

Christian Biblical Church of God Offices:

The Collapse of Anglican Christianity

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Quoted by Caroline Wyatt in “Is the UK Still a Christian Country?” www.bbc.com/news/uk-32722155.

17. David Voas, “Hard Evidence: Is Christianity Dying in Britain?” (2013) www.theconversation.com/hard-evidence-is-christianity-dying-in-britain-20734

18. Brown, “Faith No More”

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culture” its top priority—in order to achieve status and rapid growth and position itself as the champion of tolerance and political correctness. This has led massive numbers of sincere faith-seekers to consider alternative ways of worshipping.

10. Jeremy Paxman, *The English* (1998)

11. Many today view the Church of England as a “top-heavy” *political arm* of the state—one mired in politics, ritual, and tradition. The recent liberalization of the Church—unrestricted divorce among royalty, employment of gay ministers, the ordination of women, its nod to same-sex marriage—has only accelerated its decline.

12. Andrew Brown, “Faith No More: How the British are Losing their Religion” (2015)
www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2015/apr/14/british-christianity-trouble-religion-comeback

13. www.vexen.co.uk/UK/religion.html

14. Niall Ferguson, *Empire* (2002)

15. www.vexen.co.uk/UK/religion.html

16. Linda Woodhead, professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University, writes: “The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are in collapse. We are living through the biggest religious transition since the reformation of the 16th century.

“The Church [has] lost touch with our everyday life and has become *inward looking* rather than being a broad Church for the whole of society. The Churches of England and Scotland have failed to win the hearts and minds of the young for several generations now, while numbers for the Catholic Church are really only holding up thanks to immigration.”

The Collapse of Anglican Christianity

The decline of mainstream or Anglican Christianity in Britain and the UK is well documented, having now played out over several decades. There are a number of causative factors behind this decline, and the process—which arguably began in the 1960s—has been complex. In fact, the entire 1500-year history of British Christianity has followed a rather convoluted path.

This treatise will attempt to shed light on the demise of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, in Britain and the UK. Several key causes will be explored, hopefully demonstrating *how* and *why* Anglican Christianity is now apparently facing near extinction.

We will begin by reviewing current statistics concerning religious practice in Britain and the UK, which will focus largely on the present state of the Church of England. Of necessity we will look back at key aspects of Britain’s religious history, which may prove helpful as we move on to the *how* and *why* of the unfortunate state of Christianity in the UK.

But first *this caveat*: Our entire discussion of Christianity in Britain does not concern *authentic* Christianity as established by Jesus and the apostles in the first century. That *primitive* movement had, for its very survival, gone into hiding by the early part of the second century; it has existed in a more or less “underground” modus ever since. What subsequently emerged in post-apostolic times was a *forgery*—a pseudo-Christianity that over time morphed into Roman Catholicism. Thus, the

“Christianity” of Britain—originally of the Roman variety, superseded by Anglicanism—has never faithfully reflected the teachings of the Bible. (The reader can substantiate these points by looking honestly into the origins of Catholicism and by carefully comparing the clear teachings of the Bible to the teachings of mainstream Christianity.)

Yet even such *nominal* Christianity has had a profoundly positive effect on the British people over the centuries, owning at times widespread participation with essential societal authority. Since at least about 1960, however, Christianity in Britain has been in severe decline in both participation (attendance) and influence. That is the subject at hand.

“Believing Without Belonging”—The Current State of British Christianity

The religious makeup of the UK is “diverse, complex, and multicultural.”¹ Numerous survey tools are regularly employed to measure religious belief, affiliation, and practice—such as the annual British Social Attitudes survey; various official YouGov polls; private research by the Tearfund Organization; the 10-year British National Census; etc. Private research by organizations such as the Barna Group has also helped immensely.

Surveys and polls typically reflect the same general findings, albeit expressed in different ways. These differences are often due to the manner in which questions are posed. When taken as a *whole*, however, the results typically provide an accurate picture and are especially helpful in identifying *trends*. Remember, too, that when it comes to surveys and polls of a highly personal nature, respondents often fudge on their answers. For example, researchers have found that many people who claim to be “not religious” will nevertheless put down *Christian* as their “official religion.” Sociologists know that when people are asked about religious beliefs, more respondents

NOTES:

