

Background and Preview of the Global Overview of the
World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition

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Abstract:

First written and published in 1982 by Dr. David Barrett, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* serves as an authoritative and definitive work in the field of International Religious Demography and provides the demographic foundation for a broad spectrum of sociological and missiological publications and research. The third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* will continue the legacy of this impact, providing a much-needed update to the data and analysis to accurately present the state of Christianity around the world in 2020. The Global Overview of the third edition follows the tradition of the previous editions by providing an introduction and global summary of the demographic status of global Christianity and world mission. The 32-page, full-color, visually driven Global Overview seeks both to retain aspects of the previous editions and to introduce new ways to present information that is relevant, useable and historically significant. It is anticipated that the Global Overview will contain the most-often-quoted and -reproduced visual elements in future publications, and therefore a background and preview is offered for the purpose of inviting critical feedback in advance of its publication.

The Rev. Dr. David B. Barrett, an Anglican missionary from the UK, arrived in Kenya in 1957 (he would receive his Ph.D. in 1965). He had come to conduct a field survey of church affiliations. Over time Barrett's work would expand to encompass religious affiliation of all kinds, throughout Africa and eventually worldwide. In the process, he established the Unit of Research of the Church of the Province of Kenya — which would become the World Evangelization Research Center (WERC) — in Nairobi in 1965.^{1,2}

Kenneth Grubb, who had served as an editor of the popular *World Christian Handbook* from its beginning (the first edition was published in 1949), turned that project over to Barrett in 1968 following release of its fifth edition.³ The plan at the time was to produce a sixth edition for publication in 1971. What resulted instead, driven by Barrett's desire to be as comprehensive as possible in describing the extent and diversity of Christianity globally, was the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE; Oxford University Press, 1982). Barrett personally traveled to 212 of the world's 223 countries during its preparation. It was here in Africa that Barrett conceived, developed, and produced this landmark volume that completely transformed how people understood global Christianity.⁴

The thousand-page book was immediately praised as the authoritative, definitive work in the field of international religious demography. It also became one of Oxford University Press's best-selling reference books. Containing information on some 22,000 Christian denominations worldwide, the WCE was hailed by the media, scholars, and the missions community as a vital resource. An even more extensive 1,700-page second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE2) appeared in 2001, also published by Oxford. In addition to the religious breakdown of the population and the Christian denominations of every country, the second edition included the status of Christianity in every language, people, city, and province of the world. A companion volume, *World Christian Trends* (WCT), was published by William Carey Library in 2001. WCT featured historical trends, future projections, and Christian finance, as well as the first-ever empirical survey of Christian martyrdom.⁵

Advancing computer technology and the internet prompted creation of the *World Christian Database* (WCD), launched in 2003. Presenting much of the tabular data of the WCE2 and WCT, it features updates published quarterly and was joined by the *World Religion Database* (WRD) in 2007. Both the WCD and WRD are published by Brill.⁶ The Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC), the successor to WERC, is currently producing a third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE3), updating the demographic analysis to 2020 and adding new details on the recent history of

¹ *The Center for the Study of Global Christianity [50 Years of Global Christian Research]* (South Hamilton, MA: Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, [2015]). Accessed April 6, 2018. <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/50thbookletFINAL.pdf>.

² Gina Zurlo. "Barrett, David B." *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. Accessed April 6, 2018. <https://dacb.org/stories/kenya/barrett-david/>.

³ Gina A. Zurlo. "'A Miracle from Nairobi': David B. Barrett and the Quantification of World Christianity, 1957–1982" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 2017), 218, 252–3.

⁴ Zurlo. "Barrett, David B."

⁵ *The Center for the Study of Global Christianity [50 Years of Global Christian Research]*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Christianity and mission, church and state, religious liberty, and contemporary developments in other religions. Publication is slated for 2020 by Edinburgh University Press.⁷

The World Christian Encyclopedia, Third Edition: Global Overview

By some estimations the amount of globally collected digitally stored data is doubling every year and will reach a staggering 44 zettabytes (44 ZB) by the year 2020.⁸ This is the equivalent data storage of 1.4 trillion average smartphones, nearly 200 average capacity smartphones per person on the planet. As this torrent of collected information encounters (and indeed forms) an undeniably visually oriented culture, it drives a wealth of creative design including pithy memes, clever infographics, stirring YouTube video clips, and business-critical data dashboards. These all become means to summarize and share that portion of the 44 ZB of information that is most important to each one of us.

