

Anybody Got a Golden Crowbar?

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 09 October 2012 08:11

There's nothing like a new survey on religion in America to boost hope on the one hand, then turn right around and immediately crush it in another.

For example, the number of people who express no affiliation with religion is now at its highest point, at almost 20%, or one in five Americans. That figure's up 8% in just the last five years.

Before you head off to your coven or place of crystal meditation to celebrate the increase in those suddenly swooning to their senses, you should also know that 68% of the unaffiliated say they still believe in God.

Such is the history of the species: *Two sluggish, uncertain slumps forward, and one dazed, aimless bit of meandering back.*

The Pew Center / PBS survey offered more than a dozen selections from which respondents could choose to describe themselves, including "Protestant," "Catholic," along with "something else" and "nothing in particular."

If there were choices for "Nah -- religion gives God a bad name," or "Gave that up for Lent," or even, "Not really into superstition and myths, thanks," they were not disclosed.

In addition, no mention was made of the survey offering choices that reflected respondent's desired affiliations with manufacturers of really hot computer equipment or cars, off-center lottery millionaires, foaming talk show hosts, deeply troubled celebs of the moment, comic book heroes, the latest auto-tune song lip-synch "talent," nor was any Kardashian or Hollywood deity(ies) listed or named.

Still, most of the 46 million "nones" have a number of things in common, including the fact they are not looking to join a replacement religion. They have no interest in test-driving a new one. / *applaud them, should that even matter.*

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And although the "none, thank you" trend has continued across all segments of the population, and in all regions of the country, and across most income ranges, it is people under 30 who are more likely to say they are not associated with a religion.

The "nones" also skew in a couple of other common directions: They are far more likely to be socially liberal, plus, about 68% lean toward the Democratic Party.

It is an interesting moment politically, as the "nones" now make up the largest Democratic "faith constituency," so to say, with black Protestants at 16% and white Protestants at 14%. By comparison, white evangelicals make up 34% of the Republican base -- had there been any doubt.

However, I would urge relative calm, as we still have no definitive cause yet uncovered, to this very day, to satisfactorily explain leisure suits, matching white plastic belts and shoes, or very big hair.

With any luck, studies are still continuing into discovering triggers to explain donations to any obvious-but-unprovable racket involving sequin-jacketed, heavily-perspiring, maniacally-pacing, microphone-clutching, wildly-gesticulating, billionaire preachers on teevee whom you *know* already have three personal executive jets and five vacation homes on four continents.

Meanwhile: Study analysts say the data displays the stark realities of political and religious polarization that have been merging in recent decades.

A *Washington Post* article notes, "Congregations used to be a blend of political affiliations, but that's generally not the case anymore. Sociologists have shown that Americans are more likely to pick their place of worship by their politics, not vice versa."

That polarization is mostly a reaction to the religious right wing, the article notes, and is expected to continue with younger generations.

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These may be the first surface ripples of major changes in American life, with possibilities of worshipping your political party directly, rather than aiming support through a middleman, or other skimming entity, such as a religious group.

Or, there may be opportunities for Party-branded houses of religious, or non-religious, worship. Although, it is probable that attendance will be off at the Republican House of Hemp, but business booming at the GOP outlet of Thor's War Retreat.

(Check with your accountants and lawyers, and especially with your mental health professional, to see if Party Worship is right for you.)

Already we have seen American businesses attempting to rake in money and boost profit via superficial religious trickery and trafficking, such as the recent "Buy a Chicken Sandwich for God" day, or whatever, at that one feather-headed chicken joint.

Maybe that's the way it'll be, someday, with social conversations becoming much more involved on minor decisions, like dining out with friends, owing to proprietary hyper-fracturing of business models.

"OK, good -- we'll go to that pulled-tofu barbecue place that has the great macaroni-and-goat-cheese dish, One Hand Clapping," a default group leader might sum up after checking in with the group. "But, are we doing the Buddhist one tonight, or did someone want to go to that new Shinto location they've got up across from Outback?"

Decisions for amusement are suddenly scattered across Hindu multiplexes and Jesuit multi-screen movie houses, Wolverine or Mormon bowling alleys, Taoist or Rastafari amusement parks, or catching a concert at a Confucianist or Wood Sprite arena.

If you think separation of church and state were entertaining to try and maintain, and that keeping secular politics from cascading into tax-free religious groups for automatic audience

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dispersion was a true delight, then you're going to *love* an America where every single phase of life has a mandatory religious or cultish cant to it in some way or other.

Flying to Phoenix? Very good -- will that be the 1:22 p.m. Orthodox flight on Wednesday... the 4:32 a.m. Pan-Spiritual on Thursday... the 10:40 a.m. Animist on Friday... the 2:19 a.m. Gnostic on Sunday... the 11:37 Bhakti on Saturday... the 3:39 a.m. Pastafarian, which is a red-eye on Tuesday... the 7:28 p.m. Daughters of Zeus on Wednesday.... the 6:09 a.m. Order of the Contemplated Navel... the 9:41 p.m. People and Things Named Jack Society...

But, you know...

We could probably make this a whole lot easier on ourselves, and do what our parents and grandparents did: They kept religion to themselves. They practiced as they wished. They did not insist everyone else in the nation follow their beliefs, *or else*. They did not browbeat people with their religion. They did not try to slip their religious beliefs into legislation or civic enforcement.

Religion was just not anyone's else business in the whole wide world, except their own. It was a private matter, and not part of the common discourse. Religion had no role to play in the secular world.

Unless you have a magic wand, a Gordian Knot-cutter, a multi-faceted wisdom enhancer, a talking unicorn, a Chalice of Forecasting, the seven truth snakes of Xerxes, or a golden crowbar personally handed you by your deity, then your choice of religion might be best kept to yourself.

It would certainly simplify things. It might even help us get along, help us get somewhere as human beings, maybe even stop having wars.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/one-in-five-americans-reports-no-religious-affiliation-study-says/2012/10/08/a7599664-11c8-11e2-855a-c9ee6c045478_story.html?hpid=z1

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<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/1-5-religious-affiliation-survey-article-1.1178217>