

***THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION & TRENDS IN
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (2010-2060)***

By Krishnan Nandela

Introduction

On earth, all human beings are converted at birth into a follower of a religion that is inherited. Inherited religion is the first conversion that is forced upon an individual due to the accident of birth. A person is born into a religious system and becomes its naturalized follower in real or superfluous terms. When a person makes an informed choice, he or she enters a religious system and become its real follower. The original is one who establish a new religion, the rest are all carbon copies or converted creatures: informed and blind in different degrees of comparison. The difference is between the creator or the founder and the followers. The followers are always the converted lot. Social service with an aim to convert the served to the religion of the server to my mind is an innocuous aim and need not be looked at with askance. The poor, the under-served and the un-served and the exploited and oppressed ones are susceptible to the luring advances of the converter. The lure may be either material or spiritual or a combination of social, spiritual and material. In India, a considerable number of people got converted to Christianity and Islam because these religions were found to be liberating by the oppressed and were devoid of the despicable caste system. There were forcible conversions too.

By the time Christianity arose in the first century ACE and Islam came into existence in the 7th Century ACE, Hinduism had already degraded into a cesspool of caste and superstition and a great mass of people at the bottom of the caste pyramid were socially deprived and oppressed. Buddha, born Hindu, felt the need to establish a new religion in the 6th and 5th Century BCE and Mahavira who is known to be a contemporary of Buddha established Jainism. Between the two, Buddha was successful in acquiring mass following in India and later Emperor Asoka took Buddhism to various parts of India and to other countries of the world. The need to establish a new religion is born due to the wanting nature of the religion into which one is born. If a religion is wanting, the solution is to reform and if a religion is beyond reform, the solution is to

find a new one. Buddha and Mahavira went on to establish new religions: Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India. In the Middle East, Muhammad established Islam as a new religion in the 7th Century ACE to replace the polytheistic beliefs of the Arabian tribes with a monotheistic (later codified) religion. Muhammad was born in the Quraysh tribe which was a mercantile Arab tribe in charge of Mecca and its Ka'aba. In the later centuries, Islam took wings to reach many other countries of the world including India in the 8th century ACE when Sind was conquered by Muhammad bin Qasim. In the 15th century, Guru Nanak established Sikhism, a monotheistic religion, propounding one Creator or God and fundamental equality of all human beings. In the 20th Century, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar having failed to reconcile with Hinduism converted to Buddhism along with his half a million followers on 14th October 1956 at Nagpur, another 300 thousand followers were converted to Buddhism by Ambedkar on 16th October 1956 at Chandrapur.

However, in the 21st century, evangelical religious conversion is not a dominant theme. The dominant theme of 21st century conversion is conversion from religion to irreligion.

Conversion to irreligion as a dominant theme

Table 2.0 shows that irreligion is pre-dominant amongst 10 of the 22 countries listed there and in the rest of the countries, it is one of the dominant religious form because irreligion is also a religion, however, rational or otherwise it may be. Looking at these countries from the Islamic prism, they would belong to the land of *kafirs* or infidels (unbelievers, polytheists and Christians) who will be consigned to hell on the Day of Judgment. In reality, most of these countries are actually living in the Heavens on Earth and are scarcely bothered about the imaginary hell that is expected to beacon them on the Day of Judgment. Fundamental morality is fundamental to the functioning of human society and it pre-existed religions in the world. The Irreligionists are predominantly a people who made Irreligion, an intelligent choice without a messiah to deliver them into light. They are basically individuals who live in families having ancestral religions and had the courage and conviction to chart an independent path of Irreligion. No messiah delivered them into irreligion, nor did families forced irreligion on them for there are no irreligious families, save exceptions where either parent is irreligious. Irreligion cannot be

taught and it cannot be indoctrinated like other organized religions with or without the Church (central religious authority). The seeker of truth walks the path of irreligion and finds that God does not exist. He or she knows it for sure that there is no God but man who is actually the father or mother of God. Twelve hundred million people on earth follow Irreligion. They belong to more prosperous countries of the world.

When a person chooses irreligion he or she is converting or switching out from his or her ancestral or inherited religion. Twelve hundred million or 1.2 billion people chose Irreligion or switched to Irreligion without any sound or fury from within or without. Switching to Irreligion is a quiet process because it happens at the individual level whereas switching to organized religion needs somebody to beacon you to come over. Organized religions are largely proselytizing. Considerable efforts are made to proselytize people from one religion to the other leading to fear amongst the shrinking or stagnating religions in the world. Table 3.0 shows that between 2010 and 2015, the size of the unaffiliated or those choosing Irreligion has increased by 26.24 million people. By actual size, Irreligion is the fourth major religion in the world. Forty-seven per cent of the Chinese population is Irreligious by choice and of the 26.24 million increase in the Irreligious people; China alone has a share of 12.28 million people during the period 2010-15.

