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### Society's Impact on Religious Practice in the United States

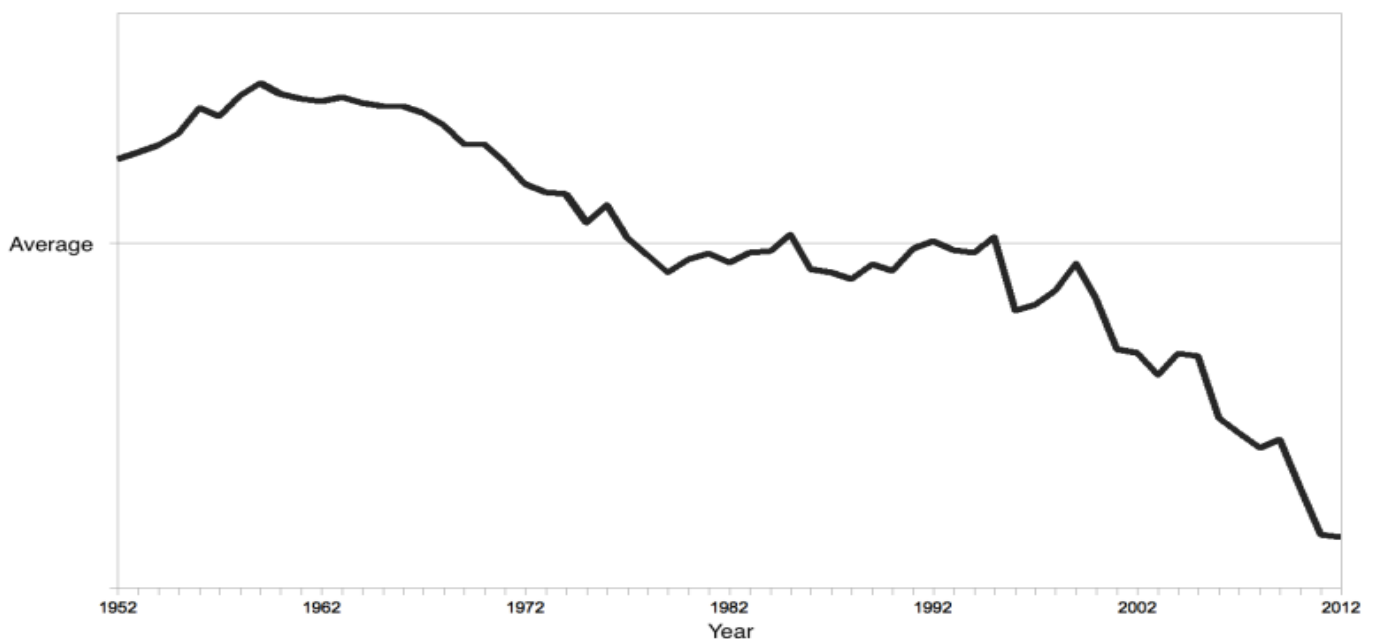
“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” These awe inspiring words are a message of hope to all of those who are welcomed into our country, to pursue a new life, and new freedoms. But have these freedoms led us down a path of unrighteousness? It is obvious that as time progresses, viewpoints will as well. When this country was founded, we were deemed as “One nation, under God.” However, as the years have gone by, society’s changing viewpoints have led to a decline not only in church attendance, but also in religious practice as a whole.

This nation was founded on the basis of religious freedom and tolerance. The reason we fled England in the first place was to escape the rule of King Henry VIII. Now, it seems as though the religious views once held by some many, are now judged and persecuted for being an old-fashioned and out of date way of thinking. It is obvious that the Bible has disagreements with homosexual activity, as well as abortion, and even the use of drugs. Today’s society however, embraces these ideas and accepts them in everyday life. Should you be on the opposing side of the argument, you are seen as a bigot. The goal of this paper is not to convince you that these actions are right or wrong, it is simply to show that there is a correlation between these shifting

views and opinions held by today's society and a decline in religious activity in the United States of America.

Religious practice always seems to spike during a time of war or some other terrible event that may occur, such as September 11, 2001, for example. When people fear something, they often turn to God for answers. There is a pattern that after during every major war church attendance and spiritual activity is on the rise. It is not until times get good again that these numbers begin to drop off. Over the past fifteen years, the drop in religiosity has been twice as great as the decline of the 1960s and 1970s (Grant, 2013). As the graph clearly shows below, religious practices were at their highest point since the Great Awakening in the 1950's. This is because of the ending of the Second World War. Times in the United States were booming. Economic activity was at an all-time high as was production of goods and services. As times of war and financial strain wear off and return to normal, people get complacent with religion and in many simply abandon it.

### The Great Decline: 60 years of religion in America



Graph by Corner of Church & State, a Religion News Service blog  
Source: Aggregate Religiosity Index, J. Tobin Grant. *Sociological Forum*.

