

World Christian Encyclopedia

Johnson, Todd M. and Gina A. Zurlo. 2019. *World Christian Encyclopedia*. Third edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1000 pp. \$260. Hardback. ISBN: 9781474403238.

Built on the previous two editions—a 1982 edition by the esteemed historiographer and statistician David B. Barrett and a 2001 edition by Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson—the third edition of *World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE)* expands, updates, and revises the most authoritative and comprehensive survey of historical and current status of Christianity around the world. Co-authors Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo have involved the research of hundreds of Christians in producing an unmatched reference work on the study of world Christianity. Engaging in quantitative research methodology, Johnson and Zurlo's selected findings are relevant to both the academic context and interested clergy and laity in church settings. In this review, I first identify the authors' aims and assess how they have achieved their goals. Second, I address the authors' perspective and writing style. Third, I discuss the authors' presentation of important findings from their work. Fourth and last, I make a concluding comment on the third edition of *WCE*.

First, Johnson and Zurlo aim to document the rapid changes of Christianity in the past one hundred twenty years (1900–2020). They have successfully achieved their goals through utilizing interdisciplinary methods from history, mathematics, theology, and sociology. One of the most unique and striking features of the third edition is that it reflects on the contextualized and lived experiences of Christians. As the previous two editions have focused more on institutions, organizations, and the development of theological and doctrinal issues, the third edition has strategically adopted an approach that takes grassroots activities and movements seriously. The authors' shifting approach has resulted in a more inclusive and holistic reflection of Christianity and other religions. It helps readers form a connectedness between Gospel and culture.

Another significant highlight is that the authors have recognized women's contribution to historical and contemporary world Christianity. While these were largely absent from the two previous editions, the third edition fills the gap and sheds light on how Christian women have been actively participating in education, church, and social service. Historical and contemporary women's work through ordained ministry and lay movement merits further research that enlightens all students. The third edition serves as a springboard for researchers on the topic of women in world Christianity.

The third edition of *WCE* has reflected another scholarly attempt at a multilingual bibliography for each country. The authors have acknowledged that available scholarship is abundant in larger countries but minimal in small nations. They have uncovered how some Oceanian and Caribbean islands need more scholarly attention.

Second, the authors present a global perspective that addresses local realities. The scope of the third edition reflects complexity and multidimensional aspects of major trends in the Christian movement. It reveals the unity and diversity amongst 2.5 billion Christians. This encyclopedia contains information about 234 countries in alphabetical order. The comprehensive database provides a wealth of maps, demographics, socioeconomic, health, gender, religions, censuses, notes on religions, short summaries of Christian history and traditions, comparative graphs, illustrative photos

of Christianity in the country, religious freedom, bibliography, and churches and denominations. The authors have highlighted key findings from Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, independents, Pentecostal/Charismatics, and Evangelicals. They have also provided their research methodology, sources, and indicators such as net religious change formula in the technical notes for readers who are curious about how the authors have drawn estimated conclusions. The authors have also addressed limitations of some data gathering and assessment. One example is that some religious adherents claim multiple belongings of different religions. The authors have also navigated through how underground churches' numbers are difficult to verify. Despite these challenges, they have enlarged and enriched our understandings of Christianity in the world context.

Third, Johnson and Zurlo have revealed patterns and trends from Christianity and other religions and nonreligions. I will address three significant findings. One of the surprising findings is a stark contrast of how Christians in Asia and Africa outnumbered Christians in Europe in the first nine hundred years of church history. The authors' discovery rightfully challenges how early church history is conventionally centered on Europe. It may surprise readers that countries with a predominant number of Christians both send and receive most missionaries (33). Although missionaries are sent from everywhere to everywhere, missionaries from the Majority World have significantly increased. Statistics from this third edition of encyclopedia continue to affirm significant Christian growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The authors have projected that 77% of Christians will live in the "Global South" by 2050.

A second significant finding reveals the holistic nature of Christian mission. While evangelism is important, social justice-related issues have also emerged as Christian mainstream concerns and participations. Christians across denominations are increasingly engaging cultures and societies through creative means. One key aspect is that Christians are building genuine friendships across religious and cultural boundaries. Despite fragmentation, Christians value and contribute to ecumenicism and interreligious dialogues. Updated religious freedom evaluations further dispel misunderstandings and explain persecutions which have occurred not only in the past but also in the recent two to five years.

A third significant pattern is about Christian identity and immigration/migration. The migration of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists impacts demographics in Europe and North America. Christian diaspora communities face challenges of preservation and integration. Johnson and Zurlo's statistics and interpretations call for more research on religious community and migration. All these findings and trends help readers anticipate concerning questions and issues in the near future.

Valuable to students and researchers in world Christianity, the database is easy to access and navigate. Full-colored photographs, charts, and tables are particularly illustrative and helpful. For example, the authors have provided brief historical information on Christian art and architecture. Researchers then may compare and contrast and make further analysis. The database also accommodates beyond academia and the church. For instance, Christians who work for non-profit organizations and social justice issues would be able to assess socioeconomic, health, and gender-related information. I highly recommend Johnson and Zurlo's third edition of *WCE* to scholars, students, and individuals who desire to learn more about Christianity around the world today.

Overall, not only does *WCE* (third edition) re-orient readers in the historical and present patterns of world Christianity, but it also predicts the trends of global Christianity in the future based on scientific analysis. Their meticulous and monumental work provides an outstanding reference

source. Johnson and Zurlo's significant findings will reveal new understandings of Christianity and shape the directions of future research in World Christianity.

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