

as emotional nonsense that stems from fear of death (1994:5). He added that his "fellow physicists are as a general rule atheists, believing that religion is a phenomenon of a prescientific worldview. They are convinced that the God hypothesis is one which was refuted long ago" (1994: xiv).

Cornell historian of biology William Provine argued that, before the 1920s, most evolutionists were theists, but by the end of the 1940s "all trace of God had been eliminated from evolutionary biology" (Tipler 1994:9).

Summary

What appears to be conflicts between the above studies are not necessarily irreconcilable. The Stark study cited, for example, looked at American scientists in general, and three of the studies researched primarily highly eminent scientists teaching at leading universities. Many scientists are essentially technicians, working to achieve very specific technological goals—and this is true even of those working in biotechnology and genetic recombinant DNA research. The level of commitment and strength of belief is not always easy to determine. Many scientists attend church for the sake of their families, and many are simply following the tradition in which they were raised. Some individuals who are very active in the church may have a very weak belief in the teachings of Christianity, and others who are not active in a formal church may have very strong beliefs. The problems of the nominal Christian and uncommitted believers have been well documented.

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(Continued on p. 54)

Religion and Crime: Do They Go Together?

Lisa Conyers and Philip D. Harvey

Charles W. Colson, the convicted Watergate felon, went on after prison to found a volunteer program for reforming prisoners. As part of that program, he advocated the broader use of religious values to help break "America's seemingly-indomitable cycle of crime."

In a talk before the National Press Club

really reduce crime?

Surprisingly, recent research suggests that a religious person is more likely to commit a crime than a non-religious person. One can even argue that the more religious the society, the more likely it is to have high crime rates.

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"Surprisingly, recent research suggests that a religious person is more likely to commit a crime than a non-religious person. One can even argue that the more religious the society, the more likely it is to have high crime rates."

in Washington, D.C., Colson chided the media for giving "short shrift" to religious values, "including the acknowledgment of the relevance of morality in society."

But how relevant is religion to morality? Does religion make a person more ethical? Can a strong dose of religion

believer in a religion is less likely to do a good deed than is a nonbeliever. Religion alone, many researchers agree, does not determine personal moral behavior.

Renowned sociologist Alfie Kohn, author of *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* and *You Know What They Say . . . The Truth About Popular Beliefs*, has taken on the myths surrounding altruism and empathy in his recent book, *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*. With this book he continues his reasoned refutation

Lisa Conyers is a writer and researcher based in Mount Vernon, Washington. Philip D. Harvey writes on a wide variety of public policy issues from Washington, D.C.

of popular beliefs, proving that man is by nature as likely to be altruistic as selfish or gentle as opposed to aggressive. This book reviews the available research on the impact of religion on behavior and brings us Kohn's conclusion that "religious faith appears to be neither necessary for one to act pro-socially nor sufficient to ensure such behavior."

Kohn adds there is "virtually no connection one way or the other" between religious belief or affiliation and pro-social social activities.

Among studies Kohn cites is one done on 700 city dwellers. It found that religious people were no more likely to be sociable, helpful to neighbors, or eager to participate in neighborhood groups than non-religious people.

In another study, researchers asked students about their religious affiliation and their willingness to cheat on a test. The majority of only one group resisted cheating: atheists.

Kohn also describes an experiment in which researchers told students that a person in another room had just fallen off a ladder. The finding: There was no relationship between a student's belief in the Bible's accuracy and his or her willingness to aid the ladder "victim."

Two thousand years of preachments about the Good Samaritan have not changed an "obvious fact about altruism," explains Morton Hunt, another avid researcher into human nature. People tend to practice altruism toward those in their own group, Hunt says, but not those outside it, "for whom they feel anything from indifference to hatred."

Hunt is the author of seventeen books in the behavioral and social sciences, including the best-selling *The Universe Within* and *Profiles of Social Research: The Scientific Study of Human Interactions*. He is a frequent contributor to the *New York Times* magazine and is well known as a behavioral scientist. In his book Hunt cites extensive research done by Samuel and Pearl Oliner on rescuers of Jews during World War II. Their analysis shows that 90% of the rescuers had had religious upbringing, yet only 15% cited religion as the main reason for what they did. Further, there was no significant difference between the religiosity of rescuers and that of a control group.

In his book *The Compassionate Beast: What Science Is Discovering About the Humane Side of Humankind*, Hunt writes: "It has not only been Goths, Huns and other barbarians who have relished slaughtering their enemies; civilized people, whose religions exalt altruism and the love of mankind, have done likewise."

Logician-philosopher Bertrand Russell went even further in *Why I Am Not a Christian*:

The more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. . . .

You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in criminal law, every step towards the diminution of war, every step towards better treatment of the colored races, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world. [p. 20]

If religion does not deter war, can it at least deter crime? Is there any evidence that Charles Colson's project to instill more religion in prisoners will cut the rate of violence? Not according to research by Lee Ellis of the University of North Dakota at Minot. Dr. Ellis has published widely in the social sciences on the topics of religiosity, criminal, and violent behavior, rape and sexual behavior. He has devoted a lifetime to examining the relationship between religion and crime.

In comparing denominational religions, Ellis found Jews to be the least criminal, by far, and Catholics the most. But a group showing a crime rate equal to or lower than that of Jews was one composed of people claiming no religious affiliation. Seeking further empirical confirmation, Ellis is conducting a study of 16,000 respondents to see if he can replicate those findings. Ellis is also conducting a comparison of crime rates with available information on religious affiliation by country, to see if he can further support his findings.