1. Statistics are taken primarily from research published in “Religion in the United Kingdom: Diversity, Trends, and Decline,” found at www.vexen.co.uk/UK/religion.html.
2. The rise of Islam in the UK has nothing significant to do with the demise of Christianity. After WWII and the loss of her Empire, Britain ceased being a nation of migrating peoples and became a nation of immigrants—i.e., the flow went from outward to inward. With immigration came multiculturalism, and the present influx of Muslims to the UK reflects the current state of that trend. Very few British Christians are converted to Islam.
3. www.christiantoday.com/article/most_people_in_england_are_still_christian_says_new_study/65360.htm
4. <http://9marks.org/article/is-christianity-in-britain-in-terminal-decline>
5. Monica Furlong, *The Church of England: The State It's In* (2000); p. 3
6. Kevin Swanson, *Apostate*; p. 271
7. Collin Hansen, “European Christianity’s ‘Failure to Thrive’—Why Christendom, Born with an Imperial Bang, is Now Fading Away in an Irrelevant Whimper.” (2008). Found at: www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?ch/news/2003/jul18.html
8. *Ibid.*
9. The failure of Christianity in America can best be explained as the failure of the church to make a meaningful, *relevant impact* on people’s lives. Why? Because the church has foolishly made “accommodating popular

UK. Echoing Voas, he concludes that “adults did not stop going to church, but they *failed to transmit the habit* to their children, and now they [the adults] are dying out”—and their children (and grandchildren) want no part of “state religion.”¹⁸

And more and more, they want no part of Christianity. With each subsequent generation, Christianity has become more and more irrelevant. Today, for the most part, the young people are long gone; they have 1) adopted an alternative faith, such as an Eastern religion; 2) grown up with no exposure to religion so that they are thoroughly secular; or 3) rejected religion altogether (and in many cases embraced atheism).

This *breakdown* or *disconnection* process—initiated originally because of post-Empire disillusionment and repeated over several generations—has led Britain to its current post-Christian, highly secularized state.

say they belong to a particular religion, and *say* they hold to the beliefs of a particular religion, than actually do. In other words, people typically *overstate* their own religiosity.

Realize as well that polls will reveal slightly varying results depending on the exact geographical area they cover—Britain alone, or the entire UK.

The 2011 National Census (the next one will conclude in 2021) shows that only minority and alternative religions are steadily growing. This includes a few minority *Christian* religions, such as Pentecostalism. Islam is also on the rise, but only because of Muslim immigration; British “converts” to Islam are insignificant.² Likewise, the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches are seeing positive growth, but mainly because of immigration from countries in eastern Europe.

But *mainstream* Christianity—i.e., Anglican and Catholic—is in significant, ongoing decline. The 2009 British Social Attitudes survey revealed that about 50 percent of Brits say they have “no religion.” Five years later, a 2014 YouGov poll showed that 77 percent of Brits claim they are “not very, or not at all” religious (the remaining 23 percent said they were “fairly or very” religious). According to the same YouGov poll, only 37 percent of Brits claimed to actually *be* Christian. Moreover, when asked, *Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?*, a full 50 percent said *no*. (By comparison, 86 percent of Americans claim they “belong” to a religion.)

Research in 2006 by Tearfund (arguably the most comprehensive and professional polling) found that 66 percent (two thirds) of people *across the UK* claim “no connection with any religion or church.” Another 2006 survey, sponsored by the British Polling Council, showed a similar response: 63 percent said they were “not religious.”

The 2011 Census put the number of Brits who claimed to “be Christian” at 59 percent, substantially

down from the 2001 figure of 72 percent. Those who declared “no religion” was 25 percent in 2011, up from 15 percent in 2001.

As you can see, polling is complex; and one survey may appear to contradict another. This is sometimes a reflection of *how* questions are asked. For example, *Do you have a religion?* and *Are you a religious person?* are actually two very different questions and will yield dissimilar results. Many Brits feel they are religious, yet they identify with no particular religion. To get an accurate picture of religion in the UK, one must look at how the various polls and surveys indicate overall *trends*.

The following graphic, based on results from British Social Attitudes polls, shows a disturbing 40-year trend.

Year	1964	1970	1983	1992	2005
Belongs to a religion & attends services (percent)	74	71	55	37	31
Does not belong to a religion (percent)	3	5	26	31	38

The trend is unmistakable: those who *do* profess to “hold to a religion” in Britain are largely inactive. A 2003 Mori poll showed that while 25 percent of Brits claimed to be “members” of a particular religion, only 18 percent considered themselves to be a “*practicing member* of an organized religion.” A 2007 poll commissioned by the British Library found that 50 percent of religious Brits “do not practice religion very much, if at all”—and *Christians* were the most inactive among all religious groups. The bottom line: many Brits see themselves as *religious*; considerably fewer claim a particular religion; and still

“We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generations to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and He appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children, so that the generation to come might know them, children which shall [yet] be born; and they shall arise and tell them to their children, so that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (verses 4-7).

