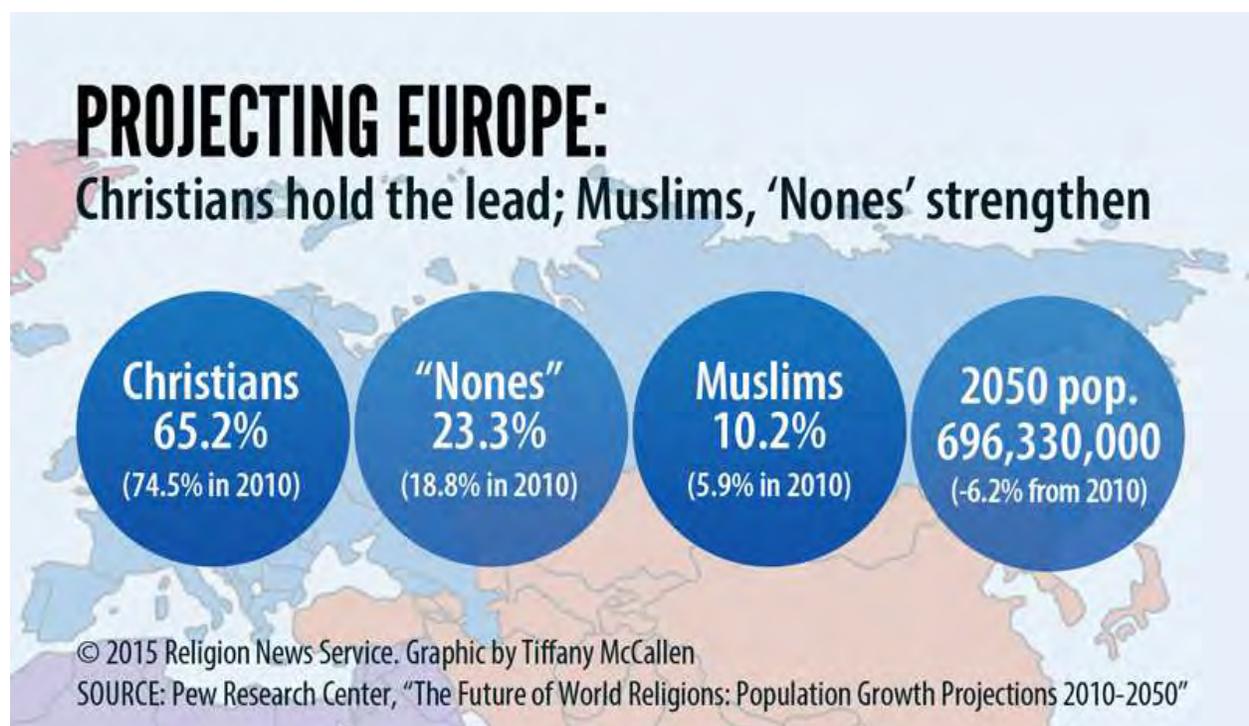# The future of world religions
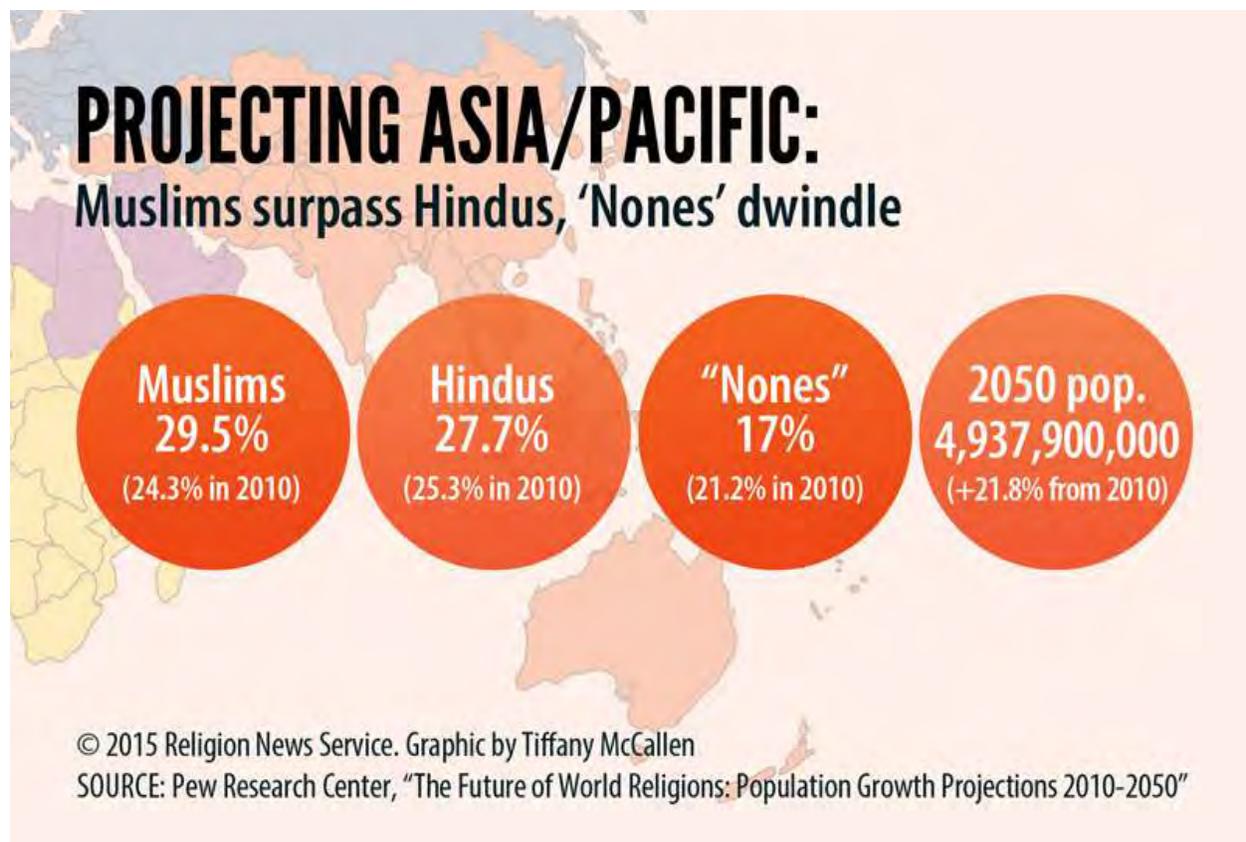
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April 9, 2015

