

BOOK REVIEW

Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010. Editors: Todd M. Johnson & Kenneth R. Ross, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009. Pages: xix+361. Price undisclosed.

1910 is a significant year for the history of Christian mission. The well known event of that year is, of course, the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, a milestone that marked the advent of the modern ecumenical movement. A lesser known but significantly remarkable achievement of the year, especially from the point of view of documentation, was the atlas the Edinburgh Conference produced, mapping the progress that had been made by Christian missionary efforts of that period. Commission I of the Conference that deliberated on the topic, "Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World", undertook the task of producing the atlas. A hundred years later, as efforts are underway to celebrate the first centenary of the 1910 Conference, it is therefore appropriate that steps have been taken to edit and publish an atlas in order to map the history of Christianity during the last one century. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross deserve all credit for undertaking this task.

The production of the *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* was indeed a mammoth task. The volume has emerged from a long line of some 200 major surveys, dictionaries, atlases and encyclopedias dealing with statistics of world Christianity. A number of them have been denominational and confessional; others have been interdenominational or ecumenical. An enormous amount of data on religious demography collected and analyzed over the last twenty five years, especially following the publication of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982;2d ed.,2001) came to the aid of this publication. An atlas of this size and scope required a remarkable global team assisting the two main editors. The resources, both in people and in technology spread around the world, worked together for several years. The volume is indeed a team work of unprecedented proportions.

The *Atlas* has six major parts. Part I titled, 'Religion' deals with the various world religions. Apart from demographic information on the growth (or decline) of various religions, this part also has general sections on the diversity and growth of religions, a religious freedom index etc. Part II deals with 'Global Christianity'. This section is a collection of essays and maps that deal with the major Christian confessional groups. The first essay here is, "Christianity's centre of gravity, AD 33-2100" and presents the significance of the shifting centre of gravity of Christianity to the global South. The article argues that, "Southern Christians can rediscover the theological, ecclesiastical and missiological trajectory of the first Christian millennium, when Southern Christians were in the majority and the centre of gravity was in Western Asia" (p. 51). Part III discusses Christianity by continent and region. There are general articles on each continent followed by regional articles. Part IV primarily addresses the context of languages and urbanization and how these have affected the growth of Christianity. Of particular significance in this section is information on the strength of various religions in the one

hundred largest urban areas in the world. Part V deals with 'Christian mission'. Following a general article titled, "Missionaries sent and received, worldwide, 1910-2010", this section contains articles on Christian mission in each of the six continents. Included here are also articles on related topics such as Christian finance, Bible translation, printing and evangelization.

Notes on "how to use this atlas" and also, on the methodology employed here, both included in the introductory section of the *Atlas*, make accessible to the lay person the reading of this voluminous reference material. The Appendices contain country by country statistics that "provides a quick reference, country by country listing for many of the variables that appear in the atlas". The Appendices also include an exhaustive bibliography, glossary and index.

In keeping with the trends of the time, the printed version comes also with an electronic one. The CD enclosed with the *Atlas* was specially developed for this purpose and allows for a greater degree of interaction with the material presented and provides a method for efficiently and accurately incorporating selected elements into presentation software for use in a classroom or group environment, thereby increasing its value as a teaching and communication tool. All the maps, tables, charts, and graphs printed in the *Atlas* are available on the CD, titled *Atlas of Global Christianity Presentation Assistant*, while the section text and analytic essays are not.

The *Atlas* seeks to correct "the false impression that Christianity is a Western religion". The academic study of world Christianity in recent decades has focused attention on changing trends in Christianity, especially the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa and Asia. This is a vital indicator that no student of religion can afford to ignore. However, some missiologists and social scientists caution us against overstating the significance of the current shift of Christianity to the Southern hemisphere. Robert Wuthnow in his recent book, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* points out that by 1970 itself, 49 per cent of the global Christian population already lived outside of Europe and the United States. "The literal geographic center of global Christianity had already migrated to northern Africa by that date". According to him, what happened in the other parts of the world earlier was even more spectacular. "... the Christian population in Latin America grew by less than 3 percent annually between 1970 and 2000 but had grown by 5 percent annually between 1900 and 1970. The pattern for Africa was even more dramatic, with 3 percent annual growth from 1970 to 2000 but 17 percent annual growth from between 1900 and 1970". The argument in favour of a recent shift, thus, is not as solidly grounded in empirical evidence as may first appear. The dramatic growth assumed to be taking place in Africa and Latin America was actually more dramatic before 1970 than it is now.

Whatever be the perception among scholars on the significance of the current growth of Christianity worldwide, there is little doubt that the publication of the *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* marks a major milestone in current Christian scholarship. As Kenneth Ross says in his introductory remarks, "within this 100-year span the Christian faith has undergone a remarkable transformation in its demographic shape – for

reasons not unconnected with the missionary movement that found its most concentrated expression in the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference.” This volume affirms that despite all the diversities in terms of ethnicity, denominationalism and theological orientation that is inherent in the worldwide spread of Christianity, the Christian faith and fellowship are marked by “an irreducible unity and coherence”, a factor that no Christian or secular scholar can afford to ignore.

- *Reviewed by Jesudas M. Athyal*