This is how religion is made *relevant*, upheld as being of *value*, for subsequent generations. As a rule, people adopt the religion they were brought up with. But if the home becomes mostly non-religious, or even irreligious, then *that* too is passed on to the children.

David Voas, professor of Population Studies at the University of Essex, England, wrote: “If people belong [to a religion] in their 20s, they will probably stay for the rest of their lives—but if they don’t, it will be hard to bring them in. Taken as a whole, *each generation is less religious than the one before. Change is between, not within, generations.*”¹⁷

Between generations—one generation failing to pass on its religious heritage to the next.

Voas adds, “The large decline in attendance at religious services has not happened because many adults have stopped going to church; it has happened because more and more adults *never start attending* in the first place”—because their parents became skeptical of “institutionalized religion” and never passed on the value of church attendance.

Writing for *The Guardian*, Brown discusses why mainstream Christianity is facing massive decline in the

between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the posts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).

“Therefore you shall lay up these My words in your hearts and in your souls, and bind them for a sign upon your hands so that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them upon the door posts of your house, and upon your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers, like the days of heaven above the earth” (Deut. 11:18-21).

As you can see, God takes “passing on” His way of life very seriously. In fact, what is described here is nothing short of *brain washing*—in a good sense. If this is not done, there is a disconnect: subsequent generations will not *value* religion as did their parents.

What happens when we fail? In Judges we see that Joshua was a great leader, godly in all his ways. But he and his generation died out (Judges 2:10). Did their children carry on with Joshua’s “religion”? No. “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor even the works which He had done for Israel” (verse 10).

A *disconnect* occurred—a generational breakdown. Joshua and his generation did not practice what Moses taught in Deuteronomy; they did not make their “religion” *relevant* or of *value* to the next generation. Concerning the things of God, Psalm 78 notes:

fewer actually *practice* their religion. This trend is pervasive throughout the UK.

Clearly, Christianity in Britain has suffered an immense decline since the 1960s. The story is most telling, however, in the area of actual *practice*—i.e., participation and attendance. After all, one may claim to *be* or *believe* this or that; but *attendance levels* are a sure indicator of how a particular religion is actually performing.

Church Attendance in the UK

In 2000, 60 percent of the British population claimed to *belong* to a specific religion, with 55 percent being Christian. Interestingly, however, *half* of all the adults aged 18 and over who said they “belonged to a religion” *had never attended a religious service* (ONS Study: “Belonging to a Religion: Social Trends 32”). Clearly, “belonging” does not equate to *participating*.

Across the UK, church attendance in 1999 was 7.5 percent on an average Sunday, down from 10 percent in 1989 and 12 percent in 1979. The figures are similar for Britain: According to the 2004 Christian Research English Church Census, only *6 percent* of the British population was going to church on any given Sunday (considerably less than Tearfund’s 10 percent, below). All told, between 1979 and 2005, *half* of all British Christians stopped going to church on Sunday.

In 2007, Tearfund published the following results of their comprehensive review (conducted throughout 2006) of the Christian religion in Britain and the UK:

- Only 10 percent of the UK adult population go to church at least weekly
- 15 percent attend church at least monthly
- 26 percent attend church at least yearly
- 59 percent never or practically never go to church

Looking again at the 2004 English Church Census, some interesting facts emerge about church attendance:

- Today, 29 percent of churchgoers are age 65 or older, yet the age group makes up only 16 percent of the population.
- Since 1998, attendance among the 20-29 age group has dropped 29 percent.
- Overall, Sunday churchgoing is now declining at 2.3 percent per year.
- Today, nearly all church “growth” is due to immigration. For example, a massive influx of Polish workers has filled many churches.
- Roman Catholicism has recorded the largest drop in attendance—about 50 percent over the past 16 years.
- Pentecostal churches have experienced the most significant growth since 1998. (In fact, the proportion of churchgoers who call themselves *evangelical* has remained remarkably stable at around 2.5 percent of the population.)

