



# WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

## Discoveries in the *Atlas of Global Christianity*

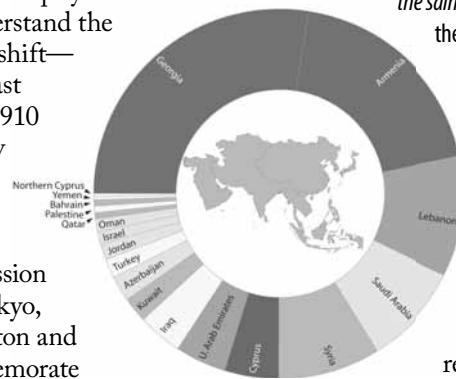
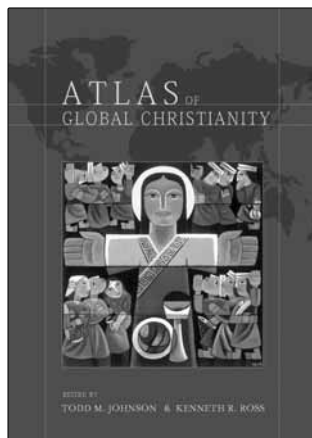
DARRELL DORR

From May 2008 to June 2009 I had the privilege of working with the international team that produced the *Atlas of Global Christianity*. Editors Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross assembled this team and did a remarkable job of shepherding the Atlas to completion by the autumn of 2009. As this issue of *Mission Frontiers* goes to press, the Atlas is in the hands of a printer in Edinburgh and should be available to the public by January 2010. But why should you—and your church or mission agency—sit up and take notice of this 400-page collection of maps, tables and essays?

Though it is widely known that Christianity's center of gravity has shifted to the non-Western world, the *Atlas of Global Christianity* helps you and your colleagues to better understand the contours and textures of that shift—region by region—over the past 100 years, since the seminal 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. And the *Atlas of Global Christianity* appears on the scene just in time to inform the array of global mission consultations in 2010—in Tokyo, Edinburgh, Cape Town, Boston and other cities—that will commemorate Edinburgh 1910 and launch new forms of cooperation in world mission into the twenty-first century.



Darrell Dorr is a Contributing Editor of *Mission Frontiers* and an Associate Editor of the *Atlas of Global Christianity*.



### Odd Curiosities or Treasured Family?

As I rolled up my sleeves and began my work as an Associate Editor, I expected that I would gain new insights in the process of editing. But what I did *not* expect was how the Atlas would affect my *heart* as well as my *head*. This personal impact was due, in part, to the convergence of my work on the Atlas with a sermon series at my home church, a sermon series on the first three chapters of Ephesians, where the apostle Paul elaborates the “grand plan of God” in which (emphases mine) . . .

His intent was that now, *through the church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms . . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, *together with all the saints*, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God* . . . until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 3:10, 3:17-19, 4:13, *New International Version*).

These truths from Ephesians were rattling around in my mind and heart while I edited essays from scholars representing Orthodox, Catholic, Pentecostal, Anglican, West African, Southeast Asian, Central American, East European and many other streams of Christianity. As I read and re-read about streams of Christian vitality that are very different from my familiar stream of American evangelical Protestant Christianity, I asked myself, “Who *are* these people? Am I—and are most of the readers of this Atlas—likely to look on these people as *odd curiosities*, almost like animals in some kind of theological and sociological zoo? Or—as these

great texts of Ephesians affirm—are we prepared to view these very different people as *treasured family* through whom we can apprehend the manifold wisdom of God, with whom we can grasp the love of God, and with whom we can enter into the “fullness of Christ” for which we were created? Do I really believe these truths from Ephesians, and do my perspectives on the global Church—and my behaviors—reflect what I say I believe?”

### Great Maps and Tables, But Don't Miss the Essays!

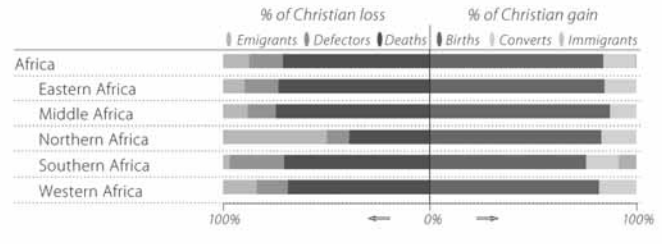
It's to be expected that maps, tables and other graphics will attract lots of attention in the Atlas. But don't miss the sterling collection of two-page essays interspersed amidst the series of two-page and four-page map spreads, for the essays bring additional depth and nuance. My favorite essays include:

- Moonjang Lee on the future of global Christianity
- Andrew Walls on Christianity across 20 centuries (a masterful overview)
- J.N.K. Mugambi on Christianity in Africa (look out—this critique has bite!)
- Ogbu Kalu on Western Africa (full of color and verve)
- Mark Noll on Christianity in Northern America (a terrific synthesis)
- Lamin Sanneh on the multi-cultural tapestry of world Christianity
- Dana Robert on the 100-year patterns in missionary sending
- Jonathan Bonk on Christian finance (vignettes of sacrifice and stewardship)

### Repercussions for Frontier Mission

As you might expect, I'm especially grateful for those parts of the Atlas that shed light on the challenges of frontier mission in particular. Most of this material can be found in Part IV (Peoples, languages and cities) and Part V (Christian mission).

For example, there is much benefit in such tables as “Global peoples with the most Muslims” and “Global languages with the most Buddhists.” Delineation of the religious demographics of major cities in each world region is fascinating and useful; soak for awhile in the tallies of cities to allow your mind and heart to be moved. I like the missionary scatterplot diagrams that reveal, region by region,



where missionaries *are* and *aren't*, and the representations of missionaries received by people group, revealing the great need for pioneers among peoples such as the

Northern Luri of Iran, the Lampungese of Indonesia, the Bagri of India, the Daza of Chad, and the Zaghawa of Sudan.

Note, too, the portrayals of the extent of personal contact between Christians and non-Christians, including the assertion, “Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians. In each case, over 86% of these religionists globally do not personally know a Christian.” Contrast these pages with those explaining a “Responsiveness Index” for different countries and regions, with the index revealing that the world's least-evangelized sectors have shown the highest average responsiveness to Biblical witness. Go figure!

### An Embarrassment of Riches in 2010

The *Atlas of Global Christianity* is part of an embarrassment of riches in 2010, the first installment in a series of great reference tools that will also soon include Patrick Johnstone's *The Future of the Worldwide Church* and Jason Mandryk's new edition of the much-loved *Operation World* handbook. Inevitably the Atlas will be compared and contrasted with these other two books, even though the Atlas is a larger and more expensive tool, includes an electronic “presentation assistant”, and is written for a wider audience than the evangelical mission community. Indeed, I expect that some evangelicals will approach the Atlas with ambivalence: admiration for its scope and breadth and yet unease at its insistence at pressing beyond the social bounds of evangelicalism. Yet I am honored to be part of an editorial team that married evangelical conviction to ecumenical perspective. Enjoy the feast of 400 pages! f

- To catch glimpses of the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, go to <http://bit.ly/UlkMo>
- If you live in the USA, you can order copies of the Atlas from Columbia University Press at <http://bit.ly/8LPdh>
- Readers outside the USA may order copies of the Atlas at <http://bit.ly/71Hhm4>

Proportions of religions, 1910 & 2010

