

“A masterpiece of textual, statistical, and visual information about religious beliefs and practices around the world!”
by Jean-Paul HELDT, MD, Ph.D.¹

A **book review** of *Atlas of Global Christianity: 1910-2010 (400 color illustrations)*, by Johnson, Todd M., Kenneth R. Ross, and Sandra S.K. Lee, eds. Edinburgh, UK: Center for the Study of global Christianity. Edinburgh University Press. www.eupublishing.com/page/atlasofglobalchristianity, 2009.

The first impression that one gets from this atlas is that it is “heavy!” When the UPS (United Parcel Service, USA) delivered the package to my home, I thought it contained half-a-dozen books. Thankfully, it only contained one big, large, book, weighing 6 pounds or nearly 3 kilos. The second impression is a visual one, looking at He Qi’s brightly colored painting of the “*Risen Lord*” (front cover). This painting alone promises a wonderful feast for the eye in this 361-page atlas.

The table of content is very impressive. The atlas features five parts, with each part having several sub-sections:

- Part I: *Religion*: a) Adherents changes from 1910-2010; and b) religious freedom;
- Part II: *Global Christianity*: a) Christianity by major tradition from 1910-2010; and b) Christianity by movement from 1910-2010; c) Christianity of from 2010-2050
- Part III: *Christianity by continent and region*: a) Africa from 1910-2010; b) Asia from 1910-2010; c) Europe from 1910-2010; d) Latin America from 1910-2010; North America from 1910-2010; and Oceania from 1910-2010.
- Part IV: *People, languages and cities*: a) religions by people and languages; b) Christianity by people and languages; and c) Christianity in cities from 1910-2010.
- Part V: *Christian mission*: a) Missionaries send and received from 1910-2010 (worldwide and by continent or region); and b) evangelism from 1910-2010 (e.g., finance, Bible translation, media, and evangelisation [sic]).²

The list of sponsors, in one of these four categories: a) research and production, b) academic collaboration, c) presentation, and d) production, is simply impressive (italics *supplied* for emphasis):

- 1) The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*;
- 2) The *Lausanne* Movement;
- 3) The *Boston* Theological Institute (BTI);
- 4) The International Association for Mission Studies (*IAMS*);
- 5) *Youth with a Mission*, Network for Strategic Initiatives (NSI);
- 6) ACC (Anglican Consultative Council);

¹ **Biosketch:** Born in France, and formally educated in France, Germany, Canada, USA and in the UK, Jean-Paul A. Heldt, a physician (ophthalmologist) turned anthropologist cum theologian and missiologist, has worked as a *medical doctor* in Guinea, Pakistan, Mexico, and Vietnam and as a public health, education and management consultant in a dozen more countries in four of the five continents. After graduating in 2002 with a *Ph.D. degree in Missiology* from Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of Intercultural Studies (Pasadena), he has been teaching History, Language and Culture in China between the Fall of 2002 and early 2009. His passion is teaching, writing, and the study of the day of rest and worship in *redemptive history* from a *worldview* perspective. He can be reached via email at [[jpheldt123\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:jpheldt123@yahoo.com)].

² My US spell-checker picked up “evangeligation” as “Not in dictionary.” Its suggestion was “evangelization!” Since this atlas was produced in Edinburgh, UK, I have retained the original spelling.

- 7) Asian Access;
- 8) Biola University, Cook School of Intercultural Studies;
- 9) First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City;
- 10) GMI (Global Mapping International);
- 11) Grace Bible Church of Arroyo Grande, CA;
- 12) New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO;
- 13) OC (OC International);
- 14) OMSC (Overseas Ministries Study Center);
- 15) St. Giles Presbyterian Church Endowment Fund, Richmond, VA; and...
- 16) WCIU (*William Carey International University*), located in Pasadena, CA.

The book features several useful appendices such as:

- 1) A select bibliography on world Christianity (pp. 324);
- 2) A 4-page glossary of “unusual, technical, or specialized” terms (pp. 325-328);
- 3) A 13-page section on “Country-by-country statistics” (pp. 329-341);
- 4) A 6-page section on “Enumerating global Christianity” (pp. 342-347). Choosing criteria for inclusion must have posed a formidable challenge for the producers of this atlas.
- 5) A 1-page section of sources (pp. 348);
- 6) A 4-page section of methodological notes (pp. 349-352);
- 7) A 9-page index of proper names (pp. 353-361);
- 8) A list of contributors (not listed among the 7 appendices), including 64 names (pp. xiv-xv), indicating their academic affiliation, a brief bio, and the CATEGORY of their respective contributions, such as “*PENTECOSTALS*, *LATIN AMERICA*, *MARGINAL CHRISTIANS*,” and so on (*Italic* and *CAPITAL* letters as in the original).