During the period 2015-60, the unaffiliated are projected to grow by 7.57 million people with 12.22 million switching in and 4.64 million switching out. While a considerable number of people will be switching over to Irreligion in the next 45 years, a third of the converts will also be leaving the fold of Irreligion. However, the gain of 7.57 million people to Irreligion will be the largest gain amongst the major religions. Data on switching in and out for organized and other religions pales into insignificance as compared to Irreligion or the Unaffiliated. While Muslims will be gaining 1.3 million people, they will lose two third of the gain i.e. 0.88 million. In the next 45 years, Muslims will gain only 0.42 million people through religious conversion. Folk and other religions will also gain by 0.35 and 0.24 million respectively. Hindus will swell by a mere 30 thousand and will also ebb by 30 thousand thereby gaining nothing in the next four and a half decades. Jews and Buddhists will be losing out on the conversion journey. Jews will

have a net loss of 40 thousand people whereas Buddhists will lose 370 thousand people. Religious conversion will take the greatest toll on the Christians who will lose by 8.18 million people. The biggest gainer is the unaffiliated group and the biggest loser is the Christian population when it comes to religious conversion.

Data on religious conversion suggests that the fears of right-wing organizations particularly in South Asia are unfounded. Muslims and Hindus constitute the vast majority of population in South Asia. Hindu right-wing outfits need not bother because religious conversion both in and out is insignificant amongst Hindus. The Muslims still have something to chew upon because they will be losing out 0.88 million people due to conversion.

Natural increase in world population by religious groups

Muslims will be the most numerous people on earth with a shade lower percentage in comparison to the Christians in 2060. With a 70 per cent natural gain over the 45-year period (2015-60), the Muslims will be the biggest gainers in numbers, followed by Christians with 34 per cent, Hindus by 15 per cent and the unaffiliated by 03 per cent. The Buddhists will lose by seven percent. The Muslim population in Pakistan over the period 2010-15 has increased by 16.81 million whereas in India, the Muslim population has increased by 19 million. Muslims in India have already surpassed Pakistan in absolute numbers in the five-year period 2010-15. In 2050, India will have the largest Muslim population in the world with 311 million people and its share growing up from 14.4 % in 2010 to 18.4 per cent in 2050. The share of Hindu population will decline from 79 % in 2010 to 76.7 % in 2050. The Muslim population in India will be up by 76 % whereas the Hindu population will rise by 33 % during the period 2010 to 2050. The absolute size of the Hindu population in India will be 1.3 billion. Christians will have 31.8 per cent share in the world population and Muslims will have 31.1 followed by Hindus with 14.5 per cent. Hindus will be losing by half a percent. The Christians will gain only by 0.6 percentage point in the 45-year period; the Muslims will register the largest gain of six percentage points or by 25 per cent i.e. from a share of 24 per cent in world population to 31.1 per cent. In 2060, every third person will be either a Muslim or a Christian. The Muslim fertility rate of 3.2 children per woman is very high as compared to 2.5 for Hindu woman and 2.3 for Christian

woman. The fertility rate of the unaffiliated woman is below 2.1 which is the replacement level fertility rate and that explain why the percentage share of the unaffiliated will decline from 16% in 2015 to 12.5 % in 2060.

The need for an informed religious choice

Societies in South Asia, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa are highly traditional and religious in outlook whereas societies in Europe, Australia and North America are highly individualistic, non-religious and humanitarian. That explains why the unaffiliated dominate in most of the European countries and why the Christian population will be losing to the religiously unaffiliated in the decades to come in these countries.

The new born babies in the religious families of the world and particularly in the traditional societies are religiously oppressed because these babies inherit the religion of their parents with an inherent bias towards the religion of the male parent (Patri-lineal descent). They are exposed to religious indoctrination throughout their lives and as a result when it comes to religious choice their brains become defunct. Forcing a religion upon one's own children is a case of religious oppression and this benign oppression happens without the knowledge of the oppressed. It is akin to parents deciding the marriage of young adults or young adults getting married to a person of the parent's choice in traditional societies. Choice is the fundamental principle of all modern egalitarian democratic free societies. Choice is relatively absent in traditional societies even if they claim to be either democratic or secular. On the assumption of adulthood, every adult in societies, world over must be given the option to choose a religion of his or her choice. In order to ensure that the adult makes an informed choice, a study in comparative religion must become part of the high school and higher secondary curriculum.

