

# The challenges of a society becoming postsecular

EEA General Assembly, Prague, 9-12 October 2017

See also:

*Europe and the Gospel*, chapter 16

# 'Post-secular'

This term refers to the persistence or resurgence of religious beliefs and practices in a society that has undergone a long process of secularisation.

And this has an impact on the role of religion with respect to

- political governance
- public or civil society
- secularised population, secularism in science, education, media, etc.

Term popularised ed by Jürgen Habermas (2006).

Widely used, but with different meanings. End of secularism? Reversal of process of further secularisation? End of neutral State?

- From a *confessional* society
  - all spheres of life and social coexistence determined by a religious outlook
- To a *secularized* society
  - Political systems (the state, the 'people', the nation, or political ideologies) took over the integrative role formerly played by religion
- Emergence of a *post-secular* situation
  - Characterized by democracy and pluralism and by the re-negotiation of the place of religion in the public sphere.

# 1. Not a restoration but a new situation

Generally, the prefix 'post' is used to indicate a new period or situation in which something of the preceding period is retained.

In a post-secular situation, the secular trends continue, but they are not the only and not even the predominant trend.

Our countries becoming more secular *and* more religious (Grace Davie, etc.)

New situation:

- 1) Christianity is not becoming the dominant religion again, but an important minority besides secularism that remains influential
- 2) In the past, Christianity was the only or the dominant religion. Today's society is becoming multireligious. Islam a major religion

## 2. Demographics and religion

2015: First time negative natural growth Europe (EU)

Since 1970's under the replacement level of 2.1 child / woman

Abortion

Western-Europe: 12 per 1,000 women, Eastern Europe 43 (in 2008).

UK and Scandinavia: 17 (on par with US)

EU: 1.2 million per year (in 2012). Add Russia (105 abortions : 100 births)

Compare: average of 1.6 million immigrants per year from outside Europe

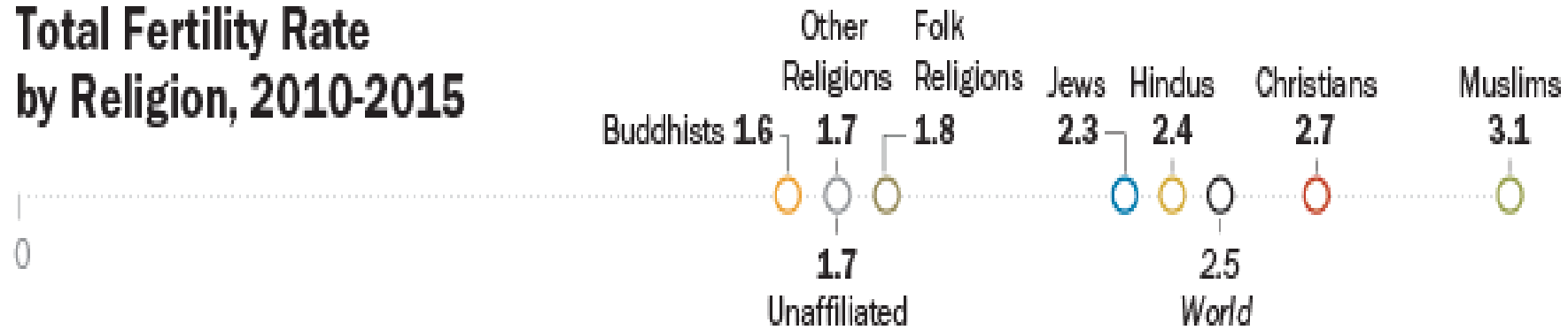
Muslim percentage of population is growing

More children per family / earlier 1<sup>st</sup> child, longer time for childbearing

***Same phenomenon in all religious groups***

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## Total Fertility Rate by Religion, 2010-2015



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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## Total Fertility Rates by Region and Religion, 2010-2015

*Number of children an average woman is expected to have in her lifetime*

	All Religions	Muslims	Christians	Unaffiliated
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.8	5.6	4.5	4.3
Middle East and North Africa	3.0	3.0	2.5	*
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.2	*	2.2	2.3
Asia-Pacific	2.1	2.6	2.3	1.6
North America	2.0	2.7	2.1	1.6
Europe	1.6	2.1	1.6	1.4
World	2.5	3.1	2.7	1.7

