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# Study reports 'stunning' U.S. Catholic population shift alongside growing secularization

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Hartford, Conn., Mar 10, 2009 / 03:22 am (CNA).- A new study on American religion finds that Catholicism is facing a "stunning" decline in the northeast United States as the population center of U.S. Catholics shifts towards the southwest. Secularism continues to grow in all regions, while mainline Protestant denominations face the most significant population decline.

The study, titled the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), was conducted by the Program on Public Values at Trinity College.

According to the ARIS report, Catholic numbers and percentages rose in many states in the South and West mainly due to immigration.

"Catholics increased their share in California and Texas to about one-third of the adult population and in Florida to over one-fourth. In terms of numbers they gained about 8 million adherents in these three states in the past two decades," the report says.

In the Northeast, Catholic adherents fell from 46 percent to 36 percent of the adult population.

"New England had a net loss of one million Catholics. Big losses in both the number of Catholic adherents and their proportion occurred also in Massachusetts, and in Rhode Island, the nation's most heavily Catholic state where the proportion of Catholics dropped from 62 percent to 46 percent. New York state lost 800,000 Catholics and they dropped from 44% to 37% of the adult population."

"The decline of Catholicism in the Northeast is nothing short of stunning," said Barry Kosmin, a principal investigator for ARIS.

The ARIS study estimates that self-identified Catholics in 2008 numbered about 57.2 million, 25.1 percent of the population. This contrasts to about 50.9 million who made up 24.5 percent of the population in 2001, and 46 million who made up 26.2 percent of the population in 1990.

The percentage of Christians in the U.S. declined from 86.2 percent in the 1990s to 76 percent. ARIS attributes 90 percent of the decline to the non-Catholic segment of the Christian population. The mainline Protestant segment, which includes Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians/Anglicans, and the United Church of Christ, particularly declined. They constitute just 12.9 percent

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of the population, down from 18.7 percent in 1990 and 17.2 percent in 2001.

Baptists, the largest non-Catholic Christian tradition in the U.S., grew by two million but declined as a percentage of the population.

Among self-described Christians, the number of persons who identified only as "Christian," "Evangelical/Born Again" or "non-denominational Christian" grew the most. In 1990 they numbered less than 200,000 people, five percent of the U.S. population in 1990, to over 8 million, 11.8 percent of the U.S. population, in 2008.

Mark Silk, director of the Public Values Program, in a statement said the split between mainline and evangelical Christians is "collapsing."

"A generic form of evangelicalism is emerging as the normative form of non-Catholic Christianity in the United States," he said.

The percentage of Americans claiming no religion jumped from 8.2 percent in 1990 to 14.2 percent in 2001. Their numbers have increased to 15 percent, with Northern New England now the least religious section of the country.

"The 'Nones' are the only group to have grown in every state of the Union," said study investigator Ariela Keysar.

The study reports that only 69.5 percent of Americans say there is "definitely a personal God." About 12.1 percent professed belief in a "higher power" but not a personal God. Only 2.3 percent of respondents denied the existence of God, while about ten percent professed uncertainty or said there was no way to know if God exists.

# 17

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Friday of the Seventh Week of Easter

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Gospel Readings Saint Homily

### Gospel of the Day

John 21,15-19



Gospel	Date
• John 21,15-19	05/17/13
• John 17,20-26	05/16/13
• John 17,11b-19	05/15/13

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**amronb** · 2 months ago  
I consider it evolutionary progress that more people don't need an intermediary between themselves and God. The only way the Catholic church keeps growing is to demonize birth control in the third world, condemning millions of desperate women to bear large numbers of children. If you support Catholicism, this is the abominable practice you are propping up.

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**Don** · 2 years ago  
As an ex-Catholic, I believe that a religion based on a primitive mythology will have little staying power as the population becomes more educated and more apt to think through intellectual challenges without reverting to "faith". Consequently, Catholicism and most other faith-based societies will more and more become the province of the less educated.

1 Reply Share

**Copticweb** → **Don** · 8 months ago  
Scientology is ----> this way my friend.  
How many times did Jesus say "you of little faith..."? Yet you question the validity of

"faith" in the catholic church? Without faith, how are you different from an artificial intelligence? Hec even outside the context of religion, men live everyday with faith in all aspects of their daily lives.

You speak of education as if it is the opposite of faith, and yet only an "uneducated" person would deny the significance of the catholic school system not only in the US but around the world. Millions of students attend catholic schools every year. Some of the best schools in the country are catholic schools. Some of the most influential schools in the poorest areas in the US are catholic schools. There is ABSOLUTELY no hurdles to "faith" that results from education.

I feel that you are merely rationalizing your separation from the faith and contributing it to being more "enlightened" or educated, when in fact it is the complete opposite.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Sarcastic Bob → Don · 10 months ago

I agree with Don, afterall Einstein believed in God and look how stupid he was.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Tom → Don · a year ago

A very ignorant comment.