More than 83% of the world's population today is religious. In other words, if you take any 6 people at random around the world, 5 of them would say that they belong to a religious community. And, according to a recent publication of population growth projections based on demographic research, the proportion of religious people is set to grow between now and 2050. This non-partisan study conducted by the Pew Research Center in the USA yields some speculative information forecasting how specific populations will rise and fall. However, is this information useful for anyone?

While some folks with the ability to analyse statistics will be able to read the data provided by the Pew Research Center's webpage and glean lots of meaning, for other folks a picture or diagram communicates more effectively. Below I share just a sample of images that represent the projections of this study:

PROJECTING EUROPE:
Christians hold the lead; Muslims, 'Nones' strengthen

Christians
65.2%
(74.5% in 2010)

"Nones"
23.3%
(18.8% in 2010)

Muslims
10.2%
(5.9% in 2010)

2050 pop.
696,330,000
(-6.2% from 2010)

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SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050"

PROJECTING NORTH AMERICA:
Christian growth slows, 'Nones' soar

Christians
65.8%
(77.4% in 2010)

"Nones"
25.6%
(17.1% in 2010)

Jews
1.4%
(1.8% in 2010)

2050 pop.
435,420,000
(+26.4% from 2010)

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SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions:
Population Growth Projections 2010-2050"

PROJECTING ASIA/PACIFIC:
Muslims surpass Hindus, 'Nones' dwindle

Muslims 29.5% (24.3% in 2010)

Hindus 27.7% (25.3% in 2010)

"Nones" 17% (21.2% in 2010)

2050 pop. 4,937,900,000 (+21.8% from 2010)

© 2015 Religion News Service. Graphic by Tiffany McCallen
SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections 2010-2050"

Location is important when reflecting on this projected data. Whereas the proportion of people with no religious affiliation will is predicted to decrease in the world overall, in Europe and North America the 'nones' will actually increase in proportion. Islam is predicted to grow and Christianity is expected to contract. How will we respond to these ongoing demographic changes?

Traditionally, the teachings of the Unification Movement have been communicated in language that is very Christian, quoting the Bible and referencing Christian theological ideas. In a community that is increasingly Muslim or non-religious, those same teachings need to be communicated in a different language. Just as the early Jews who followed Jesus began to speak in many tongues after the Pentecost, being able to spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection to many parts of the world, contemporary Unificationists need to find multiple languages by which to communicate the precious principles we have inherited and explain the meaning and significance of the blessing.

By languages, I don't just mean Mandarin, Urdu or French. Even within one's own language, there are different communities of people who 'speak' a different dialect: the business dialect, the recreational sports dialect, the video-gaming dialect, the parenting dialect, the pop music dialect, etc. Since the non-religious community is growing, those of us who feel like we have a precious message to share need to be able to communicate key concepts when the symbols, keys and codes might be missing in the bank of concepts, ideas, or connotations within the mind of the people we're trying to reach. An awareness of the kind of community around us is important to realise in what ways we can connect God's purposes with the existing human activities. Any aspiring tribal messiahs should, before seeking to serve their home church area, investigate what their community is like and study the local needs or concerns. By becoming experts of our local situations, we can be best equipped to serve, effectively 'speaking' the language of our local community.

One last thing: If you click on the thumbnail image at the beginning of this post, you'll see a larger version of the word cloud from which you would be able to read the names of the world's religions and religious organisations. Under 'Islam' you'll find the words 'Unification Church' in a font that was bigger than I expected. If any Unificationists are reading this, I hope you'll find this as nicely surprising as I did! Nevertheless, the reality is that we are a tiny community in the grand scheme of things. I'll admit that I would like to see my own faith community growing, even to the extent where the Unification Church becomes one of the major religious communities worth comparing with the existing large communities. For now, however, it remains in the group designated 'others'. While I'm sure that the sociological and scientific methods used to create this demographic projection are quite thorough and unbiased, there's always scope for miraculous growth. If we create a healthy community that operates in a principled fashion and promotes a culture of heart, I see no reason why our community – or indeed any community – shouldn't be able to receive God's blessing and grow not only in health but also in number.

Image Credits

http://www.dreamstime.com/stock-images-world-religions-image23163664

http://www.religionnews.com/2015/04/02/future-map-religions-reveals-world-change-christians-muslims-jews/