

Is America becoming an atheist nation?

Jerry Newcombe explains recent poll results aren't as dire as they sound

Somewhere Bill Maher is smiling. A new Pew Survey (Oct. 17, 2019) has come out, reporting a decline of Christianity in America and the rise of the "nones." The nones are those who have no religious affiliation.

The report states, "65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular' now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009. Both Protestantism and Catholicism are experiencing losses of population share."



Included in the bad news is the report that people are attending church less frequently: "Over the last decade, the share of Americans who say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month dropped by 7 percentage points, while the share who say they attend religious services less often (if at all) has risen by the same degree."

Pew adds, "[M]ore Americans now say they attend religious services a few times a year or less (54%) than say they attend at least monthly (45%)."

Perhaps most disturbing in the report is that young people are shying away from church attendance or affiliation most of all: "Only about one-in-three millennials say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month. Roughly two-thirds of millennials (64%) attend worship services a few times a year or less often."

Pew notes that the percentage of those who identify themselves as Christians tend to attend church today just as frequently as the same group did in 2009. It's just that the number of "self-described Christians" in America has shrunk since 2009.

So how are we to deal with this report? On the surface, it seems discouraging. Other studies have shown that the more influence church has, the better off society is – even those who don't attend church.

Is it possible that the news of the decline of Christianity in America is not as bad as reported?

Dr. Byron Johnson, a professor at Baylor, who previously taught at the University of Pennsylvania and at Princeton, does not agree with the overall tenor of the reporting on this and similar surveys. Dr.

Johnson wrote a book called, "More God, Less Crime," which documents real and positive differences religion makes in society.

I spoke with him recently on my [radio program](#) about this new Pew survey. He told me, "I think the death of religion is greatly exaggerated in these reports. When you start unpacking what Pew actually finds, it really does tell quite a different story. They say that Christianity is in rapid decline. But what they're not saying is *where* that decline is."

Johnson clarifies, "I don't argue that there is a decline. ... But the decline is not new. It is part of a seven decade trend actually, *and that is in mainline Protestantism.*" [Emphasis added.] He points out that the more liberal mainline Protestant denominations are the ones losing the members and attendees – especially the more liberal they get.

That reminds me of a remark from Dr. D. James Kennedy, a conservative Presbyterian minister, who once said in reference to the historical resurrection of Jesus from the dead: "Take away the resurrection, and Christianity crumbles like a house of cards. Some of the liberal denominations have taken it away from their statements of faith (if they have one), and their churches are withering away – for their congregations instinctively know that there is nothing there but froth, and they will not tolerate being deceived."

Is atheism in America surging today? Johnson observes, "Atheism has held steady at 4 percent for about seven decades, ever since we started measuring it." He notes that the Gallup data have shown atheism in America at 4 percent year after year.

Here's one of the dynamics left off of this kind of survey, in Dr. Johnson's opinion: "[Many] people attend non-denominational churches. If they don't see their church listed in a survey, they'll put down 'none of the above.'" Johnson thinks some of the "nones" that seem to be increasing in number in America actually *do* attend church after all – just a non-denominational one.

Johnson also cautions that often overlooked in data on church affiliation are: Latino churches, African-American churches and Pentecostal churches.

Dr. Byron Johnson concludes, "There may be as many as 500,000 congregations now in the U.S. ... not all of them are full, of course, but there are plenty of them that are growing. And that is not a narrative that much of the media is carrying. But this story here [the new Pew Research article] has legs because it sounds like God is going away."

It would seem Bill Maher's smirk over this point is not warranted after all.

Source: <https://www.wnd.com/2019/10/america-becoming-atheist-nation/>