

GÂRDAN Gabriel-Viorel¹:

The Global Religious Configuration. Realities and Forecasts²

Abstract.

Based on recent research, we aim to present the current global religious configuration, the religious demographic evolution during the twentieth century, and the main trends for the first half of the twenty-first century. From a methodological point of view, we chose to present only those religions that register a share of 1% of the global population, among which we paid increased attention only to Christianity and Islam. The only exception to this rule is Judaism, the reason for advancing this exception being the desire to compare the evolution of the three religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a more nuanced picture of the geographical distribution of each religion and, on the other hand, to illustrate the global religious diversity. From a chronological point of view, the landmarks are the years 1910, 1970, 2000, 2010, 2014, 2030, and 2050. The data collected for the years 1910–2014 is the basis of the forecasts for the years 2030 and 2050. The former ones describe the religious realities, while the latter two open up perspectives on the trends in religious demography.

We would like to draw attention to the potential of religious demography in deciphering the religious image of the world in which we live. On the other hand, we consider that exploring the global religious profile and the way it evolves, as

¹ Associate Professor, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Email: gabriel.gardan@ubbcluj.ro

² This article was subsidized by the Committee of National Remembrance.

well as the factors that bring forth change, is not only an opportunity generated by the organic development of religious demography research but also a necessity for rethinking the pastoral and missionary strategies of the church.

Religious demographics provide valuable data about the past together with nuanced knowledge of the present, helping us anticipate and even influence the future. The church, at any time, assumes the past, manages the present, and prepares the future. From this perspective, we believe that a strategic pastoral thinking, regardless of religion or denomination, can be organically outlined, starting from the data provided through the means available to religious demography. While religious demography provides specific data, it does not explain the phenomena behind this data; it notes and invites questions, debates, and explanations about religious affiliation, religiosity, and religious behaviour.

Keywords: *religious, demography, agnostics, atheists, Christians, Muslims.*

1. Religious demography

The organization of the conference *The Church and Society in the Last Hundred Years (1918–2018)* is an excellent opportunity for us to bring to the attention of the participants a perspective on the religious realities that we live globally,³ a perspective

³ This has been a preoccupation in the last years, and as a result we have published several articles regarding this issue. Some of the analyses presented in this study can be found under several forms in the following works too: GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2015): *The Changing Face of Christianity and New Outlines of Ecumenism in the 21st Century*. In: Field, David – Koslowski, Jutta (eds.): *Prospects and Challenges for The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century*. Geneva, Globethics.net, Global 12. 27–63; GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2014): *The Changing Face of Christianity and the New Outlines of Ecumenism*. In: Costroiu, Mihnea – Ciucă, Liviu-Bogdan – Burcea, Nelu (eds.): *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*. Paris, Iarsic Editions Les Arcs. 569–611; GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2015): *Locul creștinismului în configurația religioasă globală actuală [The Place of Christianity in the Contemporary Religious Configuration]*. In: *Credință și viață în Hristos – Anuarul Episcopiei Sălajului VII*. 417–445; GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2019): *Creștinismul în Europa. Realități demografice și sociale religioase [Christianity in Europe – Demographic and Social Religious Realities]*. In: Grama, Claudiu-Ioan (ed.): *Mitropolitul Andrei – păstorul blând al Transilvaniei euharistice. Vol. 2. In honorem*.

the theological and ecclesial environment in our country is still too unfamiliar with. This interdisciplinary approach is facilitated by the development of the research on religious demography in recent years. The engine of this development is represented by several research teams, grouped under the auspices of institutions that have been validated globally. These are mainly Pew Research Center⁴ and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.⁵ The two centres have become known by publishing research

Cluj-Napoca, *Renașterea*. 261–289; GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2020): *Credință, apartenență și comportament religios în creștinismul european contemporan. Elemente de demografie religioasă* [Faith, Belonging and Religious Behaviour in Contemporary European Christianity. Religious Demography Outlines]. In: Rușeț, Casian (ed.): *Comuniune și comunități: jertfă, slujire, spiritualitate*. Fabriano – Caransebeș, Montefano Publishing House – The Publishing House of the Bishopric of Caransebeș. 139–175.