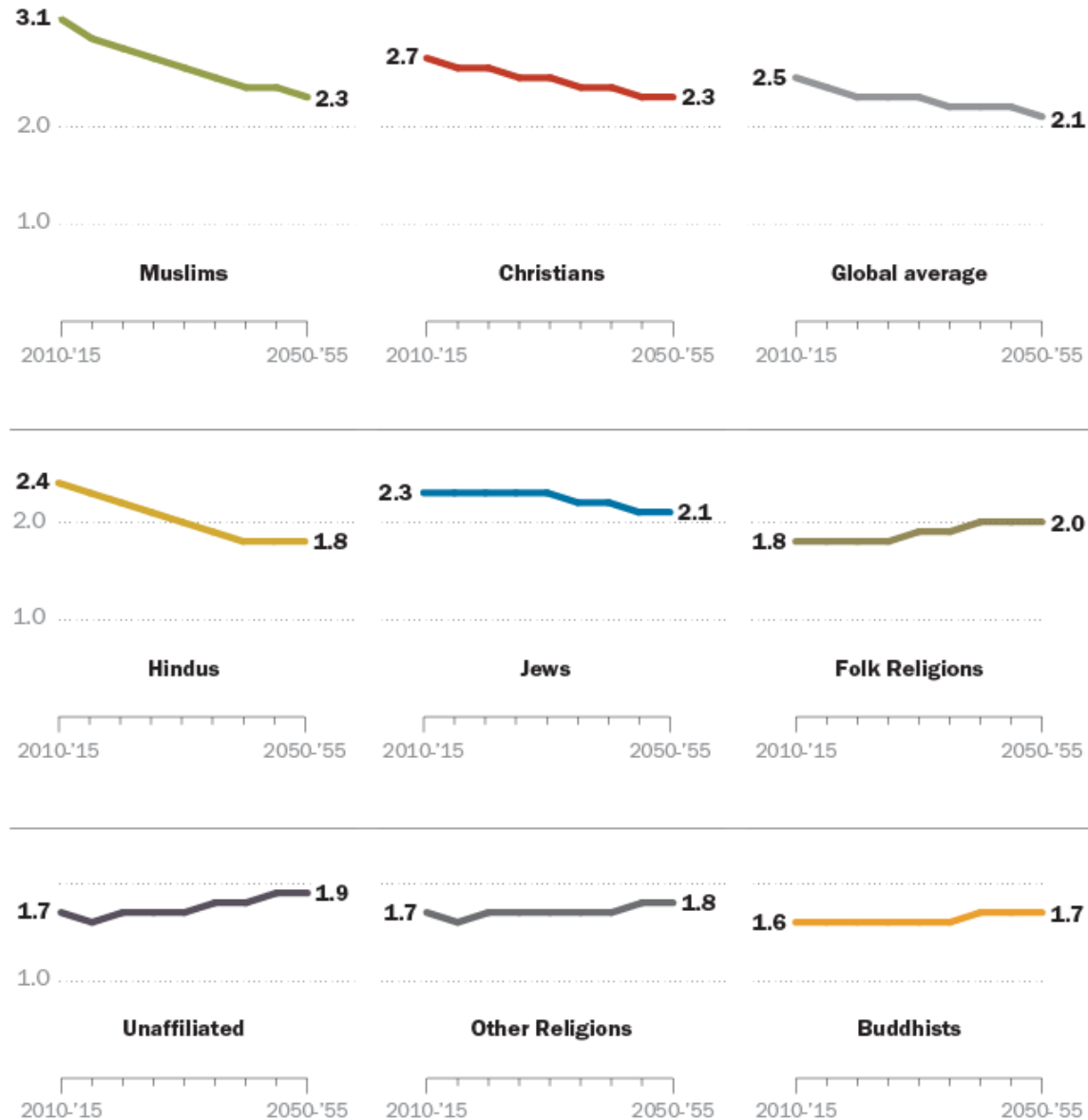
\*Insufficient data for reliable estimates.

