

The (belated) Decline of Christianity in the United States

Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2019 at 8:35 PM

I've been following the Pew survey on religious identification for several years now, and there are several features of interest in the analysis. Here's the new data;

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-...-at-rapid-pace/>

The most salient question that presents itself is this; *what's bloody taking so long!?* When I was a teenager, and only recently an atheist, Bill Maher made his signature "Mockumentary" *Religulous*. This film was just the right kind of funny to me, at just the right time in my life. (I bought the DVD, and later bought it again on iTunes.)

In addition to being a reliably rewatchable (if somewhat cheap) piece of mind-candy, Maher's film managed to be instructive. For example, I recall being mortified to discover that out of 30-odd developed nations, only Turkey ranked more pious than the United States. Astonishing! The country that crossed the cold hell of space and set boots on another world was little better in this respect than the corrupt sectarian shadow-puppet of the declined Ottoman Empire.

The intervening decade has brought victories as well as defeats for the religious nones in this country, but at last we seem to be putting space between our secular republic and the burgeoning Islamic Autocracy in Asia Minor; 10 years after *Religulous*, Turkey spurned the Enlightenment tradition of the West and banned Darwin from all of its textbooks. Americans, thanks in part to the internet and the "New Atheists", seem finally ready to turn a new page. Only 26% are unaffiliated today, but large concentrations of that number are to be found in the younger generations. With any luck, we'll be sidling ever closer to the secular states of Western Europe as the next decades unfold.

This will be the best chance Epicureanism has had in this country since the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2019 at 8:37 PM

(I'm hoping this doesn't strike an overly "political" tone. If it does, Cassius; you know what to do!)

Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2019 at 9:18 PM

Oh no, no problem with that post at all. I am seeing more and more attacks on standard Christianity from both left and right. The increasing polarization of the country, no matter what side one takes on it, is just exposing the impotence of traditional religion to deal with those divisive issues.

Dealing with religion is such a fundamental part of Epicurean history and Epicurean philosophy that I think it stands in very different status from the standard "political" issues that are the real flashpoints and that get us distracted from the core ideas. "Religion" and the problems that arise from it are about as core Epicurean issue as anything can be.

Post by “Joshua” of October 19, 2019 at 9:32 PM

Thanks, Cassius.

There was a bill put forward in 2017 in the legislature of my home state of Iowa to put Intelligent Design into the science curriculum. This bill was put forward in the State Capitol building in Des Moines, 35 miles south of Iowa State University where the first computer was invented in 1937.

The bill died mercifully in committee.

Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2019 at 9:43 PM

Joshua I personally see those initiatives as kind of like the continuing anti-abortion emphasis in some legislatures -- they are on the losing side of history and there are enough of them around yet to cause trouble, but they are mostly older people (of course there are exceptions) and their numbers are declining. And even on the "right" where they identify themselves, they are losing their grip on their own constituents. I think that a significant result of Epicurean "activism" would add to their further and faster decline, but I do think there's a uniquely Epicurean perspective about WHY they are wrong that avoids muddying the Epicurean message.

Post by “Elayne” of October 19, 2019 at 10:38 PM

I think it takes so long because it's changing generationally. It's not that older adults are leaving the churches so much as they are dying and being replaced, right? That's slow, but I hope will steadily continue!

Post by “Elayne” of October 19, 2019 at 10:40 PM

and I wonder how many middle aged folks will stop going to church when their religious parents die. Possibly a good number-- if so there should be a steeper rise in nonreligious in that age group soon.

Post by “Cassius” of October 20, 2019 at 6:16 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

It's not that older adults are leaving the churches so much as they are dying and being replaced, right?

Or in my observation in the traditional "mainline" churches, they are dying and NOT being replaced (maybe that was a typo, but maybe its a reference to how the churches are trying to reinvent themselves).

But in many cases it worries me that what is following behind to fill the vacuum in social structure is not much better, and in some cases worse, than before. If it is "social media" or Hollywood / New York glitter media culture (not sure what the best word is for it) that is taking the place of the old community churches, then something already rotten is being replaced by something in many cases more rotten still. Maybe one symptom is the rise of meth and other drugs, and the apparent rise (or so I read) in suicide.

Post by “Elayne” of October 20, 2019 at 8:13 AM

I meant the generation is dying and being replaced by the next (nonreligious) generation, not the churches-- unclear antecedent for sure!

Around here, I see the younger crowd doing a lot of a mashup of various new age stuff. In some of the liberal churches, the older crowd actually does view the whole thing metaphorically (like Spong), although that still leaves the bad philosophy in place. But the new age stuff gets taken literally. Crystals and quantum woo, etc. Everything as one consciousness, "you create your own reality", "the law of attraction"... taking the Heisenberg principle that the act of measuring phenomena at the subatomic scale influences the experimental results, so that we can measure position of the particle OR the velocity but not both at the same time, to thinking that means we can basically bend spoons with our minds ☹️. Bad science and bad philosophy all at once!

Post by “Cassius” of October 20, 2019 at 8:46 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

taking the Heisenberg principle that the act of measuring phenomena at the subatomic scale influences the experimental results, so that we can measure position of the particle OR the velocity but not both at the same time, to thinking that means we can basically bend spoons with our minds

Or taking it to mean that everything is so chaotic that NOTHING can be predicted or counted on, so hey, what the heck, let's just give up trying and get drugged out!

Post by “Elayne” of October 20, 2019 at 9:28 AM

Yeah in that case they aren't even citing a remotely relevant principle lol-- they thinking about probabilistic quantum physics, probably, not so much how the act of measurement changes what is being measured. Related but different issues.

Post by “Hiram” of October 20, 2019 at 9:37 AM

I didn't know Turkey banned Darwin!

Now the only three more or less secular countries with Muslim majorities are Tunisia and Bosnia and Albania. Sad.