⁴ Pew Research Center was founded in 2004 in the United States and soon became one of the most dynamic non-governmental and non-partisan institutions, governed by independence, objectivity, accuracy, humility, transparency, and innovation. Through empirical research on topics of wide interest in areas such as politics, media and news, social trends, religion, Internet and technology, science, etc., the Centre aims to offer international political actors, civil society leaders, influencers, and the interested public a document base designed to facilitate a better understanding of the most challenging global issues and, at the same time, to facilitate the understanding of how the contemporary world is changing. See the complete presentation at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/about/> (accessed on: 25 October 2018).

⁵ Center for the Study of Global Christianity is an academic research centre currently operating near Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, United States. The Centre was founded by Anglican missionary Dr David Barret. He began researching religious demographics in Kenya in 1957. He became acknowledged worldwide in 1982, when he published the first edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* at Oxford University Press, a monumental work that brings together demographic data on 22,000 Christian denominations worldwide. In 1989, Todd Johnson joined Barret in his efforts to edit the second edition of this research paper, and in 2003 he took over the leadership of the Centre and reorganized it. With the launch in 2007 of the *World Christian Database* (an online database – <https://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/>–which provides detailed demographic data on 9,000 Christian denominations; accessed: 21 July 2020) and in 2009 of the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Johnson and his team turned the Center for the Study of Global Christianity into the most important institution that monitors the evolution of demographic trends globally and provides comprehensive data on the past, present, and future of Christianity in each country. See the complete presentation at: <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/About-Us.cfm> (accessed on: 25 October 2018).

studies and reference works in the field of religious demography, but also by the fact that in 2008 they laid together the foundations of a project entitled *International Religious Demography*, carried out under the auspices of an institute within the structure of Boston University, The Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs. The collaboration between the Center for the Study of Global Christianity and Pew Research Center, between Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, considered deans of international religious demography, resulted in the launch of a *World Religion Database*,⁶ the publication since 2014 of the *Yearbook of International Demography*⁷ and of the work entitled *The World's Religions in Figures. An Introduction to International Religious Demography*.⁸

We find, on the one hand, that in recent years an interdisciplinary approach regarding the contemporary history of religious life has emerged, an approach that we are still unfamiliar with and whose usefulness we have not yet fully grasped. This is religious demographics. Johnson and Grim believe that demography in general and religious demography in particular are growing areas of study or research. Researchers in the social sciences acknowledge the fact that demography has an essential contribution to understanding the human condition, especially for policy makers. Understanding the changes in the structure of human populations and the reasons for these changes involves taking into account demographic factors such as: birth, death and fertility rates, migration, population density, male: female ratio, life expectancy, etc. An analysis of these factors allows a better understanding of the way society works as a whole, both at individual and at institutional level. Research on religious demography has highlighted two major issues: there are many generalizations, especially regarding secularization and the decline of religious life, that are not supported by concrete global demographic data, and there is also a significant amount of religious data which, most often, remain unanalysed.⁹

Religious demography involves the statistical and scientific study of the demographic characteristics of religious populations: primary data with reference to number, structure related to age and gender, density, growth rate, distribution, development, migration, and data on specific internal manifestations specific to each religion or denomination (prayer,

⁶ <https://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/> (accessed on: 25 October 2018).

⁷ This volume was published in 2014 at Brill Publishing.

⁸ JOHNSON, Todd M. – GRIM, Brian J. (2013): *The World's Religions in Figures. An Introduction to International Religious Demography*.

⁹ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 148–149.

worship participation, Bible reading, frequency of confession and of the Holy communion, donations to the church, etc.), including change of religious/confessional identity or affiliation. The way in which these religious demographic characteristics relate to other economic and social indicators also lies within the sphere of interest of religious demography.¹⁰

Religious demography provides us with empirical data on all measurable aspects of the religious life. Despite the fact that religious demography has its origins in statistical data collected in church circles for a very long time, far too little attention has been given to processing these data. In most cases, the statistical data transmitted by each structure of organization of the Christian life to the central bodies in the form of periodic reports, once centralized, become available, at best, to a small number of people and then directed to the archive for storage. Unfortunately, too few researchers are interested in comparing and refining these sources of religious demography, and those who lead central bodies do not realize the strategic potential of such analyses. The consequence of such an approach is that we have an incomplete picture of contemporary religious life and an image about its future that is often distorted or biased (either unjustifiably optimistic or discouragingly pessimistic). On the other hand, if we pay attention to the opportunities offered by a thorough study of religious demography, we will understand why it is important to have an accurate picture of the present and of the trends that it entails when church decision makers rethink the pastoral strategy for the days to come.