In 2004, Jonathan Petre, religion correspondent at *The Daily Telegraph*, wrote: “While 1000 new people are joining a church each week, 2500 are leaving” (Dec. 13, 2004). The question is, *Why?*

Religious Education Also Waning

Along with this decline in church participation has been a drop in overall religious education. In data revealed by a 2003 Mori poll, only 55 percent of the English population could name even *one* of the four Gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Slightly more, 60 percent, could name the sacred book used by Muslims, the Koran.

A 2015 study conducted by the American-based Barna Group revealed some interesting facts about *religious literacy* in Britain.³ As expected, Barna’s polling showed that 6 out of 10 Brits *say* they are

may be as simple as the *failure* of successive generations to *maintain* Britain’s religious heritage—which in turn stems from long-simmering cynicism concerning “state religion” following the demise of the British Empire.

For the sake of argument, let us delineate the “final generation” of the Empire as those born roughly in the 1920s and 1930s. This group would have witnessed the decline of the Empire across the Great Depression and World War II (they would also have been strongly impacted by World War I). In a post-Empire Britain, they would have watched as the Church of England *turned inward*, no longer sure of its place in the new world.¹⁶ Plus, they would have experienced first hand the massive social upheaval of the 1960s.

The result? For them, the Church began to be viewed as *irrelevant*.

And *relevance* is key. When something has relevance, it has *value*: it is preserved, maintained, passed on to the next generation. It is not forgotten. There is no disconnection—no *generational breakdown*. Notice how God instructed the children of Israel concerning this very issue—preserving their “religion” across generations:

“Only take heed to yourself and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. But teach them to your children, and your children’s children...” (Deut. 4:9).

“And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart. And you shall diligently teach them to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets

the knowledge of the Gospel among the heathen.” Ferguson calls this the “new evangelical imperialism” (p. 125).

Empire-building, particularly in its later *evangelical* form, was the heart of the Church of England—if not the greater part of the British people. And without it, they have floundered as a people without vision. The vitality of the Church of England was inextricably linked to this vision of evangelizing the world with British-styled Christianity. Now, without her Empire, the Church of England has become a relic of the past—a glorious past, but one that is nevertheless held in disdain by many Brits. Perhaps this helps explain Dean Acheson’s words from 1962: “Great Britain has lost an Empire, and has not yet found a [new] role.”

Why is this important? It perhaps explains why the generation of Brits that witnessed the decline and fall of the Empire *lost their zeal* for English Christianity. With the fall of the Empire, they saw no compelling vision for the Church of England. No doubt this new reality became an unexpected and grievous challenge to their faith—and their commitment to Anglicanism.

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint.” It appears that post-Empire Britain has indeed lost its sense of purpose, of global importance—and that loss of vision has led to generational disillusionment and a careless disregard for religious heritage.

Today, British suspicion of church-state partnerships is at an all-time high. In a 2012 poll conducted by YouGov, 81 percent of the British stated that religion is a private matter, and should *be separate from politics*.¹⁵

Generational Breakdown

Why are mainstream Christianity and the Church of England faring so poorly today in Britain? The answer

Christian. But of that group, only 9 percent described themselves as “practicing”—i.e., praying regularly, reading the Bible, and going to church at least once a month. The study also revealed a lack of *religious knowledge*: Two in five respondents did not know that Jesus was a real person, and those under age 35 were most likely to believe that Jesus was fictional.

In Britain, the law still “requires” that, in every school, “there should be an act of collective worship in which each pupil can participate every day.” The reality, however, is that “there is now little Gospel content in most schools.” Indeed, religious education has shifted from primarily studying the Bible to a “comparative religion” approach that looks at the festivals and ethics of various religions—with little concern for core beliefs and “even less actual reading of the biblical texts.” This “changing shape of religious education and worship in schools has led to growing ignorance of the Gospel among the young.”¹⁴

Additional research shows that the British public, both adults and children, are almost wholly ignorant of the basic facts surrounding Christianity and world religions. The 2007 Ofsted report on Religious Education (RE) in schools states that there is a problem “even with teachers’ insufficient knowledge of RE at primary school level.”

In her 2000 book *The Church of England: The State It’s In*, Monica Furlong writes: “Children who do not come from churchgoing homes ... now grow up largely ignorant of Christian ideas in a way unimaginable half a century ago.... [Studies] suggest that even the basic Christian ideas are no longer understood by university-educated people, still less by others. Indeed, even churchgoers can reveal an ignorance of the main elements of Christian belief.”¹⁵

The Secularization of the UK

Research confirms the ongoing *secularization* of British society, which is occurring on par with other European countries, such as France. What we must consider is: 1) Has secularization contributed to the demise of Christianity in the UK?; and 2) Conversely, has Christianity's "failure to thrive" contributed to secularization? As we will see, the answer to the first question is obviously *yes*—humanist ideas have supplanted religion in the UK. But less obvious, as I will argue, is that the "failure of Christianity to thrive" in the UK has also *enabled*, even emboldened, the secularization process.

