In the 1970s, statistician David B. Barrett created the first global database reporting on religious affiliation in every country of the world. The landmark *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982 and 2001) paved the way for not only similar publications in the field, but also the launching of two global religion databases: the *World Religion Database*, housed at Boston University’s Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, and the *World Christian Database*, housed at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (South Hamilton, MA). The databases made possible other publications, such as the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), with both print and multi-media dimensions. This presentation will illustrate the process of moving from online database to academic publication, such as *The World’s Religions in Figures* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), which is the first text overviewing the methodology of religious demography, and the forthcoming *Yearbook of International Religious Demography* (Brill, 2014), the first yearbook on the subject.

**David B. Barrett**

Following receipt of his B.A. in aeronautics from Cambridge University, Barrett began his career at Britain’s Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) in 1948 (he received his M.A. from Cambridge in 1952). While at the RAE he performed aircraft design flight research on such planes as the de Havilland Comet (the world’s first commercial jetliner)
and the supersonic Concorde. When the RAE reassigned him to missile and bomb design, however, Barrett left to train for the priesthood in the Church of England. He was ordained a deacon in 1954 and a priest in 1955 and was appointed as a missionary through the Church Missionary Society in 1956.

After serving in Kenya from 1957–61, Barrett studied as a Fulbright Scholar at Union Theological Seminary (M.T.S., 1963) and Columbia University (joint Ph.D. with Union, 1965). He returned to Kenya as a missionary and oversaw research for the Church of England in Eastern Africa for 20 years. In 1985 (still under appointment as an Anglican missionary), he left Nairobi for Richmond, Virginia, and a position as a research consultant at the Foreign (now International) Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, where he remained until 1993. Until his death in 2011, Barrett continued as an independent researcher of global Christianity through the World Evangelization Research Center (which he had founded in Kenya in 1965) and its successor, the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (established in 2003).

Barrett’s contributions to the field of religious demography are extensive. His published research continues to influence both Christian activist efforts and sociological and demographic understanding of religious adherence. After his doctoral dissertation on African Independent Churches was published in 1968, (Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements), he spent more than 10 years compiling and serving as editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia (1982). In 2001, this publication was followed by a second edition (with co-editors George Kurian and Todd Johnson) and the companion volume World Christian Trends (which Barrett co-authored with Johnson).
Barrett’s data collection process

In the 1970s Barrett began travelling to collect data on churches in every country. He travelled extensively in Africa in the 1960s and eventually added Asia, Latin America, and Oceania to his itinerary. By the time the World Christian Encyclopedia was published in 1982 he had personally traveled to 212 of the 223 countries in the world. Barrett also visited major centers of data collections on Christianity, including the World Council of Churches in Geneva, the Vatican, and the United Bible Societies in Reading, England. Along the way, he picked up one of the world’s largest collections of royalty-free photographs, many of which he used in the WCE. In addition, Barrett visited the offices of Encyclopedia Britannica in Chicago and the United Nations in New York, both of which had large collections of census and survey data on religion, a feature of the notes section under the religion tables in the WCE.

World Christian Encyclopedia

First published in 1982, the World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE) immediately took its place as a reliable, standard work in its field. The second edition’s oversized 1,700 pages represent the most extensive demographic overview of Christianity, and of religion in general, ever attempted. The heart of the WCE is a series of 238 chapters on the status of religion and of Christianity in every country in the world. Statistical tables show, in great detail, the religious breakdown of the population and the Christian denominations of every country.

Updates for WCE-2 (2001)
The second edition of the encyclopedia updated and extended Barrett's initial analysis to include the status of Christianity in every language, people, city and province of the world. It covered past history, present status, and future prospects of Christianity, including United Nations’ detailed demographic projections to the year 2025. It included large quantities of original, unpublished data, augmented by a network of collaborators and informants worldwide and by surveys of contributions from the academic world. The WCE-2 was considered a second edition, not revised edition of WCE-1, differentiated by entire new areas of knowledge and information under investigation, updated statistics at every point, and updated descriptive material throughout. The WCE-2 was a two-volume set, with World Christian Trends following soon after.

Plans for WCE-3 (2020)

The third edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia will be, like its predecessors, a visual quick reference of the changing status of global Christianity, though over the period 1910–2020. In particular the WCE-3 will be the first comprehensive encyclopedia to focus on the massive shift of global Christianity to the Southern Hemisphere. Besides the country-by-country articles, the key feature of the encyclopedia will be the comprehensive description of all Christian traditions in the context of other religious and demographic data.

The WCE-3 is divided into four major parts and appendices: Part I contains a global summary of Christianity and other world religions; Part II divides the world up into 232 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe; Part III presents the methodology behind the
figures in the encyclopedia; Part IV presents a set of full-color maps on global Christianity; and the appendices include reference material, indexes, and glossary.

**Creation of the *WCD & WRD***

While David Barrett began his collection process with index cards, these eventually were added to a primitive electronic database in a mini-computer (in the late 1970s and early 1980s). Barrett was able to do cross-tabulations and calculations for the *WCE-1*. After this, the database moved to a micro-computer (PC) and was manipulated in Dbase II. As computers improved, it went to FoxBase, then Microsoft Access, and more recently to Microsoft Sequel Server, where it is accessible to multiple users at the same time.