Religious demography provides valuable data about the past, facilitates a nuanced knowledge of the present, and helps us anticipate and even influence the future. The church, at any time, assumes the past, manages the present, and prepares the future. From this perspective, we believe that a strategic pastoral thinking, regardless of religion or denomination, can be organically outlined starting from the data provided through the means available to religious demography. Religious demography provides specific data, but it does not explain the phenomena behind them; it notes and invites questions, debates, and explanations about religious affiliation, religiosity, and religious behaviour.

On a different note, we notice the publication of works that explain the changes that occur both in the life of Christian communities and in the behaviour of Christians from a demographic perspective. Books like Eric Kaufmann's *Shall the Religious Inherit*

¹⁰ Op. cit. 145.

*the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*¹¹ or George Hawley's *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations*¹² are not only analytical models but also evidence of the interpretive potential of religious demography.

Thus, starting from recent research, we aim to present the current global religious configuration, the religious demographic evolution during the twentieth century, and the main trends for the first half of the twenty-first century. From a methodological point of view, we chose to present only those religions that register a share of 1% of the global population, among which we paid increased attention to Christianity and Islam. The only exception to this rule is Judaism, the reason for advancing this exception being the desire to compare the evolution of the three religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The sources we used for the synthetic presentation of the data are: *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010*,¹³ *Yearbook of International Demography*,¹⁴ and *The World's Religions in Figures. An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. In the illustrative tables, we generally opted for inserting only the proportion, the percentages (%), without a direct reference to numbers because, depending on the sources, the number of adherents to a certain religion varies. The percentages are not always the same either, but the recorded differences do not significantly change the concrete data. In the text, we combined the ways of presenting each analysed religious group. We also grouped the materials according to two criteria: religious and geographical. The purpose of this grouping manner was, on the one hand, to provide a more nuanced picture of the geographical distribution of each religion and, on the other hand, to illustrate the global religious diversity. From a chronological point of view, the landmarks are the years 1910, 1970, 2000, 2010, 2014, 2030, and 2050. The data collected for the years 1910–2014 are the basis of the forecasts for the years 2030 and 2050. The former data describe the religious realities, and the latter two categories open up perspectives on the trends in religious demography.

¹¹ KAUFMANN, Eric (2010): *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. London, Profile Books.

¹² HAWLEY, George (2017): *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations*. Lexington Books.

¹³ JOHNSON, Todd M. – ROSS, Kenneth R. (eds.) (2009): *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010*. Edinburg University Press.

¹⁴ GRIM, Brian J. – JOHNSON, Todd M. – SKIRBEKK, Vegard – ZURLO, Gina A. (eds.) (2015): *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2015*, Leiden–Boston, Brill.

2. The Current Global Religious Configuration

A first distinction we can make from the perspective of religious demography is between the religious population and the unreligious or non-religious population. The first category includes all those who share religious beliefs, regardless of their specificity. They represent almost 90% of the world's population.

2.1. Religious and Unreligious Population

The category of unreligious or non-religious population includes atheists¹⁵ and agnostics.¹⁶ The very data grouped at these two levels are one of the most obvious pieces of evidence of the fact that in the discourse on the evolution of religious life, there are often made generalizations that are not confirmed by demographic realities. If the sharp secularization of the twentieth century is often invoked, demographic data show that the vast majority of the global population has embraced, one way or another, a set of religious beliefs. In addition, forecasts indicate that by the middle of the 21st century only 8.7% of the world population will not share a religious belief (1.4% atheists and 7.3% agnostics).¹⁷

During the 20th century, the share of the non-religious population has evolved from just over 0.2% in 1910¹⁸ to 11.5% in 2014, the peak being the 1970s, when their share (directly influenced by communist regimes) reached 19.2%.¹⁹ Forecasts indicate

¹⁵ Unlike agnostics, atheists reject the idea of any deity. See: JOHNSON – ROSS (eds.) 2009, 30–31, 325. Among some of the most important resources for a better understanding of atheism are: BULLIVANT, Stephen – RUSE, Michael (eds.) (2014): *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

¹⁶ Agnostics are those who do not adhere to any religion. Agnosticism totally or partially denies the possibility of knowing and rationally proving the existence of God. In the context of the analyses we have in mind among agnostics, there are non-religious, secularist, or materialist people. They are also called unaffiliated from a religious point of view. See: Johnson – ROSS (eds.) 2009, 28–29, 325; EPSTEIN, Greg M. (2009): *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*. New York, Harper.

