

The religious politician, the declining superpower and the powerless church

By Garry W. Johnson
MOUNTAIN REVIEW Staff

Webster's dictionary defines religion as the service and worship of God or the supernatural. In order for one to be "religious," they must acknowledge something outside of the natural realm. Many scholars and scientists dismiss religion as primitive man's attempt to explain the world and his existence in it. Yet with all the advancements in technology and science, the religious still overwhelmingly outnumber the secular worldwide and throughout the world's current superpower nation.

Within the United States there is a growing divide over the country's direction, as evidenced by our most recent elections. Increasingly politicians are appealing to the religious sentiments of voters, and polls like the Baylor Religious Survey (page 20) help them to exploit those feelings. Studies of this nature also illustrate a growing stretch as to what passes for religion and our country's lack of biblical knowledge and/or understanding.

Reporting for *USA Today*, Cathy Lynn Grossman quotes Baylor sociologist Paul Froese in relaying that "the survey finds the stereotype that conservatives are religious and liberals are secular is 'simply not true. Political liberals and conservatives are both religious. They just have different religious views'" (September 12, 2006). Different views indeed. But does this outward profession of religion equate to godly conduct? It seems half our country's politicians proudly set policy reflecting unbiblical and degenerate beliefs, and the other half tout "family values" while personally committing shamefully

immoral acts. How did our government become this way, and what does our current situation portend for the future?

THE DOWNSIDE OF DEMOCRACY

The United States has a relatively short history as a nation, this being the 231st year since its founding. From its inception our country was an altogether new experiment on the world scene—a nation for the people, ruled by the people, yet under God.

Recently there has been a movement in higher education to minimize the part religion—Christianity in particular—played in the establishing of this country. It is true that our founding fathers had diverse views on faith, yet they overwhelmingly recognized the hand of Providence in the establishing and sustaining of the young nation.

The early Americans were a deeply religious people. Although our nation had its share of brothels and womanizers (like any other nation of that period), those lewd and immoral practices were not nearly as prevalent or mainstream as they are today. Early Americans took biblical instruction more literally than modern churchgoers do. They had a character and code of ethics derived from *applying* biblical instruction. It was for these moral Americans that our government was designed. Our second U.S. President, John Adams, put it this way, "Our Constitution was made *only* for a moral and religious people. It is *wholly inadequate* to the government of any other" (emphases mine throughout). [You may also note that in those days "moral" and "religious" were nearly synonymous terms.]

Our Constitution established a democratic government. By definition a democracy is a "government by the

people; *esp.*: rule of the majority" (*Webster's*). In essence a democratic government is representative of its citizens—our politicians reflect the attitudes and morals of the people they govern. President George Washington understood this form of government and how it would work. In his first Inaugural Address on April 30, 1789, he said, "The foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality." As private morality declines, national policy suffers. An ancient king inspired by the Spirit of God once said, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

THE REPROACH OF A NATION

As the character and values of the American people continue to decline, so will the quality and integrity of American leaders. "Somehow we Americans have let righteous conduct slip through our fingers, particularly in the recent decades since the end of World War II," writes John Ross Schroeder for *The Good News* magazine. "Our pioneer ancestors in America wouldn't understand our current behavior as a nation. Most of them would be appalled by our lack of morals. They would say we have turned our backs on God. *And they would be right.*" (January-February 2007).

In the aftermath of 9/11, it seemed our country might awaken spiritually to a new direction. Memorial services from the National Cathedral, Yankee Stadium and the Pentagon sparked feelings of patriotism and religious platitudes, but no call for *national repentance*.

Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for People and the Press remarked, "Religion was in the air after September 11, in a way that hadn't been the case for a long time and may not be the case for a long time in the future." How right he was. Religious convictions in this country ebb and flow like the tide. By March 2002, Pew was reporting 52% of Americans thought religion's effect was in decline, though they still considered religion important. Of those polled, two-thirds believed the "terrorist attacks were the result of too little religion in the world rather than too much" (*San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 22, 2002).

TOO LITTLE RELIGION?