When it is published in 2020, the third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* will certainly contribute its fair share of data to the 44 ZB worldwide. Though it will be substantially shorter than the two-volume, 1,700-page second edition, WCE3 is still likely to overwhelm most readers with the amount of information being presented about the Global Church. Both the first and second edition wisely began with a short world summary, serving the dual purpose of presenting the data at an aggregated global level and summarizing the type of information available to the reader in the following pages. As scholars and mission leaders again ask themselves, “what information about the Global Church is most important for us?”, the WCE3 plans once more to offer this global summary as a helpful starting place and global reference.

Expectations for data presentation have changed significantly since the release of the WCE2 in 2000, due to the dizzying amount of information available to most people at any given time, and also to the tools available for information design. With this in mind, the Global Overview of the WCE3 will provide a 32-page, full-color, graphically driven summary of the demographic status of global Christianity and world mission. At the global level, one- and two-page spreads topically cover issues such as religious traditions, Christian traditions, language and people groups, evangelism, Bible translation, martyrdom, and missionary sending, to name a just few (see table 1 below for a full listing of the current topics being considered by the editors). Though in the third edition the Global Overview will take a new, more graphically driven approach, it builds significantly on the tradition of the previous two editions of the WCE, as well as the WCD and the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (AGC; Edinburgh University Press, 2009). As such, it is helpful to outline the features of these publications as they relate to the development of the WCE3 Global Overview.

Background of the Global Overview

Part One of the first edition of the WCE, titled “Status,” offers a twenty-page narrative demographic overview of more than twenty distinct global-level topics such as evangelism, urbanization, and

⁷ “World Christian Encyclopedia, 3rd edition”. Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Accessed April 6, 2018. <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/World-Christian-Encyclopedia.cfm>.

⁸ Gil Press. “IoT Mid-Year Update From IDC And Other Research Firms.” *Forbes*. August 8, 2016. Accessed April 6, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/gilpress/2016/08/05/iot-mid-year-update-from-idc-and-other-research-firms/#1777dd5855c5>.

pluralism, interspersed with photos and global-level tables. For example, pages 14–15 of WCE1 present on facing pages a table of “Organized Christianity: Global Memberships Ranked by 7 Ecclesiastical Blocs and 92 Major Traditions, AD 1970–1985”⁹ and a narrative description of the topics in the table, with headings introducing and explaining the global groupings of Major Blocks, Major Ecclesiastical Traditions and Worshiping Christians. A series of eight color global maps, located in Part Eleven – Atlas, depicts what David Barrett referred to as the “Geography of Christianity,”¹⁰ providing the only graphical display of quantitative information in the first edition.

The “World Summary” in Part One of WCE2 differed substantially from the first edition by grouping like statistical topics – such as global poverty, rights abuses, and disease/illness – into global meta-issues in Christian ministry such as human need. This was done by combining “global statistics relevant to the subject” into “a series of six kaleidoscopic global diagrams that ... attempt to portray the current status of ... Christian world ministry.”¹¹ This method presented a particular way to analyze the relationship of datasets to one another rather than simply showing and commenting on the data. A good example of this is Global Diagram 3, which depicts “The dynamics of global religious change ... analyzed by Worlds A, B, C in AD 2000.”¹² Another significant visual innovation in WCE2 was the incorporation of a series of graphs and charts, described as an “instrument panel,” into each country article. The second edition also continued and expanded on the use of the global maps, doubling the number of topics covered in them to sixteen.

Two significant post-WCE2 publications from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity must also be surveyed in this background, as they have had a significant impact on the development of data presentation in the WCE3 and its Global Overview. The first is the World Christian Database, which effectively digitized and made available on-demand much of the researched data that was previously delivered exclusively in the WCE. In many ways, the online availability of the data called into question the need to publish exhaustive statistical tables in print form, one of the primary purposes of the WCE in the past. Consequently, the editors have decided not to re-produce an entire volume of statistics that was published in the WCE2 (*Volume 2: The World By Segments – Religions, Peoples, Languages, Cities, Topics*) and to increase attention on the presentation of information in narrative and graphical form.

Lessons learned from the development and publication of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* shaped the thinking on both the structure and the content of the WCE3 Global Overview. Specifically, the adoption of a “one- or two-page spread per statistical topic” approach and the promotion of the global maps to a central location were derived from the AGC. The selection of specific topics for the WCE3 Global Overview was also largely derived from those that were selected for final publication in the AGC, though the selection of these topics for the AGC represented serious study and reflection on the presentation of information in both the WCE1 and WCE2.