¹⁷ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 124–128.

¹⁸ JOHNSON – ROSS (eds.) 2009, 7.

¹⁹ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 6.

a decrease in their share compared to the global population to 9.8% in 2030²⁰ and even to 8.7% by 2050.²¹

Regarding the geographical distribution in 1910, the largest share of the total number of non-religious people was registered in North America (1.2%);²² in 1970, their share reached 25.7% in Asia, 21.3% in Europe, and 4.8 % in North America.²³ Against the background of the decrease in the global share of the non-religious population, it is expected that in 2030 the largest share of the total non-religious population will be registered in Oceania (21.6%), followed by North America (17.8%) and Europe (16.2%).²⁴ The same hierarchy is maintained, even if the percentages decrease slightly for 2050.²⁵

If we refer to the percentage of non-religious population in the total population of a country registered in 2014, we find on the first 10 places: North Korea (72.4%), Estonia (55.2%), the Czech Republic (45.8%), China (38.6%), Uruguay (35.2%), New Zealand (32.3%), Sweden (31.7%), the Netherlands (30.1%), Germany (26.0%), and Australia (25, 2%).

Demographic analysis shows that, even if atheists, agnostics, and other religiously unaffiliated people increase significantly in Europe and in the United States, their numbers will decline globally, mainly due to a below-average fertility rate which ensures population stability.

Globally, an overwhelming majority of the population has identified itself as *religious* throughout the 20th century. The share underwent a period of decrease from 99.8% in 1910 to 80.8% in 1970. A period of increase followed, according to which the share was 87.1% in 2000²⁶ and 88.5% in 2014.²⁷ The same rising trend is forecast for the next period. It is expected to reach 90.2%²⁸ in 2030 and 91.3% in 2050.²⁹

²⁰ Op. cit. 5–6.

²¹ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 124–128.

²² JOHNSON – ROSS (eds.) 2009, 29–31.

²³ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 6–7.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 124–128.

²⁶ Op. cit. 11–12.

²⁷ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 18–19.

²⁸ Ibid.

The countries with the highest percentage of religious affiliation are: Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Somalia (in each country, the share of religious people is 100% of the population), followed by Burundi, Niger, Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan, Maldives, and Yemen (with a share of 99.9%).³⁰

The religious population is divided as follows: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Chinese folk religion,³¹ ethno-religionists,³² and other religions.

Table 1. *Percentage of the religious and non-religious world population*³³

	1910	1970	2000	2010	2014	2030	2050
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
No religion	0.2	19.2	13.0	11.8	11.5	9.9	8.7
Agnostics	0.2	14.7	10.8	9.8	9.6	8.3	7.3
Atheists	0.0	4.5	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.4
Religion	99.8	80.8	87.0	88.2	88.5	90.1	91.3
Christians	34.8	33.3	32.4	32.8	33.0	34.1	35.8
Muslims	12.6	15.5	21.0	22.5	23.1	25.6	27.5
Jews	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Hindus	12.7	12.6	13.3	13.8	13.5	13.1	7.3
Buddhists	7.0	6.4	7.4	7.2	7.1	6.8	6.0
Chinese folk	22.3	6.2	7.0	6.3	6.2	5.4	4.1
Ethno-religious	7.7	4.6	3.6	3.8	3.5	3.2	2.6

²⁹ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 115–129.

³⁰ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 20.

³¹ Chinese folk religions are unlike any other religion in the world. Although their origins are deeply rooted in Chinese history, there is no centralized governing structure, no reference text, and no founding figure. In many ways, these religions are similar to indigenous religions, but there is no set of unifying beliefs. Ultimately, it is a mixture of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions. Those who adopt this syncretistic and inclusive religious system are open to borrowings, mixes, and collective applications.

³² Ethno-religion is a collective term for all the primary forms of manifestations of religiosity which involve animism, shamanism, pantheism, ancestor worship, etc.: Johnson – Ross (eds.) 2009, 18–19, 325.