This abandonment of religion is what allows these new viewpoints to come into play. For example, if you had gone out into the street in 1950 and told someone that you supported homosexuality, they would have ridiculed and persecuted you for believing in something that was anti-God and anti-America. However, now that those strong religious views have worn off, there leaves room for new views to come into the hearts and minds of Americans all over the country. In a recent survey of over 100,000 people, it was determined that religion was indeed declining, especially in teenagers and young adults. The main contributor to this was narcissism and self-centeredness (Reiss,2015). Perhaps the rise in technology and the ability to snap a quick selfie and upload it for all to see has increased this narcissism. Another interesting point is that when asked, people were more likely to say that they are “more spiritual, than religious.” This is a way of saying that they do not prefer organized religion, but would rather practice on their own terms, or in a setting that is more comfortable for them. Another contributor was the impact of traditional versus non-traditional families. A traditional family is one that was not seen a divorce. With divorce being at nearly 50% in American households, this comparison was able to clearly determine that there is indeed a correlation between the decline in religion and the decline in traditional family values. This change in family structure may be responsible for less successful religious training and recruitment of young people.

Over time, the repeated and continual practice of religious values is likely to strengthen them from generation to generation. And the opposite is true as well. For many generations we have seen a slight decline in religious activity. As time progresses, this change will become more and more drastic. The reason for this is that as religious practices are abandoned, society’s viewpoints are changed ever so slightly. Then as society changes, there becomes less of an importance placed on church activity and religious practice, and the cycle continues over and

over again. Each time becoming more and more drastic. This is clear in the chart above. The last few years, there has been a tremendous drop off that has not been seen since the social revolution of the 1960's.

The goal of this paper was to prove that society was having a negative effect on religion. However, after researching the topic, and studying many in-depth reports on the subject, it can be concluded that the decline in religious practice has resulted in a more liberal societal view, which ironically causes a further decline in religion. There still is a correlation between the two, yet in the opposite direction. As people feel that there is stability, and everything is under control in the country, they tend to stray away from God, the church, and religious practices. As time progresses, these viewpoints are passed down to their children, who develop their own views and opinions based on what they were taught as children and have learned as adults. As the generations progress without religion, socio-cultural changes occur which alter the views and opinions of future generations.

Slowly but surely, the United States is slipping away from what we once held as the law of the land. This Christian nation is once again following the cycle of abandonment of the Almighty. This has happened before in history, the Great Awakening during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were a means of correcting this problem of backsliding against God. However, some fear that society is too far down the road to be willing to admit their wrongdoings and return once again to the Lord.

There are some certain aspects in today's society that to some religious scholars and theologians have been detrimental to not only the Christian faith, but religion as a whole. While it is understood that society has matured, some of these more recent views seem to directly proclaim a message that is less focused on cultural progression and more focused on rebellion

against religion as a whole. For example, abortion is considered murder through the eyes of Christians, Muslims, and several other major religions. However, the Quran is quite specific that if the life of the mother is in danger, then the fetus may be aborted without consequence. The Quran states: “It is haram [forbidden] to abort the fetus after life is breathed into it.” It is later added that a woman could terminate a pregnancy if her life was in immediate danger. Islam does not condone the act of abortion simply because an unwanted pregnancy. Many Christians believe this as well, although it is not clearly stated in the Holy Bible as it is in the Quran. The idea that it is ok to terminate a life of an unborn child simply for convenience is what upsets so many religious groups across the nation. Many believe that if abortions were restricted to only mothers whose lives are in immediate danger, there would be more understanding from these religious groups. The “convenience factor” is what angers so many across the nation when it comes to this topic, and is, in part, the reason for so much debate over that part 30 years.

Another aspect of the United States culture is the use of drugs for recreational purposes. In recent years, marijuana has been accepted and legalized in 23 states ([procon.org](http://procon.org)). The idea of using and abusing drugs is not a new one, people have been using drugs in this country for decades if not longer. The Christian faith places special importance on keeping the body pure, both sexually, and especially when pertaining to putting foreign substances into your body to achieve some level of euphoria. The Bible states: “What? know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God, and you are not your own?” Some certain branches of Christianity believe that this verse means that they cannot use modern medicines to help prevent and fight disease. However, most Christians believe that the use of medical drugs is allowed in moderation, and the abuse of illegal drugs is wrong and therefore a sin. Society’s glorification of drug use is a major concern for believers. The openness of sin is

considered to be a sign of the end times in the Christian faith. While drug use is not mentioned by name in the Bible, the concept of openly abusing drugs is something that many theologians fear may cause harm to religious practices down the road.

From the examples presented in this paper, it is evident that they definitely influence religion negatively. Yet, at the same time, the decrease in religious practices and beliefs also cause a greater shift in socio-cultural beliefs. These two topics are intertwined with each other and are directly related to each other. The question is, which started first, the decline in religious practice, or the changes in socio-cultural views? This is a topic that is constantly being debated, and more than likely, will be for decades to come. My goal in writing this paper was not to convince you in one belief or the other, rather, it was to make you aware that there is a correlation between the two, that will inevitably worsen over time if corrective action is not taken.

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