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Study: Millennials Rejecting Religious Doctrine

by Jerome Socolovsky



Woman lights candle at 'night of lights' ecumenical prayer, Erfurt, Germany, Nov. 23, 2011 (file photo).

College campuses are among the least religious places in America, largely because people tend to drift away from faith when they are young. But a study focusing on 18-to-24-year-old Americans finds many rejecting religious doctrine and orthodoxy in general.

Findings of the [Millennial Values Survey](#), a joint survey of the [Public Religion Research Institute](#) (PRRI), and Georgetown University's [Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs](#), indicate that many of the youngest millennials - members of the so called "millennial generation" - are leaving their childhood faith and ending up mostly unaffiliated.

Around one quarter of respondents said they don't identify with any religion, more than twice the 11 percent raised in households without any particular faith.

According to Dr. Robert Jones, PRRI's CEO and one of the study's lead researchers, this group is changing the way Americans view and practice religion.

"Basically all the varieties of Christian religion are in negative territories," said Jones, adding that Catholics and white mainline Protestants saw the largest losses away from childhood religious identification.

A Complicated Relationship

"Millennials kind of have a complicated relationship with religion," said Abigail Clauhs, one of a [group of university students from around the country](#) invited to be present at the survey's release.

"In my own personal experience dealing with other millennials my age, there's a lot of those kinds of stories of 'Well, I was raised like this, but I am now this, or I'm not religious at all,'" she said. "There's a lot of shifting, and people don't tend to be as committed to one strict set of doctrines or dogmas, even if they might be spiritual still."

Clauhs, a religion major at Boston University, was raised by a southern Baptist father and a Roman Catholic mother.

"I actually identify as Unitarian Universalist now," she said, explaining with a chuckle that "you're allowed to believe what you want."

Christianity Too 'Judgmental'

Only 23 percent of the survey's respondents said they believe the Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally. And while 76 percent agreed with the statement that Christianity "has good values and principals," more than six in ten said the way the faith is practiced today is "judgmental" and "anti-gay."

Jones said it may not be surprising that millennials are less likely to attend church than older Americans.

"Even on very basic questions like the nature of God, for example, we see millennials much less likely to believe in a personal God that one can have a relationship with, and much more likely to believe in a kind of God as an impersonal force," he said.

Changing the Face of Religion in America

The survey's results also suggest that many millennials aren't looking for spirituality online. Fewer than half of respondents with Facebook accounts, for example, list a religious affiliation on their profile page.

But Jones said results do suggest millennials are seeking spirituality, albeit with less commitment than "the traditional structured church experience."

"A social service opportunity for you to go and do some good in the city, that's going to be connected to the deepest things you believe about reality and God," he said, describing the kind of experience that might appeal to them. "And you know you can come this time, maybe you don't come next time, and you know six months later you'll come again."

"That kind of more free-form engagement, that's something that this generation is really looking for," he said, adding that millennials "really do look to change the face of religion in the country."

<http://www.voanews.com/content/study-millennials-rejecting-religious-doctrine-149280835/370178.html>