⁹ David B. Barrett. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world, A.D. 1900–2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14–15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 865.

¹¹ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative survey of churches and religions in the modern world*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

Global Overview Structure

The structure of the global summary chapter shifted from distinct global statistical topics in the first edition of the WCE to an aggregate subject-based approach through global diagrams in the WCE2. In many respects, the structure of the Global Overview in the WCE3 returns to the approach of the first edition, introducing specific topics based on principal datasets and summarizing in narrative, data and graphical form at the global or regional level. This is a fundamental and intentional shift from the WCE2 approach for two reasons. First, removing the cross-data analysis allows easier comprehension of the information presented, and of the principal datasets that the WCE3 (and the companion World Christian Database) provide. Second, this shift allows scholars and ministries to access the researched global data without the quasi-interpretive lens of pre-aggregated categories. It is helpful, for example, to present the global dynamics of Christian change (births, deaths, converts, defectors, immigrants and emigrants), but not every scholar or ministry should encounter these figures first through the lens of World A, B, C categories (see WCE2 Global Diagram 3, p. 8). This move is important, as scholars and ministry leaders increasingly form their own diverse interpretive frameworks around global information. At the same time, the editors recognize that a primary layer of interpretation will always be inherent in the taxonomies of the researched data and the decision to present much of it in within the framework of geo-political or ethno-linguistic boundaries.

Topic selection is a primary concern for the WCE3 design team in the development of the new Global Overview. Although many of the topics are selected based simply on the availability of principal data that is researched by the CSGC, certain information must be prioritized, as it would not be feasible to present every researched topic here, even in summary form. The process of topic prioritization took place over the course of two years and several meetings with the WCE3 editorial team and indeed still continues through the feedback received from diverse meetings of scholars, publishers, and practitioners. Among the principal concerns of the editors in prioritizing the selected topics are those of relevance, usability, and historical significance. An example of this is the decision to include a full-page section on Christianity in the Middle East, as the mass exodus of Christians from the region today must be well documented and will almost certainly be cited in other publications. Other priorities include the presentation of primarily CSGC-produced data (as opposed to imported sources) and the integrity of the datasets (datasets that are complete and comprehensive rather than selective trends or piecemeal information).

Topic selection for the WCE3 Global Overview is still ongoing, and in a volume as widely referenced as the WCE, it is imperative that the editors continue to engage in a process of listening to scholars and practitioners around the world to understand which topics are most important for today.

Global Maps

With advances in printing technology, the full-color global maps that previously were placed in both WCE1 and WCE2 as tipped-in pages in the back of the volumes now exist as the most prominent visual feature for most topic pages in the WCE3 Global Overview. In most cases, the colors of the maps depict the concentration or distribution of the topic data by country or province to help users quickly orient themselves to the information on a global scale. User familiarity with these mapped geo-political boundaries usually makes them the best option for data visualization, and much of the data is actually researched at a geo-political level. However, this is an area that needs to be challenged continually. Does it always make the most sense to research or present global Christian data through this geo-

political lens? In many ways the WCE2 and WCT answered “no” to this question through their use of nearly one hundred collective global diagrams. However, the editors of WCE3 recognize the value provided to the users of this information by presenting the researched data principally within the primary categories in which they were collected.

Certain data, such as language and people-group data, do not present well on global maps either through ethnolinguistic polygons (which overlap and are constantly shifting) or through geo-political polygons (which require some additional level of data aggregation). The AGC used tree maps as a substitute for the primary visual element for both peoples and languages, but the designers of the WCE3 Global Overview are eager to explore other options that might emerge for depicting comprehensive data with these complexities.

Data Tables

Each of the country articles in the three editions of the WCE feature two prominent data tables. The first depicts percentages and growth rates for religious adherence in the country, and the second displays data for organized churches and denominations in the country. The religions table in the WCE3 country articles will have standard columns of adherents and percentages for the years 1900, 1970, 2000, 2015, 2020, and 2050. It will also have average annual growth rates for 1900–2000 and 2000–2050. The Global Overview follows this format and data selection, with each topic adopting an identically columned data table as its second-most-prominent element where applicable and based on data availability. A good example of this is the global religions table, which shows a global total for the eighteen major world religions for each of the years and rates noted. In most cases, these tables will present topical data at the continent or UN regional levels in addition to providing global totals. Additionally, a standard feature will be added to these tables summarizing totals in the Global North and South for topics that are presented at the continent level. This is will be a unique feature, showing, for example, the percentages of Protestant Christians in the Global North and South over the past 120 years. We anticipate that the data displayed in these summaries will be highly cited in other publications.