Sociologists William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark of Towson State University in Maryland differ with Ellis over the part religion plays in impeding crime. They argue that religion itself does

not decide whether a person will commit a crime. What is crucial, they say, is whether the group or society to which that individual belongs is religious and enforces religious values. Any strong social group that molds behavior, even a high school sports team, can determine whether a person will behave morally.

Bainbridge and Stark support their views with analyses of large computer databases. Their grist includes crime statistics from the Department of Justice for every county in the country. It also contains data on religious groups gathered by the Census Bureau and services for the study of religion.

In a brief demonstration of their database, Bainbridge showed a strong correlation between areas of low church membership and larceny. He then wiped out that correlation by introducing a second variable, transience. He found that transience relates strongly, too, to many other crimes.

Bainbridge says: "Even if you do not consider yourself a religious person, you are only a generation or two removed from a religious upbringing, and you also live in a society in which the majority are religious, and religious values are ingrained in the laws and social rules of the society. Therefore, you are in fact influenced by religion and that religion instills values in you. The United States is in fact a very religious country."

Evidence from other sources supports Bainbridge's last sentence. Statistics from *Where We Stand*, a book written by the World Rank Research Team, suggests that 91% of the population in the United States believes in God. That compares with 48% in the United Kingdom and 47% in Japan.

The percent of people who believe in their religious leaders is 43% in the United States. It is only 6% in Japan and 3% in the United Kingdom and Germany. The portion believing in hell is 76% in the United States. Compare that with 53% in Japan, 38% in Australia, 35% in the United Kingdom, and 16% in Germany.

The Gallup Poll finds that 81% of people in the United States consider themselves religious persons. That is two points lower than Italy, but well ahead of Ireland, Spain, Great Britain, West Germany, Hungary, France, and

Scandinavia. Ireland far surpasses the United States in the number of people who attend church at least weekly. Still, the United States leads most other major countries by a wide margin.

Those figures, Ellis counters, simply prove the fallacy of Bainbridge's argument. If America is very religious, and if religious communities thwart crime, one would expect to find a very low crime rate in the United States. The opposite is true; the United States is among the most criminal, violent countries in the industrialized world.

Where We Stand cites these figures: The United States has 8.4 murders per 100,000 people. Rates in Germany, Australia, Portugal, France, Denmark, and Canada range between 4.2 and 5.45. Rates in Greece, Austria, and the United Kingdom, Norway, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, and Belgium range between only 1.75 and 2.8.

The same report shows that the United States has 37.2 rapes per 100,000 people. The rate in Sweden is 15.7 and in Denmark, 11.23. Rates in Ireland, Greece, Belgium, Austria, Spain, Luxembourg, Switzerland, France, Finland, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany range between only 1.72 and 8.6.

The United States has 221 armed robberies per 100,000 people. Spain tops that with 265. However, rates in Italy, Austria, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and Canada are much lower—between 50 and 94.

Such statistics, Ellis contends, shatter the main explanation Bainbridge and Stark give for their contention that religion inhibits crimes. Ellis classifies their explanation as "group solidarity." It goes like this: those who participate in organized religion are members of a group that by definition does not condone crime. Therefore, they will be less likely to commit crimes.

Group solidarity is the most common explanation given by those who view religion as a barrier to crime, Ellis discovered after analyzing more than fifty studies on the relationship between religion and criminality. He pinpointed three other explanations given by researchers.

One Ellis calls "coincidental." According to this theory, religious people just happen to have social status or education lev-

els that make them less likely to commit crimes. And non-religious people just happen to have other variables in their lives—such as drug use or frequent moves—that make them commit more crimes.

Ellis terms another theory "the Hell Fire explanation." It applies to those religions that hold as a tenet an afterlife in which one pays for sins committed in life. Logically, this explanation goes, members of such churches would be less likely to commit crimes. Ellis notes, however, that counterbalancing such a threat is the fact that religions—such as Catholicism—that expound such theories also offer readily available absolution. That makes the real threat of hellfire remote.

Finally, Ellis identifies the "obedience-to-authority theory." This argues simply that those who are members of organized religions exhibit strong willingness to submit to authority and are eager to do as told. Hence, they would be less likely to commit crimes that might anger the authority figure.

While dismissing each of those explanations as faulty, Ellis is embarking on research into neurohormonal explanations of human behavior. He is trying to learn whether "arousal theory"—the theory that a person's need for arousal leads to certain behaviors—can explain crime.

Linking the theory to studies of religion and criminality, Ellis suggests that those who can sit through church services have average levels of arousal. They do not need to engage in activities to get themselves aroused or excited. So, they may not commit as many crimes.

On the other hand, those who cannot sit still for church services may have sub-optimal arousal. They may need to engage in stimulating behavior, including crimes, to reach normal arousal levels. This research could support the view that it is not religion in itself that daunts crime. Rather, certain characteristics related to the activities surrounding religion happen to attract non-criminals. These activities include obedience and frequent attendance at church services.

The need for such research is becoming critical because the outcries to fight crime become more strident every year.

The *Manchester Guardian* recently quoted the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. He said that atheists cannot fully understand goodness and are less likely than believers to do good deeds without personal reward.

To cut crime and boost morality, clerics such as the Archbishop and laypeople such as Colson are choosing what may be a perilously wrong weapon—religion. •