If the vast majority of this world's religious views were not false, this might be the case. Most religions obtained their foundation in the imagination, speculation and reasoning of certain human beings—with no basis in truth. The god (or gods) they produced were simply products of the human mind, much like what has become of mainstream Christianity in America. One of the articles *USA Today* published on the Baylor survey was titled, "*Americans define faith their way.*"

"More than three-fourths of Americans call the nation's religious diversity a source of strength; fewer than a third think it makes it harder to keep the country united. ... Meanwhile, more than three in four Americans believe all religions have at least some elements of truth—even though few say they know much about religions other than their own. And nearly 70% think spiritual experiences are the most important part of religion. 'If one's religion is more about individual identity than doctrine or creed, it's a lot easier to be tolerant,' says Egon Mayer, a sociologist at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Gallup says that the high degree of religious tolerance reflects, in part, 'not only a lack of knowledge of other religions but an ignorance of one's own faith.' In some polls, he says, 'you have Christians saying, 'Yes, Jesus is the only way' and also, 'Yes, there are many paths to God.' It's not that Americans don't believe anything; they believe everything'" (*U.S. News & World Report*, May 6, 2002).

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

From the first day man walked the earth, the Eternal God began to reveal to him His will. Almost as early, man's rebellion began. The devil's success was in his ability to twist God's revelation to man—to add a little error to the truth. Today he has all but mastered this technique and passed off many of his deceptions under the guise of religion.

Worldwide adherents to the Muslim faith outnumber Roman Catholics by more than 161 million. There are almost three times as many Catholics as there are Protestants, and Hindus outnumber Christian Orthodox, Anglicans and Independents combined

(*The World Almanac*, 2005). If, as many Christian organizations claim, God is trying to "save the world" through their churches, why such a poor ratio?

True Christianity, indeed, true religion is a *way of life*. Jesus Christ walked this earth for three and a half years teaching and clarifying God's expectations for mankind. True religion had become obscured by the traditions of men, and people clung blindly to the letter of the law without understanding its spiritual purpose and intent. Christ struck down their misconceptions and raised God's Law to a spiritual level. His perfect and sinless life was the model for all of His Apostles and all true Christians today. As John tells us in his first epistle, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (Ch. 2, verse 6).

Compare your church to the one described in the book of Acts. Compare your religious customs and observances to those *actually practiced* by God's True Church in the pages of your Bible. If you can see the difference, then God may be calling you into a more personal and intimate relationship with Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Please request your free booklets, *Restoring Apostolic Christianity* and *The Ten Commandments*, by writing to the Living Church of God, P.O. Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010. You may also want to request a subscription to *Tomorrow's World* magazine and/or enroll in their *24 Lesson Bible Study Course*, both are also absolutely free. ☞

How images of God affect politics

The Baylor study finds that a person's image of God tells more about his or her social, moral and political views than religious denomination or other familiar measures.

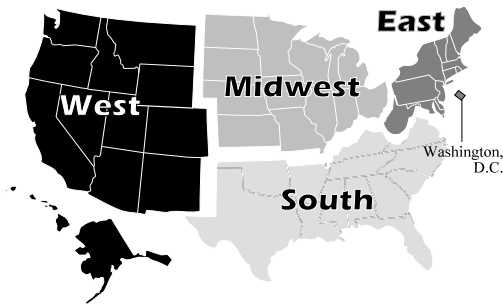
| | Authoritarian | Benevolent | Critical | Distant | Total |
|---|---------------|------------|----------|---------|--------------|
| Supporting these policies is always wrong | | | | | (Percentage) |
| Gay marriage | 80.6 | 65.8 | 54.8 | 30.7 | 57.0 |
| Research on embryonic stem cells | 38.5 | 22.7 | 13.2 | 3.8 | 20.3 |
| War | 16.4 | 18.4 | 23.1 | 20.2 | 19.2 |
| Abortion is always wrong even if... | | | | | |
| The baby has/may have a serious defect | 48.1 | 34.6 | 13.8 | 7.4 | 27.1 |
| The women's health is in danger | 24.7 | 19.5 | 6.9 | 3.1 | 14.1 |
| The pregnancy is the result of rape | 41.5 | 31.7 | 12.6 | 4.6 | 23.5 |
| The family cannot afford the child | 80.8 | 69.2 | 41.7 | 22.9 | 54.1 |
| The woman does not want the child | 81.3 | 67.5 | 42.2 | 26.2 | 55.2 |
| The federal government should ... | | | | | |
| Advocate Christian values | 74.5 | 54.8 | 36.5 | 21.1 | 45.6 |
| Fund faith-based organizations | 47.2 | 24.6 | 32.3 | 12.7 | 28.9 |
| Abolish the death penalty | 12.1 | 17.3 | 14.2 | 27.3 | 18.4 |
| Distribute wealth more evenly | 56.8 | 53.2 | 58.7 | 62.5 | 57.8 |
| Regulate businesses more closely | 60.3 | 63.5 | 70.6 | 68.7 | 65.1 |
| Do more to protect the environment | 75.9 | 81.2 | 89.0 | 87.2 | 82.9 |
| Expand its authority to fight terrorism | 76.2 | 62.7 | 64.0 | 40.4 | 59.5 |
| Allow prayer in public schools | 90.9 | 79.0 | 69.4 | 46.5 | 69.9 |
| God favors the United States in world affairs | | | | | |
| Agree | 32.1 | 22.0 | 12.4 | 6.9 | 18.6 |