Regional differences in fertility rates for other religious groups are discussed in Chapter 2.

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

## Total Fertility Rate by Religion, Projected From 2010-2050

Number of children an average woman is expected to have in her lifetime

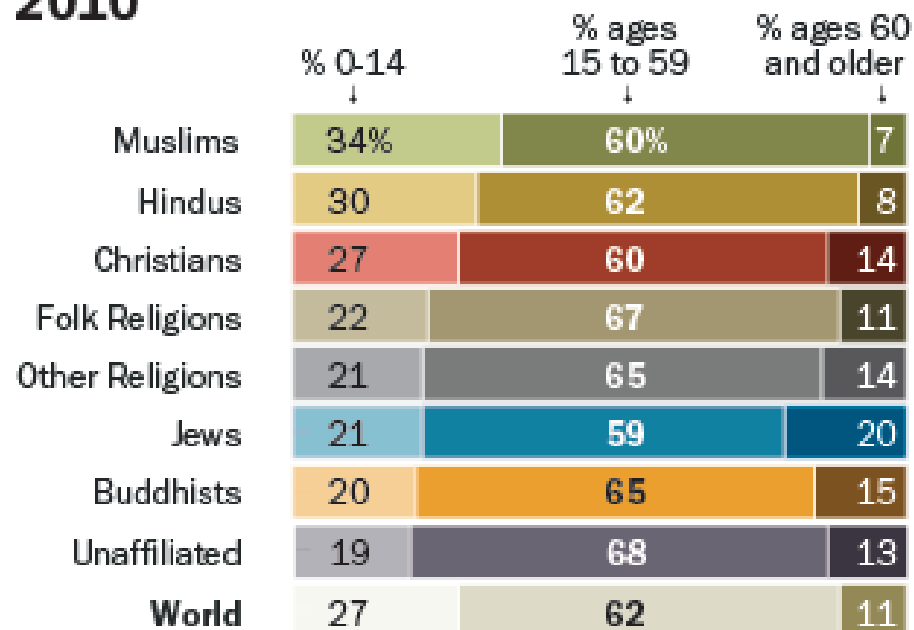


Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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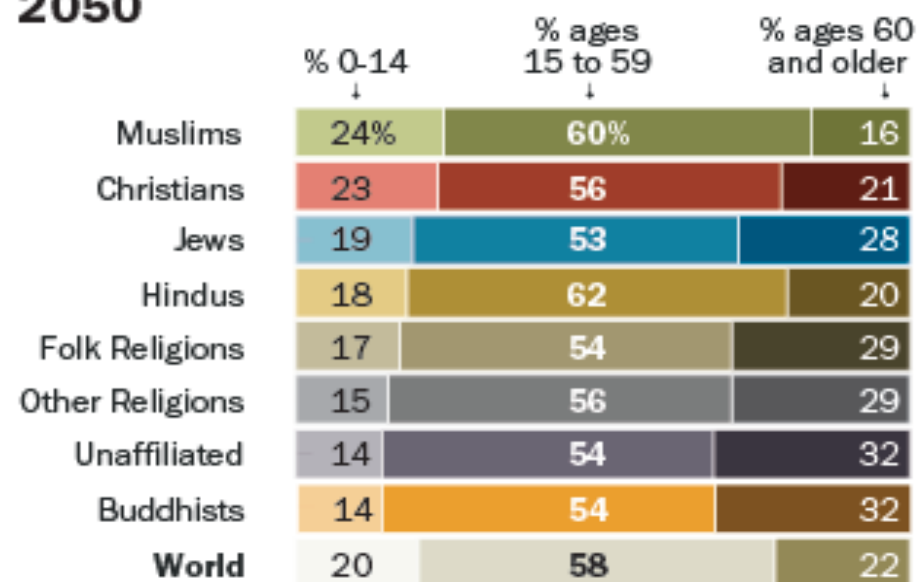
## Age Distribution of Religious Groups, 2010



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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## Age Distribution of Religious Groups, 2050



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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# Moral/spiritual factor

## Population decline, the moral/spiritual factor

- *Joseph Ratzinger*: Europe...seems to have become paralyzed by a crisis of its circulatory system, a crisis that endangers its life...The interior dwindling of the spiritual strength that once supported it... A strange lack of will for the future...
- *George Weigel*: a society that rejects the supernatural turns instead to short-term hedonism...Why...should individuals make the commitment to posterity implied by the decision to bear and nurture children?
- *Philip Jenkins*: In modern Europe, the loss of cohesion leaves a society open to the expansion of newer peoples who still care for bonds of family and religion.