The atheist-theist dichotomy

In matters of religion and God, individuals in the society are classified into theists and atheists. Theist is one who believes in the existence of God and atheist is one who does not believe in the existence of God. Similarly, a religious person is one who follows any one or more of the organized religions in the world and an irreligious person is who does not follow any of the

religions. The religious-irreligious divide is also explained in terms of the affiliated-unaffiliated divide. Here, the atheist, the irreligious and the unaffiliated is the non-conformist and is denoted by an antonym. It is unfair to denote the non-conformist by an antonym. The atheists, irreligious and the unaffiliated are essentially humanitarian in their outlook to life and world and therefore they should be positioned on the top of the hierarchy of beliefs. In the new pyramid of religious affiliation, all are believers with the difference only in the object of belief. The first-class theist is a person who believes in the human being and humanitarianism. He or she does not believe in the existence of God and follows no religion. The second-class theist is a person who believes in the existence of a universal God who does not have a proper noun or form or image but follows a religion. He or she believes in the human being and humanitarianism. The third-class theist is person who believes in God/s with forms and names. He or she is a follower of any one or more of the organized religions. In this three-level classification of theists, I have placed the erstwhile atheist on the top of the ladder because the conviction that God does not exist comes only after a long time is spent in thinking on the existence of God. The first-class theist does not follow any organized religion and follows fundamental morality which is common to the entire humanity. He or she makes an informed and intelligent choice is superior to all other choices.

In Table 1.0, the distribution of religion across the world population for the year 2012 is given (Adherents.com).

TABLE 1.0 -RELIGIOUS DISTRIBUTION OF WORLD POPULALTION (2012)

SNO	RELIGION	ADHERENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Christianity	2.4 Billion	33.0
2.	Islam	1.8 Billion	24.1
3.	Secular ^(a) /Non-religious ^(b) /Agnostic/Atheist	1.2 Billion	16.0
4.	Hinduism	1.15 Billion	15.0

5.	Buddhism	521 Million	7.0
6.	Chinese Traditional Religion ^(c)	394 Million	5.50
7.	Ethnic Religion excluding some in separate religions	300 Million	4.19
8.	African Traditional Religions	100 Million	1.40
9.	Sikhism	30 Million	0.32
10.	Spiritism	15 Million	0.21
11.	Judaism	14.4 Million	0.20
12.	Baha'i	7.0 Million	0.10
13.	Jainism	4.2 Million	0.06
14.	Shinto	4.0 Million	0.06
15.	Cao Dai	4.0 Million	0.06
16.	Zoroastrianism	2.6 Million	0.04
17.	Tenrikyo	2.0 Million	0.02
18.	Neo Paganism	1.0 Million	0.01
19.	Unitarian Universal	0.8 Million	0.01
20.	Rastafari	0.6 Million	0.01
	Total	7.167 Billion	100

Notes

1. These figures may incorporate populations of secular/nominal adherents as well as syncretist worshipers, although the concept of syncretism is disputed by some.
2. Nonreligious include agnostic, atheist, secular humanist, and people answering 'none' or no religious preference. Half of this group is theistic but nonreligious. According to a 2012 study by Gallup International "59% of the world said that they think of themselves as religious person, 23% think of themselves as not religious whereas 13% think of themselves as convinced atheists".
3. Chinese traditional religion is described as "the common religion of the majority Chinese culture: a combination of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as the traditional non-scriptural/local practices and beliefs."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations

Countries with the greatest proportion of people without religion (including agnostics and atheists) from Irreligion by country (as of 2007) are given in the following table.

SNO	COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE
1.	Estonia	77
2.	Czech Republic	76
3.	Japan	76
4.	Denmark	72
5.	Sweden	64
6.	Vietnam	63
7.	Macau	62
8.	Hong Kong	57
9.	France	54
10.	Norway	52
11.	China	47
12.	Netherlands	47
13.	Finland	44
14.	New Zealand	42
15.	United Kingdom	42
16.	South Korea	41
17.	Germany	40
18.	Hungary	39
19.	Belgium	39
20.	Bulgaria	37

21.	Slovenia	37
22.	Russia	31

Note.

Ranked by mean estimate. Irreligious includes agnostic, atheist, secular believer, and people having no formal religious adherence. It does not necessarily mean that members of this group don't belong to any religion. Some religions have harmonized with local cultures and can be seen as a cultural background rather than a formal religion. Additionally, the practice of officially associating a family or household with a religious institute while not formally practicing the affiliated religion is common in many countries. Thus, over half of this group is theistic and/or influenced by religious principles, but nonreligious/non-practicing and not true atheists or agnostics. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations)

Table 3.0 gives figures on natural increase in the size of religious groups by region and world during the period 2010-15.

