Introduction

Record secularization and population stagnation in the West combined with high religiosity and population growth in the South all make for a rapidly changing global religious landscape, creating new opportunities and challenges for the world. Yet, the meeting of today's secular political and economic powers is often accompanied by a genuine lack of awareness of religious trends. The ignorance of religious lines of thinking and religiously motivated behaviors is a truly global challenge. Part of this lack of understanding also includes a misunderstanding of statistics on religion, migration patterns, and reproductive and demographic trends related to religion, all of which the *Journal of Religion and Demography* aims to address.

The religious-demographic divisions of the world have the potential to create oppositions and limit the ability to respond to global challenges in a coherent, effective, and rapid manner. Demographic factors differ between religious groups and constitute an important area that needs to be regularly addressed. Fertility and mortality differences among religions are high and may underlie fear and opposition while countering the potential for understanding, collaboration, and mutual support. While researchers often have disregarded religion—possibly due to a lack of data, lack of insights, or being uncomfortable with dealing with the subject—religion matters for the world. And with a growing global population and less absolute poverty, fewer inequalities in education and yet no convergence in terms of religious belief, the demography of religion will likely matter more.

The study of religion and demography matters to the world—and objective data allow us to study it in a neutral manner. The current issue of the *Journal of Religion and Demography* provides important new insights in this manner.

Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing present and discuss data from the World Religion Database, a regular feature of the *Journal of Religion and Demography*. In addition to insights on Christians and Muslims, the data provides estimates on many other religious and non-religious groups. Their estimates on non-religionists in Asia suggest the share of those without a religious affiliation has been dropping, from 25.6% in 1970 to 13.8% in 2020. In Europe, the net changes are small due to a growing share of religious non-belief in Western Europe and a declining share of non-belief in Eastern Europe. Their dataset offers insights

also in a subcategory of those without religion; agnosticism (who are uncertain about the existence of a God, or who believe it is impossible to know for certain whether or not there is an ultimate reality) is growing in parts of the West, with shares in e.g., in Northern America rising from 4.9% in 1970 to 17.3% in 2020. It also offers other fascinating insights, including that Thailand, Cambodia, Bhutan, and Myanmar are the countries with the highest share of Buddhists in the world, all with more than three quarters in their respective populations for 2020.

A study by Rachel McCleary and Robert Barro studies trends in how the Catholic Church chooses who and how many people become martyrs annually. Rates of new martyr beatification over time—the average of only 0.67 martyrs per year for the 37 prior popes prior to 1978 (commonly one every two years, and just a few for each Pope)—has been contrasted by the rapid increase in beatification for the last popes John Paul II's annual beatification rate was 12.1 per year, Benedict XVI's was 11.9, and Francis's was 9.3. A growing share of all saints are found in non-Western regions and the authors find that the threat of secularization increases martyrdom more than competition from Protestants.

The article by Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme on millennials suggests fewer are religiously affiliated, with lower rates conversion, and much more evidence for a majority who have religiously affiliated parents who are leaving organized religion altogether. Both in the US and Canada, relatively few with a secular upbringing turn to religion, and non-religion is increasingly a default option in this generation. Their social environment has become much more secular, compared with that of their parents and grandparents. Having one religiously affiliated parent and one non-religious parent, rather than two non-religious parents, does not significantly affect conversion rates among young adults. Nevertheless, the majority of millennials in both countries still hold some sort of religious belief and still affiliate with a religion in the dataset, with the most popular religion still being Christianity.

Nadja Milewski and Sonja Haug explore the fascinating intersection between assisted reproductive technologies and religion among women in Germany, a country learning to respond to low birth rates, high rates of childlessness, a substantial immigrant population, and a gap between desired and actual numbers of children. The analysis finds that Muslim women were significantly more likely than Christian women to consider using assisted reproductive technologies. This is the first survey to explore religious differences among women's attitudes of these kinds of technologies and could have a substantial impact on the future of these treatments.

It is our hope that readers of the *Journal of Religion and Demography* take note of our efforts to include studies from around the world and of various religious and non-religious traditions. It is our hope to push quantitative studies of religion into new areas of research by taking into consideration the seemingly endless possible intersections between religion, health, migration, and demography.

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