## Secularist society is unsustainable in itself

- *Mark Steyn*: 'The design flaw of the secular social-democratic state is that it requires a religious-society birth-rate to sustain it.'

## Why does the unchurched population still grow?

# Demographic religious prospects

Religious groups value family and childbearing, etc. (Hayford and Morgan)

*Shall the religious inherit the earth?* (Eric Kaufman)

Shift towards traditional/conservative/'evangelical' streams

Higher birth rates than 'liberal' streams, because of family values

Conclusions:

- Fewer children born in Europe will grow up in secular family environment
- A growing percentage will grow up in a religious family environment
- An increasing number of them in a traditional/conservative religious environment

# 3. 'Return of religion' in the public sphere

More visible signs of religious identity

Increased visibility of religious practice

Presence in civil society, in the arts, sports, in popular music, in political and philosophical debates, social media, Internet

Politics increasingly confronted with demands of religious groups re. their practices, places of worship, and protests of secularists

Politicians ill-equipped to handle this, educated and trained in secularist setting

# 4. Changing role of the State

***'Second era of secularisation'*** (Bérengère Massignon)

First ... the 'neutral' state had the tendency to secularise the public sphere, while it took over the central place, as if the state were God – a divine Caesar.

Second phase, the state recognises its limits and the value of religious and other institutions in civil society. De-sacralisation of politics: the state is neither God nor Caesar, it cannot regulate everything and should leave more room for religion also in the public sphere.

## Jürgen Habermas (dialogue with Joseph Ratzinger)



This 'methodological atheist' now recognises:

*For the normative self-understanding of modernity,*

*Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst.*

*Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.*

*This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance.*

*Everything else is idle postmodern talk.*

# Post-Communist, Post-Soviet, 'post-secular'

Before the Turn (1989-1991): secularist ideology, atheism imposed

After : freedom of religion (although limited for some...), post-secular

Orientations: EU and NATO: 'Western' liberal democracy, human rights

East and Asia: traditional Orthodox and 'Eurasian'

Reappraisal of Christianity and the Church(es)

Difference between 'secular West' and 'religious East'. Examples:

- Migrants
- Traditional Christian norms (definition of marriage in the Constitution)
- Government support for Church buildings and institutions

# Post-Communist 'post-secular' East

Attempts of historic religions to restore former dominant position

Traditional posture of Protestants / Evangelicals : marginal position

New generation of leaders (e.g. Wojciech Kowalewski, Poland)

*In a post-secular society, they have the freedom and the responsibility to contribute to the transformation of society, by fostering Biblical values, combating corruption, etc.*

Michael Cherenkov (Ukraine):

*After more than twenty years since the fall of the USSR, the evangelical movement in post-Soviet society has entered a crucial phase in its historical development. It now has an unprecedented opportunity to become a shining example of a 'church without walls'.*



# Implications and challenges

## ***1. Seculars have to reckon with religious communities and views***

Beyond exclusively secular language and 'political correctness'

## ***2. Religious people have to reckon with secularism and secular trends***

## ***3. Christians have to reckon with presence of Islam***

## ***4. Values and social cohesion: States need Churches***

Example: EU and faith communities

## ***5. Participate in the public debate***

Ethical issues, conjugality, human rights, environment...

'Public theology'?

# What national EA's could do

***1. Equip Churches for engaging in public debate***

***2. Build relations with politicians***

***3. Dialogue with other Christian streams (interconfessional)***

Create better understanding and combat prejudices

Speak with one voice on political, social and ethical issues

Witness to the Gospel together, at least in mutual respect

***4. Promote religious – secularist dialogue***

***5. Meet with representatives of other religious communities***

Create better understanding and combat prejudices. Contribute to social peace

Uphold freedom of conscience and the practice of religion, within the state of law