

Fewer Religious, but More Faithful?

By [Chuck Missler](#)

The Council of Europe recently did a study on freedom of expression in Europe, and decided that leftover blasphemy laws in some countries should get kicked out the door. In England, the majority of Her Majesty's citizens deny that God created the world less than 10,000 years ago. And in America, the number of people with "no religion" are up in number. Yet, despite the general rise in godlessness, God always keeps a remnant for Himself.

Malta: Malta's Board of Film and Stage Classification recently decided to ban the play *Stitching* because it included blasphemy (among other reasons) making this island nation the focus of criticism for its anti-blasphemy laws.

Christianity has been historically important to this Mediterranean island, where Paul shipwrecked on his way to Rome. This is the island where a viper bit Paul without harming him, and where Paul's prayer healed the father of Publius, the island's chief. Today, Malta's economy is greatly aided by tourism that promotes Paul's famous landing there.

Yet, the Council of Europe frowned on the laws that still criminalize "public vilification" of religion (especially Roman Catholicism) in the island nation. After a two-year study, the CoE decided that this and the few remaining such laws across Europe should be abolished. While few countries still outlaw blasphemy, there are a number that make "religious insult" illegal. The CoE argued that it was "neither necessary nor desirable to create an offence of religious insult, that is insult to religious feelings, without the element of incitement to hatred as an essential component."

While freedom of expression is certainly vital in any healthy country, and no

Christian should desire a return to the Inquisition, Europe has clearly been losing its respect for religion in general and Christianity in particular. It's not a new trend.

England: The disbelief found in the people of England, who depend on God to save their Queen, is a bit more surprising. Across England and Scotland, more than one third of those recently surveyed said they believed that evolution has removed the need for God. That percentage rose to 44 percent in eastern England. On average, another third of Britons said they believed that God used evolution as part of His plan, but this view lost out to the disbelievers everywhere but Wales.

Still, between 20 and 30 percent of Britons support either Creationism or Intelligent Design theories. Northern Ireland has the highest percentage, with Creationism/ID believers combining to make up 41 percent of the population.

While it seems dismal that more than one third of Britons believe God is unnecessary, that still means that the majority still do believe God is responsible for life on earth. Interestingly enough, the citizens of London are more prone toward Creationism than in other parts of the country. That might be a surprise, but there could be a good reason for it; evangelism.

"Whereas the national average is 17% who believe that human beings were created by God in the last 10,000 years ... in London, that figure is 20%. That may well be due to the growth of Pentecostal churches in London, which are growing at an extraordinary rate," said Paul Woolley, director of Theos, the think-tank that ran the survey.

The United States: America has remained solidly more religion-friendly than Europe in recent years. Yet, even in the US, fewer people consider themselves

religious. According to a survey of more than 54,000 people done by Trinity College in Hartford, Conn, a full 15 percent of the US population claims to have "no religion" now. In Vermont, that number rises to 34 percent. The number of self-described Christians is also down to 76 percent from 86 percent in 1990.

People are also pulling away from mainline denominations. Those who connect themselves to mainline Protestant denominations, like the Lutheran or Methodist churches, have dropped to 13 percent of the population from 19 percent in 1990. At the same time, those who consider themselves "nondenominational" or "born-again" or "evangelical" have risen sharply. Forty-four percent of America's 77 million Christian adults consider themselves evangelical or born-again.

Whether the departure from mainline denominations is good or bad for American Christianity is up for debate. It may be that Christians are getting mushy and just want to do their own thing in the name of Christ. On the other hand, as Jesus said, you cannot put new wine into old wineskins. As too many mainline denominations grow staid and dusty, the life of Christianity keeps sprouting up in new ways, from nondenominational "Bible" churches to home churches. It may be that Christianity has not grown weaker in America, but that it simply has changed venues.

It may also be that as Christianity becomes less respected in American culture, there are fewer cases of "My parents are Christians, so I must be one too" and a form of pruning has been taking place. Fewer Americans may call themselves Christians, but of those who do, more may truly be dedicated to serving Jesus Christ according to the Word of God.

Whichever the case, too few people in the West, including America, know the Bible and what it teaches about salvation and knowing God. Too many wander through their lives, generally believing in God, but having no clue about the

passion He has for them, or the sacrifice He made for them. We cannot assume anymore that everybody we meet knows who Jesus Christ is or what he did for us.

Let's make sure we keep loving our friends and neighbors in word and deed and, in fearless humility, help them know about the hope they can have in the living Son of God. While people may be rejecting formal religion, they still need something to feed their hungry spirits. The best thing we can offer them is the Bread of Life.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. ~ 1 Peter 3:15