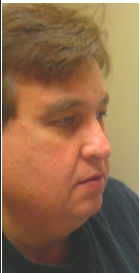


First Thoughts



"...Looking for a Hero?"

A recent Harris Poll provides insight into where Americans are looking to find their heroes. In this poll, adults were asked, "Who do you admire enough to call a hero?" The top ten might surprise you. You can find them in our "Culture Tracks" section on page 3.

You may also find interesting those who dropped out of the "top ten", from when the poll was last taken in 2001. They include: Colin Powell (who went from 3rd to 16th); John Wayne (8th to off the list); Michael Jordan (9th to no longer in the top 20); Bill Clinton (10th to tied for 16th with Powell and George Washington). Though not on the list in 2001, God just missed the top ten coming in at number 11, and beating out Hillary Clinton, who was 12th. Tied for number 13 is Billy Graham and Franklin Roosevelt, with Mahatma Gandhi at 15th.

Not only were there just four "religious" persons (not, including God) in the top 25, the poll also reflects a diminishing trend of the impact of family figures in the lives of Americans. When those identified as heroes were broken down into relational categories, the poll found:

- 49% identified a public figure as their hero (compared with 57% in 2001)
- 8% identified their Father as their hero (13% in 2001)
- 6% identified their Mother as their hero (9% in 2001)
- 4% identified another family member or relative as their hero (15% in 2001)

Obviously, religious figures and the family now play less of a role, or are viewed as less important, in the developmental stage of

Americans. This may be due to, what other polls indicate as, a diminishing commitment to traditional beliefs and values once integral to this nation.

Without question, subtle, and not so subtle, shifts are creeping into these foundational fabrics of our society. Consider the top criteria given by Americans as a basis for admiring someone enough to call them a hero. The top five reasons, all of which were given by at least 80% of respondents are:

- Doing what's right regardless of personal consequences (89%)
- Not giving up until the goal is accomplished (83%)
- Doing more than what other people expect of them (82%)
- Overcoming adversity (81%)
- Staying level-headed in a crisis (81%)

Without question, people are still looking for heroes and heroes that have consistency and stand for something. Sadly, most are not finding them in the Church and the family.

The question becomes, "Where will they find them and what beliefs and values will these heroes ultimately pass down?" Time will tell.

In this issue we share how you can help some real American heroes, the men and women who serve in our armed forces. They embody the list of qualities above. One of these is our own Dan Malin, who is currently in Afghanistan serving as a Chaplain.

Included on pages 2-3 of this issue of *CrossingCurrents* is a report from Don. Please read his article as it provides information on how you can help minister to the troops Don is serving with by joining in his special project, Table of Grace.

As always, we hope *CrossingCurrents* helps you in your own ministry and growth. If you have missed an issue, you can now read back issues on our website.

Please let us know if we can ever be of assistance to you.

Inside this issue:

<i>First Thoughts from our President</i>	1
<i>The Incredible Shrinking Church</i>	2
<i>Table of Grace</i>	2,3
<i>Culture Tracks: Current Statistical Trends</i>	3
<i>In the Mail: What Our Readers Are Saying</i>	3
<i>In the News</i>	4

Our new booklet, *Spiritual Buffet* is now available. Please see page four for additional information and to order.





The Incredible Shrinking Church by Bob Waldrep



In recent years, many Christian denominations have acknowledged that though continuing to increase in the

number of adherents, their growth is much smaller. Certainly, it is good that the Church is experiencing any growth and not stagnating, but, do the numbers really tell the whole story?

The recently released American Religious Identification Survey 2008, issued out of Trinity College in Hartford, CT, tells a different story. The Survey does confirm that, from 1990 to 2008, those affiliated with the Christian Church increased some 13.5%, from 151.2 million to 173.4 million. However, during that same time the US population increased about 30% from 175.4 million to 228.2 million.

The survey found those identifying themselves with the Christian Church represent 76% of the population; whereas, in 1990 this group represented 86.2% of the population. So, compared to the population as a whole, the Christian Church is actually shrinking in size, and possibly influence.

When broken into subcategories, (i.e. Baptists, Methodists, Lutheran, etc.) almost

all groups saw either modest growth or a decrease in the percentage of the overall population they represented when compared to that of 1990. A few groups however did see quite remarkable growth and serve as good indicators of the spiritual trends emerging in today's culture.