Source: Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University survey of 1,721 Americans, fall 2005; margin of error +/- 4 percentage points

Top 10 religion stories of 2006

The top ten religious stories of 2006 as decided by the Religion Newswriters Association's poll:

1. Periodicals in Denmark and a few other European nations publish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad which spark deadly violence.
2. By quoting an ancient text linking Islam and violence, Pope Benedict XVI angers Muslims.
3. Leaders of the Episcopal church elect a female presiding bishop who favors rites to bless same-sex unions and supports the consecration of a sexually active gay bishop.
4. President of the National Association of Evangelicals, Ted Haggard, resigns from his office and is dismissed as pastor of the New Life Church in Colorado Springs after allegations of gay sex and drug use.
5. Key election defeats are suffered by candidates backed by the Religious Right, while Democrats take steps to reach out to churchgoers, especially Catholics.
6. As sectarian conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims increase, religious voices grow louder for peace in Iraq.
7. The murder of five Amish girls in a schoolhouse in Bart Township, Pa., focuses world-wide attention on Amish beliefs about grace and forgiveness.
8. (tie) The release of *The Da Vinci Code* movie sparks new interest in Dan Brown's novel, which claims Christianity is a fraud.
8. (tie) During midterm elections same-sex marriage bans pass in seven of eight state. The first state to defeat a ban is Arizona.
10. President Bush pleases religious conservatives and disappoints liberals by vetoing a bill calling for expanded stem-cell research.



Looking at religious affiliations across the USA

Baylor sociologists broke down religious affiliation by region, gender, race and age:

Some college or more
High school or less

| | (Percentage) | | | | | Gender | | Age | | | | Education | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|---------|-------|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | West | Midwest | South | East | Total | Male | Female | White | Black | 18-30 | 31-44 | 45-64 | 65+ | High school or less | Some college or more |
| Black Protestant | 1.3 | 5.6 | 7.2 | 5 | 5 | 2.8 | 6.9 | 0 | 62.5 | 3.8 | 5.4 | 3.9 | 7.3 | 5 | 3 |
| Evangelical Protestant | 31.7 | 33.7 | 50.3 | 13.1 | 33.6 | 30 | 36.7 | 35.4 | 9.5 | 39 | 34.9 | 31.3 | 33.1 | 45.4 | 23.5 |
| Mainline Protestant | 17.7 | 26 | 19.3 | 26 | 22.1 | 22.1 | 22.1 | 24.1 | 7.7 | 20.1 | 17.6 | 22.5 | 28.1 | 18 | 29 |
| Catholic | 19.2 | 22.1 | 11.5 | 35.1 | 21.2 | 23.8 | 18.9 | 22.8 | 5 | 10.1 | 23 | 23.7 | 19.9 | 22 | 21.4 |
| Jewish | 2.2 | 1.4 | 1.9 | 4.7 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 2.6 | 3.7 | 2.7 | 1.9 | 2.7 | 2.9 | 2.3 | 3.6 |
| Other | 10.3 | 3 | 2.7 | 4.6 | 4.9 | 6 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 6 | 5.7 | 5.8 | 4.8 | 3.5 | 2.1 | 6.7 |
| Unaffiliated | 17.6 | 8.3 | 7.1 | 11.6 | 10.8 | 12.8 | 9 | 10.8 | 5.7 | 18.6 | 11.4 | 11.1 | 5.4 | 5.2 | 12.8 |

Baylor survey finds: Americans worship four gods

By Garry W. Johnson
MOUNTAIN REVIEW Staff

In September Baylor University released preliminary findings from a survey of 1,721 Americans conducted by Gallup that highlights religious confusion in a whole new way.

