

Happy Friday, New South Family. Welcome to the 61st edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending September 18, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

Announcements

1) Local Church Annual Meeting Bishops' Announcement: Because our Book of Discipline allows for electronic ballots at the national level, and due to these extraordinary times, the Board of Bishops has determined that being physically present at an annual society meeting is not necessary to vote at the present time. Options include:

- information sent through the mail
- information sent through email and available online
- live-streamed society meeting
- recorded society meeting with voting taking place at the end
- online voting
- mail-in voting
- in-person voting

No matter what form your society meeting takes, please ensure that:

- information and materials are available online or in packets at least 10 days ahead of time, including information on any vote that will be taken.
- the form of the society meeting (virtual, live-stream, recorded, in person, combination) is clearly communicated to all members at least 10 days ahead of time.
- there is clarity on the voting deadline (with enough time for ballots to be received).

2) Mustering of the Men Cancelled This Year: Due primarily to the restrictions placed on Kentucky camps, we are choosing to cancel this event this year. Let's make next year's event twice as good!

Church of the Week: Let's keep the Pastor Tim Huff and the Murphy FMC (NC) in our prayers this week. .

Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern; in-person schedule subject to COVID restrictions)

September 23-25:	New Room Conference, Nashville, TN – all online this year.
October 7-8:	Superintendent's Leadership Team (SLT) - Zoom
October 16:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
October 16:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
October 17:	MEG / MAC Meeting – Wilmore, 8:00a
November 12:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
December 10:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 19:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
March 19:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
March 20:	MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00a
June 17-20:	NSC Family Camp – Eagle Ridge (tentative dates)

And now...

-----**The Important**-----

Resources

1) **Attached is a Provocative Article...** by Ronald Inglehard entitled, *Giving Up on God*. It's too long to print here, but it's worth opening and reading.

2) **New Room Conference, by Asbury Seminary is Free!** This year only, Asbury announces *A Night with New Room*, Friday evening, Sept. 25, 2020! From ATS: "As you would expect, due to the ever-changing restrictions and limitations of COVID-19, and with the safety of everyone in mind, we've made the difficult decision to transition the New Room Conference 2020 to an alternate format for this year. In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty, God is still making a way for us to come together. Never before in our lifetimes have we experienced such a protracted period of crisis. And never before have we experienced such a profound opportunity for awakening. [This is the reason for A Night with New Room. Click here!](#)"

3) **A Good Article on Ike** from one of my favorite college professors:

As other statues and monuments are being removed or criticized throughout our nation, a new \$150 million memorial located near the U.S. Capitol will be dedicated Thursday honoring the general who helped defeat the Axis Powers in World War II and the president who worked diligently to preserve peace during the Cold War.

Occupying a four-acre plot in front of the Education Department, the memorial's two principal exhibits are Eisenhower as the Supreme Commander speaking to Allied troops before the D-Day invasion of Normandy and as president meeting with his advisers in the Oval Office.

Eisenhower saw World War II as a God-inspired crusade to protect democracy and religion against the Axis tyranny. When soldiers asked the general why they were fighting, "the simplest and best answer" he could give was that "they were defending a free way of life"—free education, freedom of speech and worship, free enterprise, free homes—"which rested on a religious foundation."

Achieving "enduring peace, while living in freedom," Eisenhower proclaimed, "must ever be the overriding goal of our American foreign policy." The only way to counter "a regime that wages total cold war," he insisted, "is to wage total peace." Eisenhower hoped that people realized "the United States was truly trying to follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace, and to establish a just peace for the world." "Bullets and guns and planes and ships" could "produce no real or lasting peace," he declared. Neither could "edicts and treaties, no matter how solemnly signed," nor could economic arrangements, no matter how favorable they were. "Only a great moral crusade" carrying out God's teachings would be successful.

Eisenhower's administration negotiated treaties, worked to decrease armaments, arranged cultural and educational exchanges with numerous nations, promoted mutually profitable trade, and developed programs for mutual security. To reduce the threat of nuclear war, Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" proposal invited the three atomic powers—the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union—to place most of their fissionable material under the authority of an international atomic energy agency. In addition, his "Open Skies" initiative proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union give each other a complete blueprint of their military establishments and provide facilities for aerial reconnaissance of the other nation.

Some historians insist that Eisenhower was more of a "hawk than a prince of peace." Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., for example, maintains that Eisenhower's military posture "made it almost impossible for the United States to fight anything short of nuclear war." Eisenhower admitted on numerous occasions that his greatest failure in foreign policy was that he did not improve relations with the Soviets or reduce the arms race.

