

U.S. is most religious in industrialized world

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With 89 percent of the population religious and 62 percent highly so, the United States is the most religious nation in the industrialized world, according to an international survey released this week.

Religiosity remains high among all adult age groups, according to the Bertelsmann Foundation's Religion Monitor, and large majorities of Catholics and Protestants say that their religious beliefs affect their political views.

In comparison, faith plays a far less significant role in developed European countries such as Britain, France and Germany.

The Religion Monitor asked 21,000 people in 21 countries nearly 100 questions about their interest in religious topics, belief in God or the divine, public and private religious practices, religious experiences and the relevance of religion to their everyday lives. The answers were used to classify individuals as highly religious, religious or non-religious.

(Internet users may complete the questionnaire at religionmonitor.com to identify their own "religiosity profile" and see how they compare with others from their country.)

Dr. Martin Rieger, director of the Religion Monitor, said the results contradict the view that the world is becoming increasingly secular.

"The United States demonstrates that the role of religion does not necessarily decline even when countries have achieved considerable economic, social and cultural progress," he said in a statement.

Rieger attributed the gap between American and European religiosity to historical differences: "The Enlightenment in young, free America included a vigorous religious vision. In Europe, which was shaped by clerical feudalism, the Enlightenment came only after a struggle against the institutional church."

The survey found that 85 percent of Americans believe in God and [life after death](#), 80 percent pray regularly, and 75 percent attend religious services or visit a place of worship, with half going at least once a week.

In contrast, 48 percent of Britons, 46 percent of Frenchmen and 28 percent of Germans and Austrians are non-religious. Among European nations, only strongly Catholic Poland and Italy are as religious as the United States. Globally, American religiosity ranks between that of Europe's industrialized countries and that of developing countries such as Brazil, Guatemala and Nigeria.

American religiosity is also unique in its vitality among all age groups, according to the survey. Eighty-nine percent of Americans 18- to 29-year-olds are religious or highly religious, and levels of belief remain high among older cohorts: 89 percent of those in their 30s, 88 percent of those in their 40s, 93 percent of those in their 50s and 90 percent of those 60 and older are religious or highly religious.

In Europe, in contrast, religiosity declines from one generation to the next.

Religious convictions also play a significant role in Americans' political views, according to the survey. Seventy-six percent of American Protestants, including evangelicals, charismatics and Pentecostals, and 65 percent of Catholics say that their religious beliefs moderately or substantially affect their political views.

In Europe, only 27 percent of respondents report that religion plays a role in their political decisions, and just 12 percent say they are strongly influenced in this regard by their religious convictions.

http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com/news/faith/2009/12/united_states_is_most_religiou.html