This book’s great strength is its perfect *integration*, on all but a few double, i.e., side-by-side, pages (e.g., viii-ix; xiv-xvii; 48-49; 100-101; 324-347; 349-361),³ of both *textual* explanation and *graphic* and/or tabulated representation(s). As far as the text is concerned, there are no less than 49 *essays* (n = 49), written by authors representing both genders, many denominations and institutions/organizations, as well as writers from all geographical areas and regions. These three-column essays typically cover double, i.e., side-by-side, pages (e.g. pp. 36-37, essay on “*Religious freedom*” by Brian J. Grim). With the exception of Andrew Walls’ essay on “*Christianity across twenty centuries*” (pp. 48-49), quasi all essays are followed by at least two double, i.e., side-by-side, pages containing colored maps, diagrams, pie charts, tabulated data, and bar graphs, all with their respective legends and matching captions; each such double-sided pages are a feast for the eyes and the mind! Each such set of opposing pages contains hundreds, perhaps thousands of *textual*, *numerical*, and/or *visual* data. To do justice to, and assimilate, all these textual, numerical, and/or visual data, each set of double, opposing, pages requires several hours of careful study, and deserves undivided attention.

Needless to say, each essay is a micro-*encyclopedia* of information and knowledge about its respective topic and section that follow the essay. To review each of the 49 essays *independently* would require a separate volume, which is clearly beyond the scope of this introductory review, and beyond the time available to this reviewer. I let each reader read the essays on his/her own, at on his/her own pace, and make up his/her *mind* as he/she see fits.

³ These excluded pages are those pages that are text-only pages, i.e., they contain only text apart from any graphic and/or tabulated representation.

As Paul asserts [albeit in a different context], “Let every one be fully *convinced* in his own mind” (See Rom. 14:5b).

A useful “afterthought:” Last, but not least, I must mention the CD-Rom that comes with the Atlas. Without any warning(s), there it is! On the inside back cover of this cover, in a transparent plastic cover, a CD-Rom that is compatible with the major PC formats: 1) Linus; 2) Macintosh (Apple); and 3) Windows. The data are also available in “*html*” as *Atlasviewer* and in individual “*jpg*” pictures (i.e., graphic format).

The CD-Rom comes pre-loaded with the APA software (“*Atlas Presentation Assistant*”). The data in this CD-Rom lend themselves very easily to presentation in software like, Powerpoint. Rather than scanning pages from the atlas, or even worse, tediously transcribing textual or tabulated data from the atlas to the software, a would-be presenter just *cut and paste* data (pictures, graphs, etc) from Adobe into powerpoint [I wrote this sentence *before* checking out the software! Lesson learned: First check out the software before bragging about it; or as the French say, “*You better kill the bear before advertising its fur for money!*”

Alas, on my computer (a Mac), the APA functions (Cut, copy, paste) either 1) do NOT work; or 2) I have NOT figured out how to execute these commands (Command key +X for cut, +C for copy and +V for paste). In the meantime, I can go around these limitations, by using the “*screenshot*” function of my computer, and then accessing the graphic data via .jpg (or .png) files. It is a little more tedious than the “*cut and paste*” function, but, in the end, it works, and that’s what matters!

The only, albeit negligible, downside of this atlas is its size (14.1 x 10.3 x 1.3 inches), and its weight (6 pounds = 2.72155422 kilograms, 8-digit decimal conversion figures are courtesy of Google.com). It is NOT a book one snuggles up with at night before going to bed. It is a desktop volume that invites *serious* study and analysis. And it is NOT a book that one can assimilate in one or two *sittings* (or reading sessions). To fully master its content, I guess it will probably take many hours and perhaps days, in weeks and months ahead. Its content, however, is designed to, and most likely will, remain *relevant* for years and decades to come, perhaps until the new revision is due by Edinburgh 2110!

Also missing in this great masterpiece of textual, graphic, statistical, and ecclesiastical achievements are:

- a) A detailed *subject index* of important places, events, and key doctrines (churches are listed under the proper name index);
- b) Enter *missing entries* into the proper name index, for the sake of impartiality and completeness, of marginal groups such as the “*United Church God*” (missing on pp. 360, under letter “U”) or The “*Jehovah’s Witnesses*” (missing on pp. 356, under letter “J,” or on pp. 361, under letter “W;” but described in the glossary as a “*marginal*” group on pp. 327 under letter “J”), while the atlas is discussing similar groups such as the “*Latter-day Saints*,” AKA “*Mormons*” (pp. 358, under letter “M;” also described as a “*marginal*” group on pp. 327, under “*Latter-day Saints*,” i.e., under letter “L”).