Other scholars defend Eisenhower's record in foreign affairs. "For eight years," Robert Divine contends, "he kept the United States at peace, adroitly avoiding military involvement in the crises of the 1950s." Stephen

Ambrose argues that Eisenhower almost single-handedly slowed the pace of the arms race, refused to escalate defense spending, strengthened the NATO alliance, maintained generally positive relations with Arab states, Latin American republics, Japan, and South Korea, and managed numerous international crises effectively.

In his final State of the Union Address, Eisenhower declared that his administration had increased “the spiritual, moral and material strength of the nation.” He pointed to ending the war in Korea, resolving crises in the Suez and Lebanon, deposing communist regimes in Guatemala and Iran, preserving the freedom of West Berlin, strengthening America’s military defenses and space program, significantly improving its economy, developing the federal highway system, advancing black civil rights, greatly increasing funding for education, and broadening social security coverage.

Eisenhower is widely considered one of the most religious presidents in American history. He attended church regularly, proclaimed national days of prayer, and invited Billy Graham and other influential clergy to the White House. His speeches contain more religious rhetoric than almost any other president, and Eisenhower repeatedly called for a spiritual revival and a moral crusade to remedy the nation’s ills. While he was president, the highly publicized national prayer breakfasts began, the words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and Congress made the phrase “In God We Trust” the national motto. Eisenhower’s commitment to prayer and church attendance, support of religious organizations and endeavors, and frequent discussion of religious themes indicate that his faith helped shape his thinking and actions as president.

Inspired in part by his faith, Eisenhower promoted a “dynamic conservatism” that prodded voluntary organizations to combat economic and social problems and used the power of the federal government to remedy social ills when their resources were insufficient. The Republican preferred individualistic to collectivistic solutions to the nation’s social problems, and he maintained that social progress depended more on changing human hearts than on altering social structures. Human welfare, he insisted, was best advanced “not by government paternalism but by helping people help themselves.” Led by “those with strong moral motivation and spiritual resources,” Americans could work together through families and voluntary associations to alleviate social maladies. Eisenhower believed with Abraham Lincoln that “government should do for the people what they could not do well for themselves or at all, but it should keep out of those things that people can do for themselves.”

Eisenhower prodded Americans to rededicate themselves to traditional moral values and the religious convictions of their forefathers. By repeatedly referring to God, religion, and spirituality in public addresses, arguing that spiritual revival was essential to national renewal, worshipping regularly, and supporting religious groups and activities, Eisenhower encouraged Americans to deepen their spiritual life and improve their moral practices.

Although he did not move as fast and forcefully on civil rights as many blacks desired and, like all human beings, had character flaws, his life and legacy deserved to be celebrated.

Dr. Gary Scott Smith, Professor of History Emeritus, Grove City College.

Job Openings

At this point, we have two churches who need pastors: Greeneville (TN) and Harriman (TN)
Please keep this process in your prayers – that the Lord would provide shepherds for His flock.
Remember too that [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at FMC Human Resources.

September Birthdays (*that we know of)

Cole, Buffy September 19
Matthews, Doug September 30

McPeake, Patti September 21

*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at newsouthconference@gmail.com

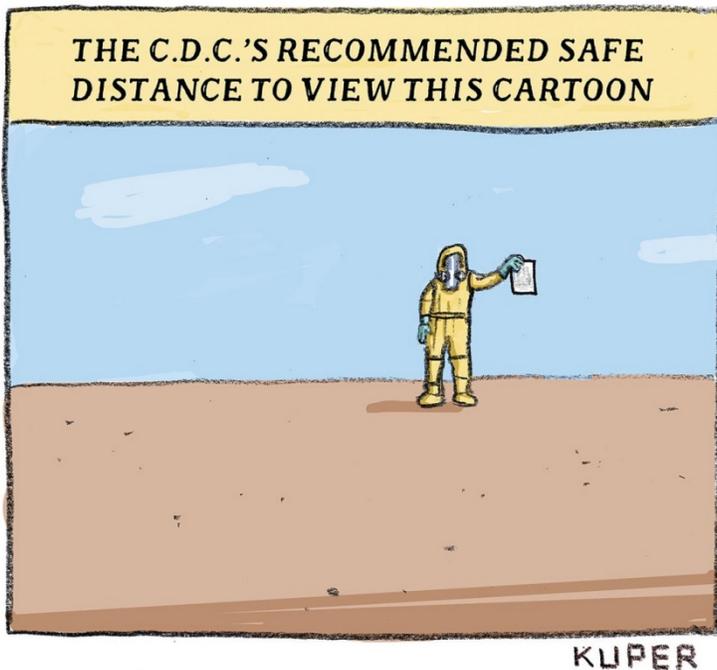
This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: The Sundays September 20 and 27 are our World Mission Week, hearing from missionaries Mike and Vicki Reynen (FM Area Directors, Africa) and Ricardo and Beth Gomez (FM Area Directors, Latin America) which means I'm not preaching. This Saturday, however, I am conducting a memorial service for Dr. Don Joy – long time Wilmore FMC member, Wabash Conference elder and denominational executive and educator. In that context, I've been thinking a lot on Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58, and their encouragement in the face of bodily death.

