



Messenger Project Newsletter

The Messenger

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A NONPROFIT CORPORATION PROMOTING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE ARTS

Messenger Project Members

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Messenger Notes

Dan Waterman is recording lead guitar tracks for our upcoming **Messenger Project** CD. We are hoping to schedule bass and drum recording sessions this month. Finding common free time has proven elusive throughout the month of April.

Declining Churches

Many polls indicate that the percentage of adults who regularly attend religious services is about 40% in the U.S., 20% in Canada, and perhaps 10% or less in Europe. But the true figures are about half the stated figures (about 20% in the U.S. and 10% in Canada). Church attendance has been slipping since the 1960s, and especially in Western Europe since the 1980s. In 1995, 40% of the Dutch said they belonged to no church or religion (up from 18% in 1960).

Unused churches are found in Britain, France, Germany, and elsewhere in northern Europe. Many are closed, but more than 250 have been sold in the last two decades. They have been converted into libraries, shops, cultural centers, restaurants, coffee houses, clubs, music halls, apartments and discotheques.

There's a trend in Germany where people just want to live their lives and have fun. A recent study predicts that 50% of Germany's churches may close or be turned into other uses. Pressures on European churches include secularization, villages emptying as people move to find work and a state religion tax collected from all church members, which keeps thousands from joining.

Some argue that church membership decline is attributed to its departure from traditional Christian teaching. Others argue that the church has not kept up with the times and has become irrelevant to younger generations. But declining church attendance can't be explained solely on church services or teachings, because there has also been a steady rise of secular influence against the church.

In 1740, David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* was instrumental in the rise of Rationalism (reasoning as a basis for truth vs. Biblical truth). In the late 1800s, Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* set the groundwork for the theory of evolution. In 1933, *The Humanist Manifesto* was written to erase distinctions between the human and divine, endorsing evolution over Creation. In 1948, religious education was ruled unconstitutional in America's public schools. In the early 1960s, reading the Bible and reciting official prayers was outlawed from public schools in the United States. By the end of the 1980s, posting the Ten Commandments and teaching Creation in public schools was unconstitutional in the United States. With less exposure to the Bible and conflicting scientific teachings about the origin of life in public schools, it is no wonder that less people became interested in attending church or learning about Jesus Christ.

Church history is partly to blame for its decline in attendance. Hypocrisy and corruption have plagued the church (Inquisition, Ku-Klux-Klan, pedophile priests, etc.), tarnishing its credibility as trustworthy servants of Christ. Some people are abandoning the church in favor of home churches (like the original churches in and around Jerusalem). Other people are abandoning religion altogether and are adopting a personal philosophy of life without God and eternity.

Because the divorce rate among Christians equals the secular world, Christian family values are diminished. Christianity has split into numerous sects (some with conflicting beliefs), diluting the power of the gospel and creating controversy and confusion within various churches. Key differences between churches is how much emphasis is placed on the Bible. To some denominations the Bible is the inerrant word of God, to others it is the flawed works of noble men.

Adding to the confusion of various conflicting church practices and beliefs are outside attacks against Jesus and the gospel. The Islamic Koran denies Jesus' divinity and crucifixion. There are sensational news stories about the bones of Jesus being discovered. There are apocryphal books (writings that were excluded from the Bible when it was codified) like the *Gospel of*

Thomas and the *Gospel of Judas* that are receiving renewed interest. There is debate among religious scholars over what Jesus actually said (opposed to Scripture). There are some who deny that Jesus existed. It is no wonder that less people in Europe and America attend church. The secular use of the word *Christian* has changed from a compliment (faithful follower of Christ) to a critique (closed-minded religionist).

But the church is far from dead. Although America and Europe are in religious decline, 20,000 Africans come to Christ every day. Africa was 3% Christian in 1900 and is now over 50% Christian. In 1900, Korea had no Protestant church and the country was deemed impossible to penetrate. Today Korea is 30% Christian with 7000 churches in Seoul (several have over 1,000,000 members). About 500 Muslims come to faith in Christ every month in Iran--a country ranked among the top ten persecutors of Christians in the world. The number of Christians in Indonesia has grown from 1.3 million forty years ago to over 11 million today. No Christian was officially allowed to live in Nepal until 1960. Now there is a church in every one of the 75 districts of Nepal with estimates of over half a million believers. There are currently 60-80 million Christians in China with over 10,000 daily converts.

The decline of church attendance in Europe and America is a trend that will continue, barring a miraculous revival or catastrophic event (there was a rise in church attendance after the 9/11 terrorist attack against the United States). The western world is moving away from God. This generation is only interested in what the present world has to offer. There is no fear of God because Christianity is replaced with secular humanist reasoning (God is a creation of man's mind, excellent codes of behavior/morality can be created through reason).

To non-believers, I ask why would Jesus' disciples (and Paul) invent the resurrection? They condemn themselves (and us) if it is a hoax. Jesus predicted his resurrection, but his disciples didn't believe it until they saw it with their own eyes. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Jn 20:29)