A more detailed presentation of “sabbatarian” churches, besides “*Adventists*” (pp. 353, under letter “A;” also listed in the glossary on pp. 327) and “*Messianic Jews*” (pp. 37, also described in the glossary on pp. 327, under letter “M”). There are, to date (as of Monday, 2010-05-17, n = 514), over 500 churches, denominations, communities, and

groups who maintain the Biblical mandate to honor the “*seventh day Sabbath*” (AKA nowadays Saturday).

Although their total number [perhaps between 20-25 millions members worldwide, which represents, in the most optimistic approximation, between 1-2%!] is relatively *small* compared to the vast body of Christianity [2,292 million according to this atlas: pp.7], the total *number* of these groups [each church having its respective and *different* doctrine-defining leadership, administrators and *theologians*] is currently at 514, and growing (Ten Commandment Ministries, 2008, 2010). On Friday, May 16, 2008, the number of these was 492 (Website accessed 2008-05-16). Exactly two years later, their number has grown to 514 (Website accessed again on 2010-05-17), i.e., 22 new groups in just 2 years, i.e., approx. 2 new Sabbath-keeping groups per month!

Their divers (n = 514) and their growing (2 new groups per month) aspect alone should give the rest of us enough food for thought to *think again* about [i.e., re-visit] the *original*, i.e., post-resurrection, day of rest and worship of the Apostolic, Christian church *before* the adoption of Sunday as the weekly day of rest and worship in the later period of the church.

In God’s economy [i.e., His kingdom], it seems, *Truth* is not defined by majority vote of its adherents. How else can we justify the *unique* truth and claims of Christ and Christianity, when Christianity is endorsed by only a little over *one third* [n = 33.2003%] of the current world population, i.e., 6,906.56 million people (Johnson, 2009:7). Even though Christianity is, by far, the *largest* religion compared to other religions, i.e., # 2 Islam (1,549.444 millions = 22.4%) and #3 Hinduism (948.507 millions = 13.7%) [all data are from this Atlas (Johnson:2009:7)]. Even though it may be the *largest*, with a ten-year growth rate of only 1.35% (2000-2010), several other religions have a faster growth rates than Christianity: Muslims (1.82%); Hindus (1.46%); Sikhs (1.61%); Daoists (2.45%); Confucianists (1.86%); Jains (1.54%) [These growth rates are listed in the decreasing order of the total number of 2010 adherents, as found in this Atlas:2009:7, and not in the order of the actual growth rates]. Of course, most of these religions grow by biological reproduction of their adherents, such as the Daoists (2.45%) and Confucianists (1.86%) in *China* that forbids any and all proselytism [All population and religions data are from this Atlas (Johnson:2009:7)].

For a complete listing of Sabbath-keeping churches, denominations, communities, and groups, please see the following website that is constantly updated, “<http://www.the-ten-commandments.org/sabbathkeepingchurches.html>.”

- c) Fix the “*cut/copy and paste*” function(s) in the APA software (Atlas presentation Assistant), at least that for the Mac (Apple), assuming that these function(s) work for other platforms.

Apart from these three minor suggestion(s), this atlas is definitively a great achievement for the 21st century, both in terms of Christian, ecclesiastical and missiological literature, as well as in terms of statistical documentation of ever-changing figures and numbers. For this reason(s), no church (local or otherwise), no institution (college, seminary, or otherwise), no library (public or otherwise), and no individual interested/involved in the history and/or expansion of the Christian church/movement in the 21st century can afford to be *without* this fantastic atlas! A *must-have*, and moreover, a *must-read*, *must-understand/assimilate* and

must-use and apply in our 21st century corporate ministries and personal vocations! Then, and only then, will the editors and contributing authors of this atlas have achieved their goal(s) and their objectives (Johnson, 2009:x). Their intense and sustained *effort(s)*, as well as the *money* invested in acquiring this book, will have not been spent in vain.

Should you have any comment(s) and/or suggestion(s) about this review, I can be reached via email at [[<jpheldt123@yahoo.com>](mailto:jpheldt123@yahoo.com)]. I look forward to hearing from you.

References cited in this review:

- Johnson, Todd M., Kenneth R. Ross, and Sandra S.K. Lee eds. *Atlas of Global Christianity: 1910-2010 (400 color illustrations)*. Edinburgh, UK: Center for the Study of global Christianity. Edinburgh University Press. www.eupublishing.com/page/atlasofglobalchristianity, 2009.
- Ten Commandment Ministries. *Sabbath keeping denominations*. Published online by The Ten Commandments Ministries. <http://www.the-ten-commandments.org/sabbathkeepingchurches.html>, 2008 [accessed May 16, 2008 and again on May 17, 2010].