Quote: "The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

— Martin Luther

Joke:



Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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Giving Up on God
The Global Decline of Religion
By Ronald F. Inglehart
September/October 2020

In the early years of the twenty-first century, religion seemed to be on the rise. The collapse of both communism and the Soviet Union had left an ideological vacuum that was being filled by Orthodox Christianity in Russia and other post-Soviet states. The election in the United States of President George W. Bush, an evangelical Christian who made no secret of his piety, suggested that evangelical Christianity was rising as a political force in the country. And the 9/11 attacks directed international attention to the power of political Islam in the Muslim world.

A dozen years ago, my colleague Pippa Norris and I analyzed data on religious trends in 49 countries, including a few subnational territories such as Northern Ireland, from which survey evidence was available from 1981 to 2007 (these countries contained 60 percent of the world's population). We did not find a universal resurgence of religion, despite claims to that effect—most high-income countries became less religious—but we did find that in 33 of the 49 countries we studied, people became more religious during those years. This was true in most former communist countries, in most developing countries, and even in a number of high-income countries. Our findings made it clear that industrialization and the spread of scientific knowledge were not causing religion to disappear, as some scholars had once assumed.

But since 2007, things have changed with surprising speed. From about 2007 to 2019, the overwhelming majority of the countries we studied—43 out of 49—became less religious. The decline in belief was not confined to high-income countries and appeared across most of the world.

Growing numbers of people no longer find religion a necessary source of support and meaning in their lives. Even the United States—long cited as proof that an economically advanced society can be strongly religious—has now joined other wealthy countries in moving away from religion. Several forces are driving this trend, but the most powerful one is the waning hold of a set of beliefs closely linked to the imperative of maintaining high birthrates. Modern societies have become less religious in part because they no longer need to uphold the kinds of gender and sexual norms that the major world religions have instilled for centuries.

Although some religious conservatives warn that the retreat from faith will lead to a collapse of social cohesion and public morality, the evidence doesn't support this claim. As unexpected as it may seem, countries that are less religious actually tend to be less corrupt and have lower murder rates than more religious ones. Needless to say, religion itself doesn't encourage corruption and crime. This phenomenon reflects the fact that as societies develop, survival becomes more secure: starvation, once pervasive, becomes uncommon; life expectancy increases; murder and other forms of violence diminish. And as this level of security rises, people tend to become less religious.

Our earlier study, published in 2011, compared levels of religious belief measured as early as 1981 with findings from the latest surveys then available, from around 2007, bridging a period of roughly a quarter century. In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate how important God was in their lives by choosing a value on a scale ranging from one—"Not at all important"—to ten—"Very important."

Examining how a country's level of religiosity changed over time led to some striking findings. A majority of the countries surveyed showed upticks in a belief in the importance of God. The largest increases were in former communist countries. For example, from 1981 to 2007, the mean score of the Bulgarian public rose from 3.6 to 5.7. In Russia, it rose from 4.0 to 6.0. In part, this growth in religiosity was a response to the severe decline of economic, physical, and psychological security experienced after the Soviet Union disintegrated; religion was filling the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of communism. Religious beliefs also increased in many developing countries outside the former Soviet Union, including Brazil, China, Mexico, and South Africa. On the other hand, religion declined in most high-income countries.

Since 2007, there has been a remarkably sharp trend away from religion. In virtually every high-income country, religion has continued to decline. At the same time, many poor countries, together with most of the former communist states, have also become less religious. From 2007 to 2019, only five countries became more religious, whereas the vast majority of the countries studied moved in the opposite direction. (For a graph of these shifts, [click here](#).)

India is the most important exception to the general pattern of declining religiosity. The period of the study coincides roughly with the return to power of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, whose brand of politics seeks to conflate national identity with religious identity. The BJP government has advocated policies that discriminate against the followers of other religions, particularly India's large Muslim minority, polarizing communities and whipping up religious sentiments.

The most dramatic shift away from religion has taken place among the American public.

