

Sociology

Myths and Facts, #5

MYTH: "Christians don't care about poverty or social justice."

FACTS: Christians volunteer and give to humanitarian causes much more than their secular peers:

"The average annual giving among the religious is \$2,210; it is \$642 among the secular. Religious people volunteer an average of 12 times per year, while the secular volunteer an average of 5.8 times..."

*The data show that if two people are identical in every other way, the secular person is 23 percentage points less likely to give [to a secular charity] than the religious person and 26 points less likely to volunteer." (Dr. Arthur Brooks: *Religious Faith and Charitable Giving: Believers Give More to Secular Charities Than Non-Believers Do*, Stanford University, 2003)*

*"About half of the most secular Americans say that people need to 'look after themselves and not worry about others.' Only about 1 in 5 of the most religious Americans, by contrast, feels that way." (Dr. Robert Putnam, Harvard political scientist: *Bowling Alone*)*

MYTH: "There are above-average numbers of Christians in prison, and fewer atheists than average."

FACTS: The false prison statistics behind this myth were fabricated and posted online by the American Atheist organization. They then spread to countless atheist blogs, who shared it as proof that Christianity is immoral.

The evidence of sociology is that those who pray, attend church, etc. are statistically much less likely to commit

Understanding Christianity



a crime than those in comparable situations who don't:

"Participation in religious activities is negatively correlated to participation in criminal activity." (Religion and its Effects on Crime and Delinquency, Neuroscience Research Institute, State University of NY, U.S. National Library of Medicine)

"The literature is not disparate or contradictory...Religious measures are generally inversely related to deviance, and this is especially true among the most rigorous studies." (A Systematic Review of the Religiosity and Delinquency Literature, Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice)

MYTH: "Christians get divorced as much as non-Christians do."

FACTS: This rumor was based entirely on one survey by the Barna Group, which included types of evangelical Christians in the "non-Christian" category, confusing the divorce-rate numbers.

The body of research on the subject consistently and overwhelmingly shows that the divorce rate is much *lower* for Christians, especially those who practice their faith in some way. For example, here are the American divorce rates among people-groups according to one of the best known sources of sociological data, the *General Social Survey (2000-2004)*:

DIVORCE RATES

51% ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC

48% ALL NON-CHRISTIANS

41% ALL CHRISTIANS

32% ALL ACTIVE CHRISTIANS (*defined as those who attend a church regularly*)

Divorce Rate According to the National Survey of Families and Households:

49% ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC
41% ALL NON-CHRISTIANS
37% ALL CHRISTIANS
26% ACTIVE PROTESTANT
24% ACTIVE CATHOLIC

And the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States:

52% ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC
45% ALL NON-CHRISTIANS
35% ALL CHRISTIANS
25% ACTIVE PROTESTANT
24% ACTIVE CATHOLIC

"Sociologists have found that Christians have low divorce rates. Still, Barna's statistics on divorce rates have a long shelf life because, I suppose, there's a large audience who want to believe the worst about Christians." (Bradley Wright, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, University of Connecticut: *Christian Divorce Statistics*)

"Whether young or old, male or female, low-income or not, those who said they were more religious reported higher levels of commitment, higher levels of marital satisfaction, and lower levels of negative interaction." (Prof. Scott Stanley, Ph.D., director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies, DU: *2001 Baseline Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce*)

MYTH: "Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas are an example of Christians."

FACTS: Fred Phelps is the notorious cult-leader from Kansas, whose sect is known for protesting at funerals and holding signs saying that God "hates" various groups of people. Apart from the fact that Phelps' teachings are contrary to the Bible's, it is also known that Phelps:

a.) teaches that Christians outside of his own group are not saved, b.) does not even believe personally in God or Jesus, and c.) only uses God's name to anger and hurt groups of people whom he feels have wronged him. Several of Phelps' children have left the cult and become Christians, reporting that Fred Phelps' belief in God was gone decades ago, if it had ever even existed at all.

It is dishonest and unethical to equate Phelps' cult with evangelical Christians or with Christianity in general, although various skeptics do it all the time. (fredphelps.com)

MYTH: "There are over 30,000 different denominations of Christians. They can't all be right, so Christianity isn't true."

FACTS: Most of what are called "denominations" are just different organizations through which Christians work/worship, differing by language, subculture, or style/practice. That reflects diversity- not disunity.

They may have separate leadership, but most consider one another fellow Christians. Their doctrinal differences usually relate to secondary issues. The *core* tenants of Christianity are clearly laid out in the Bible and agreed upon by the 1000's of Bible-believing denominations.

Although false churches and cults do exist, sincere Christians, whatever church they attend, still enjoy spiritual unity as described in John 17:20-23, even without being underneath some centralized human organization.

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