Designed for both the casual user and research scholar, the *World Christian Database (WCD)*, as an online database contains comprehensive demographic statistics on global Christianity, which were drawn directly from both editions of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and *World Christian Trends*. Over 400 categories of information including religious adherents, Christian traditions and missions trends are available at the province, country, ethnic group, language, and city levels for the entire world. The full-time staff at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity is dedicated to updating and maintaining the *WCD*. New information from thousands of sources is reviewed on a weekly basis to continually refine and improve the *WCD*.

In 2008, four doctoral students at Princeton University examined the *WCD* for accuracy, including that, “In sum, we find that the WCD religious composition data are highly correlated with other sources that offer cross-national religious composition estimates. For cross-national studies, the WCD may be more useful than other sources of
data because of the inclusion of the largest number of countries, different time periods, and information on all, even small, religious groups.”¹ At the same time, the students found that some terms used by the WCD (such as “Great Commission Christians,” a category dropped for the third edition) to be impossible to measure accurately and uncritically accepted by some Christian organizations.

Like the WCD, the World Religion Database (WRD) contains detailed statistics on religious affiliation for every country in the world. It is the major source to render a definitive picture of international religious demography. The WRD provides both current and historical data, as well as sophisticated forecasts of future developments. For each of the world’s religions, best estimates at multiple dates for the period 1900 to 2050 are given. The WRD also offers access to the sources that underlie the figures in the database, such as censuses and surveys. Through an interactive feedback mechanism users can leave comments on sources or methodology related to any figure reported in the WRD. The WRD is constantly updated with new sets of data as they become available, such as estimates of religious affiliation at the province level and religious freedom information for all countries in the world.

**Moving from database to visual representation: case studies**

The data in the WCD and WRD have been used in number of publications, some created by the editors and some created by others. The publications of the editors are listed below and include the *Atlas of Global Christianity, The World’s Religions in Figures*, and the

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Yearbook of International Religious Demography. In addition, others, especially the National Geographic Society, have used WCD/WRD data to create their own maps and graphs.

Atlas of Global Christianity

The Atlas of Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2009) is a thorough visual reference of the changing status of global Christianity over the 100 years since the epoch-making Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, which is often stated as having inaugurated the global ecumenical movement. It puts Christianity in its global context by also reporting on world religions, social issues, cities, and languages. It is the first scholarly atlas to depict the twentieth-century demographic shift of Christianity to the global south, highlighting the reality that there are now more Christians in the south (Asia, Africa, Latin America) then there are in the north (Europe and Northern America). It is also the first text to map Christian affiliation at the provincial level, not simply the national level.

One major feature of the Atlas of Global Christianity is its use of WCD data to create provincial-level maps of every world religion and Christian tradition in 2010.

The World’s Religions in Figures

The World’s Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) is the first text to comprehensively provide an overview of the field of international religious demography, detailing what is known about religious adherents around the world and how it is known. The text highlights trends of the 100 years and offers projections to the year 2050, while also outlining issues and
challenges related to definitions, taxonomies, sources, analyses, and other techniques on interpreting data on religious adherence. It provides resources for measuring both qualitatively and quantitatively important data on the world’s religious situation in the twenty-first century.

Chapter one of *The World’s Religions in Figures* presents statistical tables for each of the major world religions, presenting data from 1910 and 2010 extracted from the *WRD*. The *WRD* is unique in that it contains a comprehensive listings of sources of demographic data (censuses, surveys, and polls).

*Yearbook of IRD*

The *Yearbook of International Religious Demography* (Brill, 2014) presents an annual snapshot of the state of religious statistics around the world in sets of both global and regional tables, based on the data in the *World Christian Database* and *World Religion Database*, which are collected through censuses, surveys, polls, religious communities, scholars, and a host of other sources. The yearbook with well-arranged tables and scholarly articles provides an excellent and accessible summary of findings, sources, methods, and implications surrounding international religious demography. Each issue also focuses on five countries to provide a more in-depth look at religious statistics. In addition, the yearbook offers articles describing challenges in sources, analysis, and methods relating to the data. Finally, an assessment is made of new data made available since the last issue of the yearbook.
Similar to *The World's Religions in Figures*, the YIRD also presents statistical tables for each of the major world religions, presenting data from 1970 and 2030 extracted from the *WRD*.

**Other publications**

The *World Religion Database* and *World Christian Database* are continuously employed to extract data for a variety of smaller publications, such as reports and articles, as well as distribute data to news media or other organizations. One of the most significant users has been the National Geographic Society. In several of their atlases (see *Family Reference Atlas*), maps of religions have been designed using the *WCD/WRD* data. National Geographic was one of the first users of provincial data on religion to improve the accuracy of the maps. In addition, media outlets such as *The Economist*, the BBC, and the *New York Times* have used *WCD/WRD* data to produce their own maps, graphs, and tables.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has also used both the *WCD* and the *WRD* in its series of publications. These databases complement Pew's census and survey data by offering more details on religions whether it be the breakdown of Sunnis and Shias in Islam or Evangelical and Pentecostal movements in Christianity. Pew has produced innovate maps and charts based on this data.

**Conclusion**

This paper presents evidence that the *World Christian Database* and *World Religion Database* have been used in two major ways: as electronic data (or text) and in visual representations (maps, graphs, etc.) by a number of users. The electronic data allows for
manipulation in analytical programs such as SPSS and Excel. The visual representations have introduced the data to a wider audience via attractive maps and charts. In both cases, demographic data on religion is receiving a wider treatment by scholars and journalists who are concerned about the impact of religion in modern life.