The most dramatic shift away from religion has taken place among the American public. From 1981 to 2007, the United States ranked as one of the world's more religious countries, with religiosity levels changing very little. Since then, the United States has shown the largest move away from religion of any country for which we have data. Near the end of the initial period studied, Americans' mean rating of the importance of God in their lives was 8.2 on a ten-point scale. In the most recent U.S. survey, from 2017, the figure had dropped to 4.6, an astonishingly sharp decline. For years, the United States had been the key case demonstrating that economic modernization need not produce secularization. By this measure, the United States now ranks as the 11th least religious country for which we have data.

Influential thinkers from Karl Marx to Max Weber to Émile Durkheim predicted that the spread of scientific knowledge would dispel religion throughout the world, but that did not happen. For most people, religious faith was more emotional than cognitive. And for most of human history, sheer survival was uncertain. Religion provided assurance that the world was in the hands of an infallible higher power (or powers) who promised that, if one followed the rules, things would ultimately work out for the best. In a world where people often lived near starvation, religion helped them cope with severe uncertainty and stress. But as economic and technological development took place, people became increasingly able to escape starvation, cope with disease, and suppress violence. They become less dependent on religion—and less willing to accept its constraints, including keeping women in the kitchen and gay people in the closet—as existential insecurity diminished and life expectancy rose.

Secularization doesn't happen everywhere at once; it occurs when countries have attained high levels of existential security, and even then it usually moves at a glacial pace, as one generation replaces another. It can even reverse itself, with societies becoming more religious if they experience prolonged periods of diminished security. Secularization has been gradually taking place since the nineteenth century, starting with the societies of western Europe and North America that were most secure economically and physically and then spreading to more and more parts of the world.

Although secularization normally occurs at the pace of intergenerational population replacement, it can reach a tipping point when the dominant opinion shifts and, swayed by the forces of conformism and social desirability, people start to favor the outlook they once opposed—producing exceptionally rapid cultural change. Younger and better-educated groups in high-income countries have recently reached this threshold.

Several other factors beyond rising levels of economic and technological development help explain the waning of religion. In the United States, politics accounts for some of the decline. Since the 1990s, the Republican Party has sought to win support by adopting conservative Christian positions on same-sex marriage, abortion, and other cultural issues. But this political appeal to religious voters has had the corollary effect of pushing other voters, especially those who are young and culturally liberal, away from religion. It once was generally assumed that religious beliefs shaped political views, not the other way around. But recent evidence indicates that the causality can run the other way: panel studies have found that many people change their political views first and then become less religious.

The uncritical embrace of President Donald Trump—a leader who cannot be described as a paragon of Christian virtue—by many prominent evangelicals has led other evangelicals to fear that young people will desert their churches in droves, accelerating an ongoing trend. The Roman Catholic Church, for its part, has lost adherents because of its own crises. Earlier this year, the Pew Research Center found that fully 92 percent of U.S. adults were aware of recent reports

of sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and about 80 percent of those surveyed said they believed that the abuses were “ongoing problems that are still happening.” Accordingly, 27 percent of U.S. Catholics polled said that they had scaled back their attendance at Mass in response to these reports.

But perhaps the most important force behind secularization is a transformation concerning the norms governing human fertility. For many centuries, most societies assigned to women the role of producing as many children as possible and discouraged divorce, abortion, homosexuality, contraception, and any sexual behavior not linked to reproduction. The sacred writings of the world’s major religions vary greatly, but as Norris and I have demonstrated, virtually all world religions instilled these pro-fertility norms in their adherents. Religions emphasized the importance of fertility because it was necessary. In the world of high infant mortality and low life expectancy that prevailed until recently, the average woman had to produce five to eight children in order to simply replace the population.

During the twentieth century, a growing number of countries attained drastically reduced infant mortality rates and higher life expectancies, making these traditional cultural norms no longer necessary. This process didn’t happen overnight. The major world religions had presented pro-fertility norms as absolute moral rules and stoutly resisted change. People only slowly gave up the familiar beliefs and societal roles they had known since childhood concerning gender and sexual behavior. But when a society reached a sufficiently high level of economic and physical security, younger generations grew up taking that security for granted, and the norms around fertility receded. Ideas, practices, and laws concerning gender equality, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality are now changing rapidly.