^ | v Reply Share ›



GFM · 2 years ago

American Christianity in general, except for Catholicism, has been generic for a long, long time. The loss of the Northeast has to do especially with some weak episcopal appointments in the last 25 years. Just look where the leadership in the US Bishop Conference resides in this country: Chaput in Denver, Bruskewitz in Lincoln, Myers in Neward (he used to be in Peoria), Burke was in St. Louis (now in the Apostolic Signatura), Carlson Archbishop elect in St. Louis. Rigali (who used to be in St. Louis) is now in Pittsburgh. The midwest and parts of the West may be where Church leadership will continue to flourish.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Mike · 2 years ago

What is Truth? Why are Catholic men not challenged? Why do people like Pelosi and Biden and all the rest of the abortion supporting catholics not held to account for their actions. If we want to see a growth in the church then we should start hearing more of the truth and challenge to walk our talk. We so desperately need a new St. Ambrose thats willing to confront instead of pacifying

1 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Sick of Society · 2 years ago

We are a self-absorbed, lazy, fat, and weak people. We kowtow to money and our employers, but scoff at any authrity regarding our soul. We are a rotten people and deserve the worst punishment God can give AS WE HAVE KICKED HIM OUT OF OUR LIVES, OUR COUNTRY, EVERYEHERE

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Charlene · 2 years ago

Jamika, I would like to blame it on faulty or biased polling, but, it appears that the constant barrage of moral relativism, secularism and downright antagonism of the media and entertainment industry toward religion is having the intended effect. The United States is headed the way of Europe in becoming a predominately secular culture. The empty churches on the other side of the Atlantic tell the real tale.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Cecilia · 2 years ago

I don't think anyone can dismiss (as easily as Jamika of England would like to) the data in

— this study, regardless of the number of participants. 54% of U.S. Catholics just voted into office the most pro-death, anti-Christian values president the U.S. has ever had. This is not something to ignore. It is something to combat with every Catholic/Christian bone in one's body. I regularly hear people of faith (believers) make statements of belief that are completely insupportable based on demonstrable evidence. This ought to be of great concern to anyone who values objective truth and its promulgation, both of which ought to lead to greater numbers of truly converted believers, not to the opposite, no matter where in the U.S. they live.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Mary · 2 years ago

For some this finding is stunning. This finding can be seen as a mere change in demographics but it is much more.

The Church has underestimated the damage done thru the recent scandals and the Church authority protecting offenders. I understand and agree that most incidents occurred when understanding of this sickness was in its infancy. But when we learned the scope of this scandal many faithful in the pews are crushed by the actions of the Church. This scandal has deeply, deeply shaken the trust and faithfulness in our souls.

Jesus gave the keys to St. Peter, Jesus is in the Church. If we cannot trust the Church to follow Christ, who can we trust? Why should we stay with the Church? No one turned over the tables of the moneychangers. Has the Church turned into a mere human "organization"?

see more

1 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Copticweb → Mary · 8 months ago

Over the history of the Catholic Church, there has been many scandals, periods of injustice, etc.. some of which would make this recent scandal very trivial (and they didn't have the anti-Catholic media we have today). Yet, there were always 2 kinds of people in the Church; those like Luther who chose to separate, and others like many of our saints and clergy who chose to stay and make a difference in the Church. Our history is full of these individuals that stood against evil and injustice within the Church, and have done so while remaining in the faith. The question is, which kind are you. It is not my place to tell anyone how to live, but imagine if Christ took the same stance? We are all sinners, and how often do we do or say things that would greatly offend our Lord? Should He also turn his back on us? Should He also say, I want nothing to do with them and separate from us?

You speak of St. Peter, the person Jesus entrusted his Church to, the person Jesus named the Rock, the foundation.....the same Person who denounced his Lord, his savior, his Christ, THREE times.

Even as a Catholic, you need to put your trust in Christ, and not individual inside or outside of the Church. This scandal will NOT bring down our Church, because not even "the gates of hell shall prevail against it"(Mat 16:18). The Church can be damaged, or injured, but I have faith that our Lord will always protect it, as he promised.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Jamika · 2 years ago

I just did some quick research and it turns out that there were 54,461 adult participants, so the percentages in this study relate only to these people.

Furthermore, the lead investigator, Barry Kosmin, seems to be quite the secularist. It is therefore in his interest to ask questions such as to get a response that would support the desired result.

In short, I wouldn't pay much attention to any survey. Sure, church attendances may be falling but this is natural, due to the increasing dominance of government.

Government and control are contrary to religion and freedom. A perfect example is the quasi-totalitarian British government and its corresponding atheist population.

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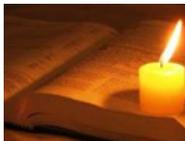
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