What is most obvious are the *results* or *symptoms* of what has been occurring in religion over the past several decades in Britain. But some confuse these results with the *cause*. For example, some blame *humanism* for the collapse of mainstream Christianity in the UK—particularly the Church of England. Others look at atheism or secularism in general as being causative in the demise of Christianity in Britain.

There is no question that secularism, humanism, and atheism are key issues in the UK. And there is no doubt that such ideologies have long pervaded the entirety of British academia. But has secular humanism directly *caused* the decline of Christianity in the UK? Or, is secular humanism largely a *result* of the overall failure of "institutional religion"?

Is it possible that there has been a growing *void* left by the decline of mainstream Christianity—which in varying ways has been filled by 1) *secular ideologies*—for those who prefer to opt out of religion altogether or who have simply never been properly exposed to Christianity; and 2) *unorthodox faiths*—Christian (such as Pentecostalism) and non-Christian (such as Eastern and New Age).

Many years ago, the West had a rich Christian

to the British Empire.—“The history of the English finding their identity after the two world wars [and the resultant loss of the Empire] is a history of the realization that *there is no Christian Britain*.”¹³

Can the fall of Anglicanism arguably be linked to the fall of the British Empire? To understand, we must look first at what really *drove* the Empire, especially in the 18th century. In his book *Empire*, Niall Ferguson makes this observation about Christianity and the Church of England: “The British Empire is long dead.... [It] was bound to crumble once the British economy buckled under the accumulated burdens of two world wars.... As for the ‘missionary impulse’ that sent thousands of young men and women around the world preaching Christianity..., *that too dwindled, along with public attendance at church*” (p. 358).¹⁴

Thus, Ferguson links the collapse of the Empire with the subsequent decline of the Church of England and of mainstream Christianity. His reference to Britain’s “missionary impulse”—that God uniquely ordained the British to carry Christianity to the world via the utility of the Empire—must not be underestimated. In fact, he argues that the English “concept of empire” was formed primarily on this very “impulse”—in reaction to the empire-building of their Spanish rival. In other words, to counter the *Catholic* empire of the Spanish, the English felt compelled by religious duty to “enlarge and advance ... the faith of Christ on behalf of Protestantism” to all the world (p. 7).

At first, the Empire was all about building power and economic strength through colonization. But over time a new approach took precedence. The goal became “not so much colonization as *civilization*”—i.e., that *British Christianity* would be introduced to heretofore uncivilized areas of the world (p. 116). This movement to “convert [the] indigenous peoples” of the Empire took off in the late 1700s (p. 123). In fact, the Anglican Church Missionary Society formed in 1799 in order to “propagate

seemingly *irrelevant* state-church.” He adds, “With the world so quickly changing around them, Europeans revolted against static institutions [such as the state church] they accused of either causing, or failing to minister to, their sufferings. In most cases, they directed venom toward secular governments, many of which still ruled co-dependently with the established [state] church.”¹¹

The British Parliament and the Church of England are a perfect example of such a “co-dependency”—in which the failures of the government are inextricably linked to the church. If a shadow is cast on one, it is cast on the other. Ultimately, the church is cast off as irrelevant. In turn, Christianity’s “failure to thrive” in the UK has actually contributed to secularization by failing to be the defender of the faith. In other words, a strong and *relevant* church—one that defines culture rather than reflects culture—would be a natural safeguard against secular ideologies. But with a weak, irrelevant church, there is no hope of marginalizing secularism.

British researcher and author Andrew Brown follows a similar line of thinking. He writes that “the narrative of Christian nations within a Christian Europe was underpinned by a sense of national and continental superiority. Two world wars, *the end of empire*, and the occupation of the continent by the U.S. and Russia stopped that looking like common sense.”¹² Brown is suggesting that Britain’s loss of world dominance following the demise of the British Empire has profoundly affected the way Brits look at religion—particularly the Church of England.