³³ The data are taken from the previously mentioned works. Its value is relative and can differ from one paper to another, without significant differences. Each research taken into account has a special chapter in which the procedures used are explained methodologically in order to establish the data.

2.2. Christianity

In the global religious configuration, the share of Christianity slightly decreased during the 20th century even if the number of Christians experienced a significant increase, being supported by global population growth. Thus, whereas in 1910 Christians represented 34.8% (611,810,000 adherents) of the total world population, in 2010 the 2,260,440,000 Christians represented 32.8% of the world population.³⁴ It is interesting to underline that the annual growth rate of the Christian population continued to decline until 2000, when it reached 1.33%; thus, in the next ten years, there would be a slight increase to 1.35% in 2010.

Globally, Christianity remains the religion with the most followers, and predictions show that this position will be maintained in the coming decades. It is estimated that in 2030 the share of Christians will be 34.1%,³⁵ and in 2050 the number of Christians will reach 3,327,384,000, representing 35.8% of the world population.³⁶

However, the geographical distribution of Christianity underwent important changes during the 20th century. While in 1910 over 80% of the world's Christian population was located in Europe and North America, in 2010 only 37.9% of the Christians lived on the two continents. The countries of the southern hemisphere have come to provide a living environment for almost 60% of the Christians.

Table 2. *Distribution of the Christian population by continent*³⁷

Christianity	1910	1970	2000	2010	2014	2030	2050
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Europe	94.5	75.0	77.5	78.6	78.2	75.2	74.5
North America	96.6	91.6	81.1	78.8	78.0	75.1	72.2
Latin America	95.2	94.3	92.5	92.3	92.3	91.7	89.6
Africa	9.3	38.4	47.1	48.3	48.6	50.5	52.6
Asia	2.4	4.5	7.4	8.2	8.6	10.2	11.8
Oceania	78.6	92.5	78.1	76.6	73.5	70.4	70.6

³⁴ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 13.

³⁵ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 36–37.

³⁶ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 116.

³⁷ For the purpose of synthesizing the data, except for the aforementioned sources, we have also used: JOHNSON – ZURLO: *Religions by Continent*. In: GRIM, Brian J. – JOHNSON, Todd M. – SKIRBEKK, Vegard – ZURLO, Gina A. (eds.) (2015): *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2015*. 87–97.

If we follow the evolution of Christianity on every continent, we will have a clear picture of the dynamics that, from a demographic perspective, Christianity has known in the last century. Thus, in Europe in 1910, 94.5% of the population was Christian. Its share decreased to 75% in 1970, and then it had seen a slight increase until 2010, when it reached 78.6%. Since then, there has been a slight decrease, and this trend is maintained for the future – estimates show that in 2030 only 75.2% of Europe’s population will be Christian, and by 2050 the percentage is likely to fall to 74.5%. The same evolution is noted for North America, Latin America, and Oceania. Instead, we are witnessing an exponential growth in the Christian population on the African continent. While in 1910 less than 10% of Africa’s population was Christian, in 2014 no less than 48.6% of the population was Christian, the 553,047,000 adherents representing 23.1% of the world’s Christian population.³⁸ Christianity continues to grow steadily in Asia even if it ranks only fifth in the ranking of religious affiliation after Muslims (26.4%), Hindus (22.3%), Buddhists (11.7%), and Chinese folk religions (10.4%).³⁹ Asia is the only continent on which the Christian population is not the largest religious group.

2.3. *Islam*

The dynamics of the evolution of other religious groups, particularly Muslims, was much more pronounced in the 20th century.⁴⁰ Muslims registered a spectacular increase from 12.6% –which means 221,749,000 followers in 1910 –to 22.5%, the equivalent of 1,553,773,000 followers in 2010, and the forecasts are that in 2050 (according to some estimates even sooner) the number of Muslims will exceed 2,500,000,000, i.e. 27.5% of the world population.⁴¹ If we analyse each continent, we find that the number of Muslims increased between 1910 and 2014 from 32.1% to 41.6% in Africa, from 16.7% to

³⁸ JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 87.

³⁹ Op. cit. 90.