The study, by far the most comprehensive national religion survey to date, was written and analyzed by sociologists from Baylor University's Institute for Studies on Religion, in Waco, Texas. The survey asked 77 questions with nearly 400 answer choices and found that Americans have widely divergent understandings of God.

Baylor's researchers avoided the more familiar divisions of denominational brands and doctrinal deviations and focused on the four dominate views of God that emerged from the study. As dubbed by the researchers, these 'four gods' are classified as: Authoritarian, Benevolent, Critical and Distant.

THE FOUR GODS OF AMERICA

Of the 91.8% of Americans that said they believe in God, a higher power or a cosmic force, 31.4% acknowledge the Authoritarian god (43.3% in the South). This god is angry at humanity's sins and engaged in every creature's life and world affairs. He is ready to throw the thunderbolt of judgement down on "the unfaithful or ungodly," says Baylor's Christopher Bader.

He describes these believers as "religiously and politically conservative people, most often black Protestants and white Evangelicals." He says they are the most inclined to say that abortion is always wrong (23.4% vs. 12.2% overall) and that God favors the USA in world affairs (32.1% vs. 18.6% overall).

Those that acknowledge the Benevolent god came in at 23% (28.8% in

the Midwest) and believe that God still sets absolute standards for mankind in the Bible. This group draws more from mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews, says Sociologist Paul Froese. He notes that this group is inclined (68.1%) to say caring for the sick and needy ranks highest on the list of what it means to be a good person.

The next group of believers claim a Critical god, 16% overall and 21.2% in the East. They see God as having a judgmental eye on the world, but not ever intervening to punish or to comfort. Bader says, "This group is more paradoxical. They have very traditional beliefs, picturing God as the

classic bearded old man on high. Yet they're less inclined to go to church or affiliate seriously with religious groups. They are less inclined to see God as active in the world." These people are also significantly less inclined to draw absolute moral lines on hot-button issues such as abortion, gay marriage or embryonic stem cell research; only 54.7% of this group says gay marriage is always wrong, compared with 80.6% of the Authoritarian group, 65.8% of the Benevolent group and 57% of the overall sample.

The Distant god is "no bearded old man in the sky raining down his opinions on us," says Bader. Overall, 24.4% saw God this way (30.3% in the West)—as a cosmic force that launched the world, then left it spinning on its own. This has strongest

appeal for Catholics, mainline Protestants and Jews, according to Bader. It is also popular among "moral relativist," those least likely to say any moral choice is always wrong, and among those who do not attend church. Of this group, only 3.8% believe embryonic stem cell research is always wrong, compared with 38.5% of the Authoritarians, 22.7% of the Benevolents and 13.2% of Criticals.

HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

On behalf of Baylor University, the

outlined in their research are not mutually exclusive, nor do they include the 5.2% of Americans who say they are atheists (the remaining 3% were not sure or did not answer).

Over the next two years Baylor's researchers will continue reviewing their findings and releasing reports on subtopics. In the fall of 2007 they intend to repeat the core questions to track trends. The John Templeton Foundation is funding the project.

RELIGION SALES

Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* was viewed by 44.3% of those polled; Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code* (the best selling book of 2004 and 2006) was

read by 28.5%. Rick Warren's handbook, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, found its way into the hands of 25% of all U.S. women and 19% overall. Another 19% have read at least one of the novels in the apocalyptic fiction series, *Left Behind*. More than one in 10 of those surveyed say they spent \$50 or more in the past month on items such as religious books, music and jewelry.

WHO MAKES THE CUT?

The Baylor Religion Survey finds that Americans are divided over who is eligible for salvation, the majority (58.3%) agreeing with the statement "many religions lead to salvation." Sociologist Kevin Dougherty says, "People clearly are not holding an exclusivist view." The survey found however, 61% of Evangelical Protes-

tants and 46.4% of black Protestants say only Christians will "get into heaven." By contrast, the majority of Catholics (66.9%) say all or most non-Christians will. Overall, most people believe their family (75.3%) and friends (69.3%) will be saved. The survey did not ask people if they expect to receive salvation themselves.

