Research Reveals Sharp Decline in Faith in Britain

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New research from the National Center for Social Research paints a bleak picture of declining faith in Britain.

The survey of more than 4,000 people across Britain found that the number of people describing themselves as Christian has dropped in the last 25 years from 66 percent to 50 percent.

The national center said the drop was due largely to the steady decline in numbers belonging to the Church of England, with only 23 percent of those surveyed describing themselves as Anglican today in comparison to 40 percent of the population in 1983.

The survey found that even among those describing themselves as Anglican, half said they never attended church at all and less than one fifth said they attended church once a month.

While the Church of England has experienced a sizeable drop in attendance, non-Christian faiths have seen a small increase in affiliation, from two per cent to seven per cent. The national center said immigration and population growth amongst ethnic minorities had contributed to the growth.

The number of Britons saying that they do not belong to any particular faith rose from 31 percent in 1983 to 43 percent today.

A survey was also conducted in the United States, where the national center found ties to religious faith to be far stronger than in Britain.

Sixty-one percent of Americans said they had "no doubt" that God exists, compared with just 17 percent in Britain. Thirty-seven percent of Britons described themselves as atheist or agnostic compared to only eight percent in the United States.

While 70 percent of Americans said they adhere to a particular religion, believe in God and attend religious services, just a quarter of people (26 percent) in Britain said the same.

The survey also identified what it called the "fuzzy faithful" – those who identify with a religion, believe in God or attend services, but not all three. In the United States, fuzzy faithfuls make up 24 percent of the population, compared with 36 percent in Britain.

In Britain, 73 percent of those surveyed felt people with strong religious beliefs were often too intolerant of others, compared with 66 percent in the United States.

In spite of the decline in people identifying with the church in Britain, 79 percent of people still think religious faith provides comfort in times of trouble. In the states, 95 percent think so.

When it comes to politics, both countries favor the separation of religion and state, with 67 percent in Britain and 66 percent of Americans saying that religious leaders should not try to influence government decision-making.

Professor David Voas, who analyzed the survey data, said: "Americans and Britons are surprisingly similar in many of their attitudes. Most people are pragmatic: religion has personal and social benefits, but faith should not be taken too far.

"From politics to private life, many domains are seen as off limits to clerical involvement."

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