⁴⁰ For a history of Islam, see: LAPIDUS, Ira M. (2002): *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴¹ Also see: JOHNSTONE, Patrick (2011): *The Future of the Global Church*. InterVarsity Press. 74. For further details on the historic and demographic of Islam see: RUTHVEN, Malise (2004): *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World*. Oxford University Press; Pew Research Center (27 January 2011): *The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

26.4% in Asia, from 2.4 % to 6.1% in Europe, from 0.1% to 0.3% in Latin America, from 0.0% to 1.5% in North America, and from 0.2% to 1.6% in Oceania.⁴²

Muslims register the highest growth rate globally. For the period between 1970 and 2000, the annual growth rate was 2.75%. The growth rate of the Muslim population was 1.5 times higher than that of the world population growth.⁴³ The demographic factors that support this sharp increase are: high fertility rate, increase in life expectancy, decrease in child mortality, the share of the young population, migration, and the change of religious affiliation.⁴⁴

Globally, the fertility rate in 2010 was 2.5, and it is anticipated to decline by 2050 to 2.1. In the case of Muslims, the fertility rate is significantly higher, namely 3.1 with a tendency to decrease to 2.3 by 2050. This increased fertility rate, which is above the average that is necessary to ensure the stability of the population, will lead to a natural increase in the share of the Muslim population.⁴⁵

Muslim life expectancy has grown steadily, reaching 67 years in 2010 but remaining below the world average of 69 years. There is a trend to further increase life expectancy, according to which by 2050 it is estimated to reach 75 years for Muslims, i.e. a level almost similar to the world average. Consequently, Muslims will not suffer significant losses as a result of deaths due to natural causes.

Globally, the average age of Muslims is the lowest – only 24 –, while for Christians it is 30. On the one hand, the share of the young Muslim population under 15 is the highest of all religions, reaching 34% compared to the world average of 27% or to that of Christians, which is again 27%. On the other hand, the share of the elderly Muslim population over the age of 60 is the lowest, of only 7%, compared to the share of Christians of 14% or the global share of 11%. This share of young population will provide the necessary support for the accelerated growth of the Muslim population.

⁴² JOHNSON – ZURLO 2015, 62–63; JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 118.

⁴³ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 16.

⁴⁴ For detailed analyses on these factors, see: Pew Research Center (27 January 27, 2011): *The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center (2 April 2015): *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

If the change of religious affiliation has a relatively small albeit positive impact on the Muslim population, migration will decisively influence the increasing share of the Muslim population in certain geographical areas. Europe is particularly concerned about this. It is estimated that more than 10% of the continent's population will be Muslim by 2050 as a result of sustained migration.⁴⁶ There will also be a large increase in North America, where the Muslim population is expected to grow by 197%.⁴⁷

Table 3. *Distribution of the Muslim population by continent*

ISLAM	1910	1970	2000	2010	2014	2030	2050
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Europe	2.4	2.7	5.6	5.6	6.1	7.3	10.2 ⁴⁸
North America	0.0	0.4	1.3	1.6	1.5	2.0	2.6
Latin America	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
Africa	32.1	40.4	42.2	41.7	41.6	41.6	41.2
Asia	16.7	19.0	24.2	25.9	26.4	28.9	30.9
Oceania	0.2	0.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	2.0	2.5

2.4. Other Religions

Most Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc.) experienced a slow evolution during the 20th century, maintaining, with small variations, their share in the world demographic structure. The same holds true for Judaism.

The most significant decreases in the number of followers were registered by the Chinese folk religions and ethno-religions, reaching 6.6% from 22.3% and 3.8% from 7.7%, respectively, by 2010.

⁴⁶ JOHNSON – GRIM 2013, 117–119.

⁴⁷ Pew Research Center (2 April 2015): *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

⁴⁸ The scenario that supports this figure starts from the premises of increased migration towards this geographical area; see: Pew Research Center (2 April 2015): *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

3. Topics for Reflection

Throughout our analysis, we aimed to draw attention to the potential of religious demography in deciphering the religious image of the world in which we live. On the other hand, we consider that the exploration of the global religious profile as it evolves as well as of the factors that cause change is not only an opportunity generated by the organic development of religious demographic research but also a necessity for rethinking the pastoral and missionary strategies of the church.

The presented data is only the first level of analysis. In fact, it is the foundation for qualitative analysis as well as reflects the relationship between cause and effect. The ability to compare data also provides the necessary openness for projections regarding the future dimension of world religiosity.