During this same time frame, the survey indicates "eastern religions" have increased from 0.4% of the population to 0.9% and Buddhism, from 0.2% to 0.5%. This means that each of these have experienced over a 50% growth rate. Atheism and agnosticism (which were grouped together in 1990's survey) have also increased over 50%, from 0.7% of the population to 1.6%; as has the Muslim growth rate, increasing from 0.3% of the population to 0.6%.

"The culture is doing a better job absorbing the Church than is the Church in changing the culture"

Combined, these five groups have increased from representing 1.6% of the population to representing 3.6% of the population. To give this some perspective, they comprise a larger, or nearly as large, segment of the population than the Jewish

religion (1.2%) and the following Christian groups: Lutherans (3.8%), Presbyterian (2.1%), Episcopal/Anglican (1.1%), Pentecostal (3.5%)

As mainline Christian churches continue to become smaller, in relation to the overall population, the Survey found those who choose not to identify with any particular religion are seeing, comparatively, explosive growth, increasing from 8.2% of the population in 1990 to 14.1% in 2001 and now to 15%, in 2008.

Clearly, these trends indicate a growing disinterest in the Christian Church; at least as it is currently presented, or perceived. This is not the first time in its history the Church has been so viewed. Furthermore, these statistics, and other trends we have been reporting, seem to give evidence that the culture is doing a much better job of absorbing the Church than is the Church in changing the culture.

It is imperative that those who follow Christ begin to engage the culture with the redemptive message of the gospel. For, it is only the hope that we have in Christ that can turn around these numbers and the trends they represent. And, that is certainly something to hope, pray, and labor for. Truly, the fields are white unto harvest.



Table of Grace in Afghanistan by Don Malin



I'm finally in Afghanistan. It started Dec 6 and we finally arrived in country about Feb 13. The flights were long but better than I anticipated. We left the Gulf Coast and landed at Ft Campbell Ky; then it was on to Gander, New Foundland; Iceland and to Manas, the base they are planning on closing down.

We stayed there for two days and flew in a C17 to Bagram. It was a snowy, slushy night and then, in less than 24 hours, I was on a C130 to Sharana, where I have been since Feb 14 (that's Valentines day for all you guys). There is a lot of travel for the men and women in the Armed Forces; some is comfortable and sometimes crowded. On the C17 we had to carry all our equipment and it was tough even being able to move or breathe!

What I've been doing in Sharana is going through a two week changeover. I follow

the present Chaplain around and we talk about what I will do and what I can expect. He gets me and my assistant on the computers and special accounts and turns the control of the Chapel and other items over to me. Soon he will be gone and I will officially be the Forward Operating Base (FOB) Chaplain.

I am starting a Bible study and have been leading services since March first. The Chapel has Protestant, Catholic, Gospel, and LDS (Mormon) services. I lead the Protestant and Gospel services.

I also started "the Table of Grace" ministry. This is a table in the Chapel where I put items that soldiers can use to make their life more comfortable. The items are free for the soldiers; but, the catch is that someone does pay for them - YOU.

I ask people to buy items and send them to me in Sharana. I then put them on the table for soldiers. The goal is to let people know that though it is free for them, that you, the friends and family back home,

paid for it.

It is like the gospel. The gift is FREE. Take the gift. But the gift cost a great price, the price of the Son of God dying on the Cross. This is the message of the table of Grace - it is free to you, but it did not come without a cost to someone.

How can you help? Go to your post office and get a special box, or boxes, for free. These are to send to troops overseas. The cost is low depending on the post office. My wife only pays \$11.95 per box no matter how much it weighs. Just fill the boxes with items you would like to give our soldiers and send it to me for distribution. The list of items needed are:

- Hygiene/grooming items in small pkgs
- Blank post cards (stamps not needed)
- Moisturizing lotion/skin repair cream
- Wet wipes
- Hand sanitizer
- Chapstick
- Aspirin and Tylenol



Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



In the Mailbag What Our Readers Are Saying



America's Heroes?

Responding to the question who do you admire enough to call your hero? The top ten responses given are listed in order of popularity.

1. Barack Obama
2. Jesus Christ
3. Martin Luther King
4. Ronald Reagan
5. George W. Bush
6. Abraham Lincoln
7. John McCain
8. John F. Kennedy
9. Chesley Sullenberger (pilot who safely landed in the Hudson River)
10. Mother Teresa

Interestingly, when this poll was taken in 2001, Jesus was at the top of the list. It is also notable that only three "religious" figures, Jesus and Mother Teresa appear in the top ten; and, only five in the top twenty five, not including God.