Though the WCE3 Global Overview will feature mainly visual reference elements, strategic use of tables placed in each topic page or segment will provide the core data at a global summary level that is most likely to be quoted. The Global Overview will shift away from large or full-page tables, as were used in both the WCE and WCE2, and instead try to depict relevant information from those comprehensive tables in summary or visual form. The data for all elements present in the Global Overview will be made available in the appendices or online in the WCD.

Instrument Panel and Other Data Visualizations

The instrument panel, a quick-reference comparative visual element that was introduced for each country article in the WCE2, will be revised and updated for the WCE3 country articles. In the WCE2, these panels consisted of six topics: 3 Worlds (A, B, C), Religions, Ecclesiastical Blocs, Evangelization, Offers, and Cost-effectiveness. The WCE3 version will reduce these to four elements: Religions, Christian Traditions, Christianity 1900–2050 (percentage over time), and Christian Comparison (Christians as percentage of the world and of the country’s continent and UN region). For consistency, these visual elements of the instrument panel will also emerge in relevant sections of the Global Overview, as supplemental data visualizations – for example, on the Christianity by continent pages, where there is

little room to show a fuller depiction of the religious context. Feedback on these elements is especially important, as they appear in almost every article in the WCE3.

Topics presented in the Global Overview generally will have one to three visual elements in addition to the standard elements discussed above. In most cases, the editors and designers have selected these extra elements based on the most significant trends or topic-related data that needs to be summarized. The topic of Cities, for example, includes an inset map showing the percentage of urban dwellers by country, and the topic of Evangelicals contains a line graph of the percentage of Evangelicals in the Global North and Global South. Although it is not feasible to present each of these elements for evaluation, pre-publication feedback on the most important trends and specific data that should be depicted for each topic will be helpful.

Review and Feedback

The editors and designers of the WCE3 and the Global Overview welcome any review and feedback during this pre-publication phase, in order to shape a reference work that is relevant, useful and significant for scholars and practitioners globally. They also wish to express their appreciation to all who have contributed to this project thus far. The WCE is and always has been the work of many hands from around the world.

Table 1. Comparison of Primary Topics in the Overview of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Editions of the <i>World Christian Encyclopedia</i>		
WCE1	WCE2	WCE3 (as of 13 March 2018)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christianity AD 30–2000 (history) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christianity by Continent (secular context/political divisions) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Christianity • Christianity by Continent (one page per continent)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urbanization 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cities and Urbanization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Need (global diagram) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and Religious Freedom • Religious Liberty and Persecution (map) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phenomenon of Martyrdom (global diagram) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious Liberty • Martyrdom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pluralism • Secularization • Religious, Secular and Atheistic States (map) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geo-political Religious Blocs (global diagram) • Dynamics of Global Religious Change (global diagram) • Global Religious Adherence (table) • Adherents of All Religions on Six Continents (table) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority Religion • Religious Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamics of Christian Growth 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peoples and Cultures 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peoples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages • Christians and Million-speaker Christian Languages, AD 1980 (map) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture Availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture Translation (table) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible Translation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecclesiastical Traditions • Dynamics of Denomination and Church Growth • Growth of Organized Christianity, Per Cent Per Year, AD 1980 (map) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of Independency (global diagram) • Megatypologies of Renewal, Megablocs (global diagram) • Global Membership Ranked by Major Ecclesiastical Blocs (table) • Global Expansion of Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal (table) • Organized Christianity: Denominations and memberships (table) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Traditions • Catholics • Independents • Orthodox • Protestants • Evangelicals • Pentecostals/Charismatics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign Mission • Foreign Missions: closed, receiving and sending countries (map) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missionaries Sent and Received
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelization • Unreached People • Status of World Evangelization, AD 1900 (map) • Status of World Evangelization, AD 1980 (map) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Workers • Evangelism • Personal Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Organization and Activities • Christian Broadcasting: listeners/viewers, radio/TV stations (map) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Income and Expenditures (table) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian Finance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today's Globe in 24 Hrs (table) 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future of Global Christianity