Phyllis Tickle, author of books on religion in American life, sees problems in Baylor's survey because its questions rely on terms such as "heaven" and "salvation" in a multi-faith society. "Heaven is not the only point," she says. "We may not share the same idea of where a religious path leads."

CONFUSION ABOUNDS

Paranormal beliefs are shared by millions of Americans, particularly women, the research found. Of those surveyed 52% overall say they believe in prophetic dreams. Four in 10 agree that places can be haunted and that ancient advanced civilizations such as Atlantis once existed.

When asked about alternative medical treatment, the response was so strong that Bader suspects the question's intent was not clear. "We asked whether 'Some alternative treatments are at least as effective as traditional medicine'" and 74.5% said yes. "We were thinking of crystals, aromatherapy... But people may have read the question to mean acupuncture, vitamins or herbs."

The survey found close to 25% use the Internet or books to research the prophecies of 16th-century astrologer Nostradamus, ghost, yoga, astrology and UFO's. ☺

Baylor is a Baptist-affiliated university and is the information source for the charts on this page.

For more on the Baylor Survey and other religious statistics, please read the editorial article on page 21.

Paranormal beliefs popular in the U.S.

People who agree/strongly agree by gender: ■=Women □=Men

| | | |
|---|------|------|
| Dreams can sometimes foretell the future or reveal hidden truths. | 58.9 | 49.9 |
| Some alternative treatments are at least as effective as traditional medicine. | 77.8 | 78.5 |
| Ancient advanced civilizations such as Atlantis once existed. | 44.9 | 41.8 |
| Places can be haunted. | 45.5 | 32.2 |
| It is possible to influence the world through the mind alone. | 31.0 | 28.3 |
| Some UFO's are probably spaceships from other worlds. | 23.2 | 29.1 |
| It is possible to communicate with the dead. | 27.2 | 14.0 |
| Creatures such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster will be discovered by science. | 19.8 | 17.6 |
| Astrologers, palm readers, tarot card readers, fortunetellers, psychics can foresee the future. | 18.2 | 8.0 |
| Astrology affects one's life and personality. | 19.7 | 10.1 |

Gallup Organization contacted 3,702 potential respondents and asked them to complete a 16-page booklet on *The Values and Beliefs of the American Public—A National Study*. The English-only survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with any of 10 descriptions of their "personal understanding of what God is like," including phrases such as "angered by my sins" or "removed from worldly affairs." When asked to describe God they could check off 16 adjectives, including words such as "absolute," "wrathful," "forgiving," "friendly" or "distant." More than 46% of the surveys were completed and returned and are a statistically representative sampling of the USA by age, gender and race.

Baylor's four visions of God as

How Americans see God

Americans' images of God vary by geography, gender and race:

Some college or more
High school or less

| | (Percentage) | | | | | Gender | | Age | | | | Education | | | |
|---------------|--------------|---------|-------|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | West | Midwest | South | East | Total | Male | Female | White | Black | 18-30 | 31-44 | 45-64 | 65+ | High school or less | Some college or more |
| Authoritarian | 20.8 | 32.5 | 43.5 | 25.2 | 31.4 | 28.9 | 33.6 | 29.6 | 52.8 | 40.2 | 33.3 | 27.4 | 28.8 | 40.4 | 23.9 |
| Benevolent | 27.4 | 28.8 | 16.6 | 19.9 | 23.0 | 15.4 | 30.4 | 24.5 | 13.5 | 13.4 | 20.9 | 27.2 | 25.6 | 24.0 | 22.2 |
| Critical | 13.6 | 13.8 | 15.9 | 21.2 | 16.0 | 19.9 | 12.3 | 15.3 | 30.3 | 14.9 | 13.9 | 16.0 | 20.0 | 18.6 | 14.7 |
| Distant | 30.3 | 21.2 | 21.5 | 25.8 | 24.4 | 28.0 | 21.0 | 25.1 | 3.4 | 25.3 | 26.4 | 24.3 | 21.4 | 14.7 | 32.5 |
| Atheist | 7.9 | 3.7 | 2.6 | 7.5 | 5.2 | 7.8 | 2.7 | 5.4 | 0.0 | 6.2 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 4.2 | 2.2 | 6.7 |

