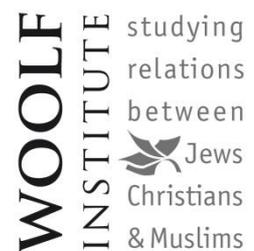


Dr Edward Kessler, MBE



Dr Edward Kessler is Founder Director of the Woolf Institute and a leading thinker in interfaith relations, primarily, Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations. He was awarded an MBE in 2011 for services to interfaith relations. Kessler regularly appears in the media commenting on interfaith affairs and was Vice-Chair of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, chaired by Baroness Butler-Sloss, which published its report, 'Living with Difference' last December. Much of his academic work focusses on the encounter between the Abrahamic faiths. He has written or edited 11 books and dozens of articles. His most recent book is entitled *Jews, Christians and Muslims* (SCM, 2013) and a new book on Jesus is due to be published in 2016. In 1998, he founded the Woolf Institute, which delivers research, teaching and public education programmes in relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims (www.woolf.cam.ac.uk). For the last 4 years Kessler has led on training programmes for the FCO on religion and foreign affairs under the strand, Freedom of Religion or Belief. In 2011 he established an academic partnership with the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, which has resulted in a number of joint educational programmes in Qatar and the UK.

The Changing Religious Landscape: changing demographics



In 1999, the sociologist Peter Berger noted that: “the world is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever”ⁱ. He called the process ‘desecularization’. Yet, to what extent we have absorbed the implications that in most parts of the world the most powerful actors in civil society are religious. The 2012 Pew Survey, ‘The Global Religious Landscape’ stated that 85% of the world’s population identified themselves as belonging to a specific religion.ⁱⁱ

There is increasing religious diversity around much of the world, not just in the West and understanding how religion interacts at local, national and international levels is vital. The picture is made more complicated by the growth of fanaticism and violent extremism.

The increasing movement of people and ideas are challenging what were once religious monopolies, such as the Orthodox churches in central and Eastern Europe or Hinduism in India. In China there are more Christians than members of the Chinese Communist Party (87m)ⁱⁱⁱ and in Russia, although religiously dominated by the Russian Orthodox Church, there are more Muslim inhabitants than in any other European country (17m or 12% of the population) and 50% of the military (1.1m) are Muslim.^{iv}

The two largest religions of the world – Christianity (33%; 2.2 billion, 2010) and Islam (23%; 1.6 billion, 2010) – are growing dramatically in the Global South. According to the 2013 report by Center for the Study of Global Christianity, the proportion of Christians in the world located in Africa, Asia or Latin America will increase from 41% 1970 to 65% in 2020. In Europe and North America, Christianity is declining as a percentage of the population.^v

The world's Christian population is expected to increase to 2.7 billion by 2030, especially Pentecostals and evangelical Protestants whose numbers are expected to grow to 700 million by 2020, more than a tenfold increase since 1970. After Catholics (1.2 billion, 2010), this collection of Christian churches represents the largest single grouping of Christians.

The world's Muslim population is increasing even faster than the Christian, rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030, according to the Pew report, 'The Future of the Global Muslim Population'. Muslims will make up 26.5% of the world's projected population of 8.3 billion, up from 23.5% in 2010 (of 6.9 billion). Pakistan will surpass Indonesia as the country with the single largest Muslim population and the largest Arab country will remain Egypt. Muslims will continue to be relatively small minorities in Europe and the Americas, but are expected to constitute a growing share of the total population.^{vi}

One implication of the changing religious landscape is that an increasing number of countries with substantial Muslim communities also have large Christian populations eg., India contains 32m Christians and 177m Muslims, alongside 830m Hindus, Indonesia 24m Christians and 204m Muslims, and Nigeria 81m Christians and 75m Muslims. It is not coincidental that in these areas tensions and conflict have increased, such as in Nigeria. In China, areas of instability include where followers of the Dalai Llama religious live (Tibet) and in Muslim Uighir areas of north-east China. In Israel, 23% of population (including Jerusalem but excluding the West Bank) is expected to be Muslim in 2030 (2.1 million), a dramatic increase from 14% (0.6 million) in 1990^{vii} and tensions there seem unlikely to decline.

In the Global North, the number of people who do not identify themselves as religious is also increasing. For example, in the UK, this proportion of the population has risen from 12% to 25% in a single decade, according to the 2011 census^{viii} and continues to grow. A Pew Forum study issued in 2015, projecting the future of world religions 35 years forward, to 2050, makes interesting reading for Europeans as Europe is the only region projected to see a decline in its total population between 2010 (745m) and 2050 (700m). Although Christians will continue to be the largest religious group in the region, Europe's Christian population is expected to drop by about 100 million people, falling from 555 million in 2010 to 455 million in 2050. In the same period, Europe's Muslim population is projected to increase from 44m to 70m. The religiously unaffiliated population in Europe is expected to grow by about 16%, from 140 million in 2010 to 160 million in 2050.^{ix}

This brief overview makes clear why we need to understand the influence of religion otherwise, as the 2010 Chicago Council on Global Affairs report states, "it will be much harder, if not impossible, to accomplish important goals – including development objectives, conflict resolution and the promotion of social and human rights."^x Religion cannot be separated from world affairs, nor can logic be liberated from those beliefs that claim to transcend it. Religious motivation does not disappear simply because it is not mentioned.

The contemporary religious landscape is a mosaic of different religions and beliefs, each with multiple strands influencing and being influenced by the society in which it is located. Religion is a both unifier and divider and understanding its role today requires sensitivity to nuance as well as to the specific, often local, context. Religion has seldom operated as a static bloc with set

beliefs but is adaptable, shaped by and shaping its surroundings. Whilst tempting, it is a mistake to depict it as homogeneous. Religion is far more complicated.

ⁱ Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 2.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Economist, 1st November 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21629218-rapid-spread-christianity-forcing-official-rethink-religion-cracks>

^{iv} See 2011 Pew Research Centre Report, 'The Future of the Global Muslim Population', <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>

^v Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 'Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020', 2013 <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>

^{vi} 2011 Pew Research Centre Report, 'The Future of the Global Muslim Population', <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>

^{vii} Statistics provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs identify 24% or 1.8m non-Jews in 2015 including 1.55m Arab Muslims (including Beduin), 125,000 Arab Christians and 120,000 Druze <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/people/pages/society-%20minority%20communities.aspx>

^{viii} Office for National Statistics, 2011

^{ix} See 2015 Pew Research Centre Report, 'The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050' <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

^x The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010, 'Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy' <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/engaging-religious-communities-abroad-new-imperative-us-foreign-policy>