Glad to see you address the Seventh-day Adventist church in The Alabama Baptist's Spiritual Buffet feature. I am a former ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister and pastor who left the denomination in 1999, after 18 years. In 2000 I became a Southern Baptist and am joyfully thankful to be living in God's grace and faith-focused fellowship.

While the cults continue to flourish, I think you're branching (correctly) into the bigger picture -- and that is what all this multi-culturalism, watered down beliefs, etc. are doing to our generation and follow on generations. While we need to be equipped to understand and challenge individual false belief systems, I think the bigger (and more subtle) issue of the day are the so-called "Christian" influences that have incorporated false new age and prevailing subjective beliefs and in doing so are easily led astray.

In this recent news letter you have an article on "Alternative Medicine Popular Treatment" under the heading "Media news stories effecting current trends in American spirituality". How is alternative medicine effecting American spirituality? The point was never made in the article. Through the sarcasm and rudeness of the the writer, the only point that was made, was that he is personally against this type of treatment. I don't see how you are trying to link, for example, taking echinacea for a cold to leading people away spiritually. Using alternative medicine alters your spirituality as much as eating rice makes you Asian. That is quit a leap and an extreme way of thinking. Your point was never made, nor does it have any grounds on which to be made. The hypocritical irony of this article is amazing, in that, the writer is leaning on science as "all knowing" and "conclusive" when it comes to evaluating things such as alternative medicines. Which we as Christians know is not always the case...evolution for example...I have to say on a side note, being raised on alternative medicines, that both sides of the fence, medical and alternative, can move to extreme ends of the spectrum. The best way to treat the body, in my opinion, is a combined knowledge from both sides of medicine... alternative and traditional. Otherwise we are just stubbornly picking sides, and neither side can claim to have all the answers to healing our complex God given bodies.

Want to get CrossingCurrents sooner?
Visit our blogspot and sign up for our E-Letter: crosswindsfoundation.blogspot.com

[Ed. Note: Articles included in the "In the News" section are generally placed without comment and represent some trend/shift in the culture as seen through the eyes of the news article writer and are intended to promote cultural awareness and to stimulate critical thinking. As with the last letter, whether you agree with what you read in CrossingCurrents, or not, we would love to hear your comments.]

Table of Grace, continued from page 2

- Sun block
- Eye drops
- Bug spray
- Powders - foot and body (Gold Bond)
- Ointment (like neosporin, bactine, etc)
- Toothpaste, mouthwash, dental floss
- Large handkerchiefs
- Batteries (especially AA or AAA)
- Coffee (bags and singles)
- Nuts, dried fruit, trail mix
- Beef sticks, jerky (nothing with pork)
- Sweets (not much chocolate, it melts)

Finally, to keep up with me join Facebook and become my friend. My page link can be found on our website, or just go to facebook.com and type my name in the search box. You can follow the pictures and awesome sense of humor I have.

In closing please be in prayer for the men and women who go to Afghanistan and are affected by the sights and sounds and horror of what we could see. Ask God to let His mercy fall on all of us and keep us under His wings. Ask for wisdom for me, the Chaplain, to share that mercy and grace through Worship, Prayer, Bible Study and friendship. Ask God to open the hearts of the men and women to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

Thank you for whatever you can do to help.



NOTE: IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP DON, YOU CAN ALSO DESIGNATE A GIFT TO "TABLE OF GRACE" AND WE WILL PURCHASE THE ITEMS AND SHIP THEM ON YOUR BEHALF; OR, BRING ITEMS BY OUR OFFICE IF YOU WOULD LIKE FOR US TO SHIP THEM

Missing Articles From Past Issues of CrossingCurrents?

Just let us know and we will be glad to send copies of those you would like to have. Here are some of the topics we have covered:

- Becoming a Post-Racial America (2 Parts)
- Oprah and Spirituality
- President Bush, Faith, and Culture
- Atheists and Christmas
- Coming Soon to a Bus Near You

YOUR DONATIONS HELP

To make a financial investment in our ministry make your check payable to: Crosswinds Foundation and mail to:

P.O. Box 12143
Birmingham, AL 35202

For information on giving by credit card (Visa, MC, Discover, AMEX) contact us at 205-327-8317; or info@crosswindsfoundation.org



In the News

Excerpts from articles reflecting trends in American spirituality (LINKS PROVIDE FULL TEXT)

QUESTIONS RAISED ANEW ABOUT RELIGION IN MILITARY

New York Times, 03-01-09

Terry Bradshaw stared intently into the camera, his eyes moist, as the interviewer asked him if his faith in God had helped him through his bouts with depression.