Christianity’s Link to the Empire

Brown’s thinking seems to fit with what researcher Vexen Crabtree wrote in 2015: “The absolute, institutionalized, and symbolic strength of the Church of England has disappeared.”—*Why?* Because it was linked

heritage. Between about 400 AD and 1400, the Gospel penetrated the entire western world. But beginning with the 16th century, another “religion” began to develop—*secular humanism*. Slowly, perniciously, this new way of thinking began to work its way into the consciousness of the West—forming first in Britain and Europe, then moving across the Atlantic. By the 17th century, the radical ideas of liberal philosophers began to shape the minds of the most brilliant writers, educators, musicians, artists, politicians—even theologians. Implicated are such notables as Rene Descartes, John Locke, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, John Stewart Mill, John Dewey—to name a few.

Within a few generations, “enlightened” ideologies formed fundamental components of liberal arts curricula at every major western university. After another hundred years or so, these ideas had filtered into the popular culture. It was a slow process, but this is how the West was lost—and Christian thought has suffered most profoundly.

Humanism is the idea that *man* is the ultimate source of truth. Of necessity, humanism utterly rejects the idea of an all-powerful Creator God who has control over man and this world; it revolts against the notion that such a God would command men how to live. Above all, the humanist seeks to be a “law to himself”—to determine his own ethics. From about 1700 to 1900, revolutionary humanist ideas became well established throughout the West.

The humanism that developed in Britain and America was borrowed from classical Greek and Roman philosophy—yet it was adapted with new, “progressive” ideas for the Christianized West. Great writers and artists incarnated these ideas in literary and art forms, which were then taught in high schools and liberal arts universities. Indeed, there is no better way to radicalize whole nations than by infiltrating educational systems. Generation by generation, humanist educators overturned

western civilization by corrupting the minds of teachers, political leaders, priests, and even pastors—all via the universities and seminaries.

While secular academia has been the primary breeding ground for humanistic ideologies, the same philosophies have been surreptitiously incorporated into mainstream society via the mass media—thanks largely to Hollywood, Nashville, and MTV. As Kevin Swanson writes in his book *Apostate*, “The media has replaced the church and the family as the dominant means by which society transfers information, inculcates worldviews, and forms [its] culture.”⁶

Humanism vs. Religion

For decades, western academics have accepted the standard “secularization thesis,” which asserts that intellectual advancement (i.e., *humanism*), along with economic modernization, has led people *beyond* a need for faith, to a more “enlightened” and more *secular* mode of life.⁷ Europe’s ongoing and increasing contempt for organized religion has been their prime example—and perhaps no nation flaunts its secularism more proudly than France, which has morphed into a staunchly secularist state.

But in recent decades the “secularization thesis” has been seriously called into question. According to Collin Hansen of “Christianity Today,” this intellectual shift is primarily because of the example of American Christianity. Christianity in America, he notes, “has survived and thrived despite suffering many of the same factors that have proved so troubling to Europe. Americans have been dragged into modernity by scientific advance, brutalized by modern mechanized warfare, battered by urban squalor, seduced by consumerist materialism, and bombarded by anti-Christian [humanistic] critiques from a secularist media and academic establishment. But through it all, they have

clung to faith and resisted the destructive ideologies that [have] so deeply scarred 20th-century Europe.”⁸

But *why* should American Christianity survive the assault of secular humanism when British Christianity has not? Hansen, along with other researchers, believes the answer has to do with the fact that American Christianity is not a *state* religion. He writes that “the contrast between Europe’s long legacy of *government-sponsored religion* and America’s historically recent and unique *separation of church and state* provides one wide window on European Christianity’s decline.” Hansen argues that European Christendom has, from its very inception, suffered from the church’s “intimate relationship” with the state—be it Catholic or Church of England. But because of an environment of open religious competition, American Protestant denominations have, for the most part, thrived across time both in numbers and vitality. Still, churchgoing in America is also in decline, but for completely different reasons.⁹

What this suggests is that *state sponsored religion*—Catholicism and Anglicanism—is by its very nature inferior and more prone to ultimately fail. Because of their intimate connection to state government—especially in the case of the Church of England—state religions (or state churches) are at times *held in the same contempt* as the government that sponsors them. When states fail the people they rule, the resultant backlash goes not only against the government, but against the “government church.” As goes the government, so goes the state church. The more corrupt, ineffective, and irrelevant the government gets, the more the state religion is viewed with suspicion. After all, to many “the Church of England [is] a political invention.”¹⁰

Hansen writes, “Shocked by the tremendous human toll of world war”—not to mention the Great Depression—“Europe’s masses began turning toward other ideologies ... which they perceived could speak more directly to their everyday circumstances than a