From another perspective, the emerging demographic realities draw attention to the needs of religious dialogue in general but also to the thorough preparation for this type of dialogue. Knowledge and self-knowledge, the familiarity of the interlocutor and the assumption of one's own religious identity become immediate needs in this context. One of the major consequences of the demographic changes that have taken place over the past century is the global increase in religious diversity. There are two kinds of religious diversity: inter-religious diversity and intra-religious diversity.⁴⁹ If the data we presented illustrates the growth of religious diversity in different geographical areas, the elements of intra-religious diversity require much more attention. In the intra-religious area, be it Christian, Muslim, or of other religions, there are major changes that require increased attention. These changes target at least three levels: faith, belonging, and behaviour. These changes are highlighted especially in the case of the young population. There are certainly changes in the way one believes in God, the way one assumes membership of a religious group and the way one expresses faith and religious affiliation by assuming religious behaviours.⁵⁰

Another area of analysis that would require special attention concerns the impact of secularism in a world eminently religious, at least in terms of quantity, as well as the consequences of religious fundamentalism.

⁴⁹ These realities are illustrated by JOHNSON – ROSS. (eds.) 2009, 32–33; JOHNSTONE, Patrick 2011, 65–92, 93–120.

⁵⁰ For a case study on these aspects, see: GÂRDAN 2020, 139–175.

Bibliography

- BULLIVANT, Stephen – RUSE, Michael (eds.) (2014): *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- EPSTEIN, Greg M. (2009): *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*. New York, Harper.
- GÂRDAN, Gabriel-Viorel (2014): The Changing Face of Christianity and the New Outlines of Ecumenism. In: Costroiu, Mihnea – Ciucă, Liviu-Bogdan – Burcea, Nelu (eds.): *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*. Paris, Iarsic Editions Les Arcs. 569–611.
- (2015a): The Changing Face of Christianity and New Outlines of Ecumenism in the 21st Century. In: Field, David – Koslowski, Jutta (eds.): *Prospects and Challenges for the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century*. Geneva, Globethics.net, Global 12. 27–63.
- (2015b): Locul creștinismului în configurația religioasă globală actuală [The Place of Christianity in the Contemporary Religious Configuration]. In: *Credință și viață în Hristos – Anuarul Episcopiei Sălajului VII*. 417–445.
- (2019): Creștinismul în Europa. Realități demografice și sociale religioase [Christianity in Europe – Demographic and Social Religious Realities]. In: Grama, Claudiu-Ioan (ed.): *Mitropolitul Andrei – păstorul blând al Transilvaniei euharistice. Vol. 2. In honorem*. Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea. 261–289.
- (2020): Credință, apartenență și comportament religios în creștinismul european contemporan. Elemente de demografie religioasă [Faith, Belonging, and Religious Behaviour in Contemporary European Christianity. Religious Demography Outlines]. In: Rușeț, Casian (ed.): *Comuniune și comunități: jertfă, slujire, spiritualitate*. Fabriano – Caransebeș, Montefano The Publishing House – The Publishing House of the Bishopric of Caransebeș. 139–175.
- GRIM, Brian J. – JOHNSON, Todd M. – SKIRBEKK, Vegard – ZURLO, Gina A. (eds.) (2015): *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2015*. Leiden/Boston, Brill.
- HAWLEY, George (2017): *Demography, Culture, and the Decline of America's Christian Denominations*. Lexington Books.
- JOHNSON, Todd M. – GRIM, Brian J. (2013): *The World's Religions in Figures. An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- JOHNSON, Todd M. – ROSS, Kenneth R. (eds.) (2009): *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010*. Edinburg University Press.
- JOHNSTONE, Patrick (2011): *The Future of the Global Church*. InterVarsity Press.
- KAUFMANN, Eric (2010): *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. London, Profile Books.

LAPIDUS, Ira M. (2002): *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge University Press.

Pew Research Center (27 January 2011): *The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

(2 April 2015): *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*. Accessible online at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050> (last accessed: 21 July 2020).

RUTHVEN, Malise (2004): *Historical Atlas of the Islamic World*. Oxford University Press.

World Christian Database – <https://www.worldchristiandatabase.org>.

World Religion Database – <https://www.worldreligiondatabase.org>.