistant in Windows XP or Vista, and also presumably in Windows 7, navigation is further restricted by the inability to switch focus from one country to another by double-clicking on an adjacent country on the map. Switching countries requires using a drop-down menu to choose the country. The double-click function does work on the Mac version of the assistant. In both the Windows and Mac versions there are a few instances where there appears to be a long list of maps or other illustrations that have a scroll-bar to move the list up and down, but it is not possible to scroll the list. The part of the list that is visible does not allow access to the illustrations listed, so there is no purpose to these truncated lists. It is possible to navigate to all these illustrations by using a drop-down menu or by paging through the illustrations. Given these problems, it was frustrating to find that all versions of the assistant are missing all the help pages other than the main help page. The complete help file is available online for use or for download at the *Atlas*’ support website: <http://www.atlasofglobalchristianity.org/support.html>. Looking at the illustrations in the printed volume in the assistant is unproblematic, but making more sophisticated use of the assistant will be challenging. Although the presentation assistant does allow for viewing data by country, users will need to be patient and allow for sufficient time to do this in spite of the poorly designed assistant.

Although it is never explicitly stated in the *Atlas*, the work is clearly written from the perspective of what the text terms “Great Commission Christians.” This term seems to be synonymous with Christians who engage in and support Christian missions. The coverage of Christianity is ecumenical, and the inclusion of data about other

religions makes the work useful to some extent even to researchers not interested in Christianity. However, at times the perspective comes through strongly, especially in the essays on Christianity in a region where the conclusion often addresses how to grow Christianity in that region. The whole of Part V, “Christian mission,” is also written from this pro-missions perspective; it is a treatment that presents Christian mission as a phenomenon that is desirable and worth promoting globally. This perspective does not appear to impact the presentation of the data, other than in the same way as noted in the discussion of data in the *WCD* above, but it does permeate the textual analysis.

Even with the shortcomings noted, the *Atlas of Global Christianity* is recommended for all theological libraries. It is the only modern work that presents such a comprehensive visual presentation of data on global Christianity. Although at \$250 it is expensive, having access to the data is a steal when compared to the cost of the *WCD* and the *WRD*. The essays add much value to the work because as a whole they are a good introduction to the study of global Christianity and Christian mission.

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