This shift is quantifiable. Data collected in the World Values Survey over the years offer a glimpse of a deep transformation. The survey uses a ten-point scale based on each country’s acceptance of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. The tipping point is around the middle of the scale, at 5.50: lower scores indicate that a majority of the country’s people harbor more conservative views, and higher scores indicate that a majority have more liberal views centered on individual choice. Around 1981, majorities in every country for which we have data supported pro-fertility norms. Even in high-income countries, the mean scores ranged from as low as 3.44 (Spain), 3.49 (the United States), 3.50 (Japan), 4.14 (the United Kingdom), and 4.63 (Finland) to as high as 5.35 for Sweden—then the most liberal country but with a score still slightly below the scale’s tipping point. But a profound change was underway. By 2019, Spain’s mean score had risen to 6.74, the United States’ to 5.86, Japan’s to 6.17, the United Kingdom’s to 6.90, Finland’s to 7.35, and Sweden’s to 8.49. All these countries were below the 5.50 tipping point when first surveyed, and all of them were above it by 2019. These numbers offer a simplified picture of a complex reality, but they convey the scale of the recent acceleration of secularization.

This trend has been spreading to the rest of the world, with one major exception. The populations of the 18 Muslim-majority countries for which data are available in the World Values Survey have stayed far below the tipping point, remaining strongly religious and committed to preserving traditional norms concerning gender and fertility. Even controlling for economic development, Muslim-majority countries tend to be somewhat more religious and culturally conservative than average.

For centuries, religion has served as a force for social cohesion, reducing crime and encouraging compliance with the law. Every major religion inculcates some version of the biblical commandments “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not kill.” So it is understandable that religious conservatives fear that the retreat of religion will lead to social disarray, with rising corruption and crime. But to a surprising extent, that concern is not supported by the evidence.

Since 1993, Transparency International has monitored the relative corruption and honesty of government officials and business people around the world. Each year, this watchdog group publishes the Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks public-sector corruption in 180 countries and territories. These data make it possible to test the actual relationship between religiosity and corruption: Is corruption less widespread in religious countries than in less religious ones? The answer is an unequivocal no—in fact, religious countries actually tend to be more corrupt than secular ones. The highly secular Nordic states have some of the world’s lowest levels of corruption, and highly religious countries, such as Bangladesh, Guatemala, Iraq, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, have some of the highest.

Clearly, religiosity does not cause corruption. Countries with low levels of economic and physical security tend to have high levels of religiosity and also high levels of corruption. Although religion may once have played a crucial role in supporting public morality, that role shrinks as societies develop economically. The people of religious countries are slightly more likely to condemn corruption than the people of less religious countries, but the impact of religion on behavior ends there. Religion may make people more punitive, but it does not make them less corrupt.

This pattern also applies to other crimes, such as murder. As surprising as it may seem, the murder rate is more than ten times as high in the most religious countries as it is in the least religious countries. Some relatively poor countries have low murder rates, but overall, prosperous countries that provide their residents with material and legal security are much safer than poor countries. It is not that religiosity causes murders, of course, but that both crime and religiosity tend to be high in societies with low levels of existential security.

Religious countries actually tend to be more corrupt than secular ones.

The evidence suggests that modern societies will not descend into nihilistic chaos without religious faith to bind them, but that may not always have been the case. In early agrarian societies, when most people lived just above the survival level, religion may have been the most effective way to maintain order and cohesion. But modernization has changed the equation. As traditional religiosity declines, an equally strong set of moral norms seems to be emerging to fill the void. Evidence from the World Values Survey indicates that in highly secure and secular countries, people are giving increasingly high priority to self-expression and free choice, with a growing emphasis on human rights, tolerance of outsiders, environmental protection, gender equality, and freedom of speech.

Traditional religions can be dangerously divisive in contemporary global society. Religions inherently tend to present their norms as absolute values, despite the fact that they actually reflect their societies' histories and socioeconomic characteristics. The rigidity of any absolute belief system can give rise to fanatical intolerance, as the historical conflicts between Catholics and Protestants and Christians and Muslims have demonstrated.

As societies develop from agrarian to industrial to knowledge-based, growing existential security tends to reduce the importance of religion in people's lives, and people become less obedient to traditional religious leaders and institutions. That trend seems likely to continue, but the future is always uncertain. Pandemics such as the COVID-19 one reduce people's sense of existential security. If the pandemic lasts for many years or leads to a new Great Depression, the cultural changes of recent decades might begin to reverse.

But that shift remains unlikely, because it would run counter to the powerful, long-term, technology-driven trend of growing prosperity and increased life expectancy that is helping push people away from religion. If that trend continues, the influence that traditional religious authorities wield over public morality will keep shrinking as a culture of growing tolerance becomes ever stronger.

RONALD F. INGLEHART is Amy and Alan Lowenstein Professor Emeritus of Democracy, Democratization, and Human Rights at the University of Michigan and the author of the forthcoming book *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It and What Comes Next?*