"Oh, yeah," answered the Hall of Fame quarterback. "Well, I'm a Christian for one thing so, yeah, I'd been praying."

The viewers of this video were military personnel who were watching an official military production dealing with depression, suicide and "the importance of faith."

The screening of the suicide-prevention video and other recent incidents are reviving questions that the Pentagon had hoped to put behind it years ago: what the proper role of religion should be in the military and whether a pro-Christian culture permeates the armed forces...Officials said they had made great strides...with training for officers and a concerted effort at the inclusion of all faiths.

"I'd be wrong to state every chaplain does it right 100 percent of the time, but we work very hard at it," said Carleton Birch of the Army's Chief of Chaplains Office. "Chaplains ascribe to pluralism. We represent our own faith while respecting other faith groups."

nytimes.com/2009/03/01/washington/01church.html

SUPREME COURT: BAN ON TYPE OF SCHOOL PRAYER

Associated Press, 03-03-09

[High school] Coach Marcus Borden used to bow his head and drop to one knee when his football team prayed...the Supreme Court ended that tradition...[refusing] to hear the coach's appeal of a school district ban on em-

ployees joining a student-led prayer.

The [New Jersey case] decision could add another restriction on prayer in schools, advocates on both sides said.

"We've become so politically correct in terms of how we deal with religion that it's being pretty severely limited in schools right now, and individuals suffer," said John W. Whitehead...of The Rutherford Institute.

But Barry W. Lynn...Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said some parents had complained about Borden leading prayers before the...school district ordered him to stop and banned all staff members from joining in student-led prayer.

"The bottom line is people in positions of authority, like a coach, have to be extremely careful about trying to promote their ideas, or implying that if you don't pray, you may not play," Lynn said.

law.com/jsp/scm/PubArticleSCM.jsp?id=1202428733739

VATICAN-BACKED CONFERENCE SNUBS CREATIONISM

Associated Press, 03-05-09

ROME - A Vatican-backed conference on evolution is under attack from people who weren't invited to participate: those espousing creationism and intelligent design.

The Discovery Institute, the main organization supporting intelligent design research, says it was shut out from presenting its views because the meeting was funded in part by the John Templeton Foundation, a major U.S. non-profit that has criticized the intelligent design movement.

Intelligent design holds that certain features of life forms are so complex that they can best be explained by an origin from an intelligent higher power, not an undirected process like natural selection.

Organizers of the five-day conference...said they barred intelligent design proponents be-

cause they wanted an intellectually rigorous conference on science, theology and philosophy to mark the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's "The Origin of Species."

"We think [intelligent design is] not a scientific perspective, nor a theological or philosophical one," said the Rev. Marc Leclerc, the conference director and a professor of philosophy of nature at the Gregorian.

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29535870/

STUDY: JEWS LESS LIKELY TO SWITCH FAITH AFFILIATION

Christian Post, 03-02-09

Jews are less likely to change religious affiliation than Protestant Christians and Catholics, a new study claims.

While Jewish and Christian traditions are both reporting a decline in adherents, most Jews who leave the faith become unaffiliated rather than "switching" to another religious tradition, according to the study released last week by the American Jewish Committee.

According to the study, 76% of Jews are "stable," or currently professing the same religion that they were raised in. Meanwhile, 14.5% are "losses," reporting a different religion now than the Jewish faith they grew up in. And 9 percent of Jews are "gains," or have converted to Judaism from another faith.

For Protestants, there are high levels of switching between denominations, but as a whole...are the most stable at 80.8%. But when denominational switching is taken into account, stability ranges from 39.3% to 59.8%.

The study broke Protestants down into four major denominational families - Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Baptists had the highest level of stability at 59.8%, and Presbyterians had the lowest rate among the four at 39.3%.

christianpost.com/Society/Polls_reports/2009/03/study-jews-less-likely-than-christians-to-switch-faith-affiliation-02/



Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture

P.O. Box 12143

Phone: 205-327-8317

E-mail: info@crosswindsfoundation.org

ENGAGING THE CULTURE

Visit Our Web-

For additional information on a topic in this newsletter, or another area of interest, contact us for a free information packet.

Our new book, *Spiritual Buffet*, is now available.

This is a compilation of articles written by Bob Waldrep and Ron Carter for the *Alabama Baptist Newspaper*.

Topics Include:

- Atheism
- Universalism/Unitarians
- The Occult
- Wicca
- New Age
- Word-Faith Movement
- Mormonism
- Jehovah's Witnesses...And More

Contact our office to order your copy.