Table 3.0 - Natural Increase by Region & World in Millions (2010-15)

Country/ World	Christian	Muslim	Un- affiliated	Hindu	Buddhist	Folk Religions	Other Religions	Jewish	All
World	115.82	152.5	26.24	66.9	12.05	13.33	1.32	0.45	388.6
Asia- Pacific	17.68	79.52	16.85	66.46	11.72	9.6	9.6	*	202.79
Europe	-5.64	2.29	1.44	0.07	0.05	0.02	0.02	*	-1.75
Latin America- Caribbean	32.57	0.02	3.13	0.02	0.01	0.26	0.05	0.01	36.08
Middle East-North Africa	0.91	32.09	0.19	0.13	0.04	0.13	0.02	0.37	33.89
North America	5.81	0.32	2.38	0.19	0.23	0.05	0.1	0.07	9.15
Sub-	64.48	38.24	0.25	0.03	*	3.26	0.18	*	108.45

Saharan Africa									
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Note. Positive values indicate more births than deaths and a fertility rate of more than 2.1. Negative values indicate more deaths than births and a fertility rate of less than 2.1. *Indicates an increase of less than 10,000 persons.
Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER.

Table 4.0 gives natural increase in the size of religious groups during the period 2010-15 of some major countries of the world.

Table 4.0 - Natural Increase by Country in Millions (2010-15) – Major Countries

Country	Christian	Muslim	Un-affiliated	Hindu	Buddhist	Folk	Other	Jewish	All
Australia	0.29	0.07	0.32	0.03	0.04	0.01	0.01	*	0.77
Bangladesh	0.03	9.71	*	0.61	0.06	*	*	*	10.43
Brazil	7.3	*	1.1	*	*	0.08	*	*	8.49
Canada	0.12	0.06	0.33	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.64
China	2.53	1.75	12.28	*	6.96	6.4	0.3	*	30.21
Germany	-1.36	0.39	0.05	*	*	*	*	*	-0.91
India	1.6	19.0	0.02	62.83	0.49	0.39	0.65	*	84.97
Indonesia	1.85	11.01	*	0.09	0.06	*	0.01	*	13.02
Japan	*	*	1.26	*	-1.83	*	-0.14	*	-0.73
Malaysia	0.22	1.72	0.01	0.11	0.14	0.04	*	*	2.25
New Zealand	0.04	*	0.11	*	*	*	*	*	0.16
Pakistan	0.27	16.81	*	0.33	*	*	*	*	17.42
Saudi Arabia	0.1	2.24	0.01	0.03	*	*	*	*	2.4
Sweden	-0.04	0.05	0.09	*	*	*	*	*	0.11
UK	-0.45	0.34	0.88	0.04	0.01	*	*	*	0.82
US	5.68	0.26	2.05	0.15	0.21	0.03	0.08	0.04	8.51
Vietnam	0.52	*	1.5	*	0.72	2.03	0.02	*	4.8

Note. Positive values indicate more births than deaths and a fertility rate of more than 2.1. Negative values indicate more deaths than births and a fertility rate of less than 2.1. *Indicates an increase of less than 10,000 persons. Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER.

Table 5.0 gives the size and projected growth of major religious groups in millions during the period 2015-2060.

Table 5.0 – Size & Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups in Millions (2015-2060)

Religion	Projected 2015 Population	Percentage of World Population	Projected 2060 Population	Percentage of World Population	Population Growth 2015-60	Percent Growth
Christians	2276.25	31.2	3054.46	31.8	778.21	34
Muslims	1752.62	24.1	2987.39	31.1	1234.77	70
Unaffiliated	1165.02	16.0	1202.30	12.5	37.28	03
Hindus	1099.11	15.1	1392.90	14.5	293.79	15
Buddhists	499.38	6.9	461.98	4.8	-37.4	-7
Folk Religions	418.28	5.7	440.95	4.6	22.67	05
Other Religions	59.71	0.8	59.41	0.6	-0.29	00
Jews	14.27	0.2	16.37	0.2	2.1	15
World	7284.64	100	9615.76	100	2331.12	32

Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>

Table 6.0 gives projected figures on religious conversion for the period 2015-2060 in millions.

Table 6.0 - Religious Switching(2015-2060) in Millions

Religion	Switching in (In-conversion)	Switching Out (Out-conversion)	Net Change
Unaffiliated	12.22	4.64	7.57

Muslims	1.3	0.88	0.42
Folk Religions	0.76	0.41	0.35
Other Religions	0.37	0.13	0.24
Hindus	0.03	0.03	Nil
Jews	0.04	0.08	-0.04
Buddhists	0.47	0.83	-0.37
Christians	4.96	13.14	-8.18

Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER.<https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>

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