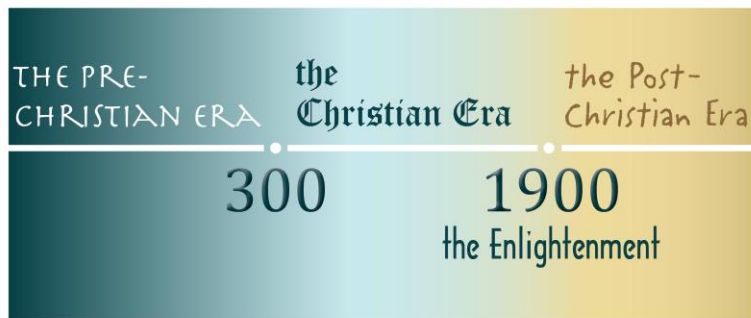


Looking Behind to Ponder:
How Did we Get to Where we are?
The American Saga

Christianity through the Centuries



Eras are often determined by the source of authority that forms the dominant basis for decision-making, the priorities of importance. In the Christian Era it was the Bible and the presupposition that Jesus was God's medium of disclosure through His life and death.



Age of FAITH
(380-1750)



Age of SCIENCE
(1750-1970)



Age of INFORMATION
(1970-pres)

The assumptions that supported the supernaturalness of the Bible has become a subject of increasing doubt over the past four centuries. What has taken place in Western Europe has transpired in the United States though we generally lag behind by a few decades.

Bruce Shelley & Traditions of American History

Source: Bruce L. Shelley, *The Gospel and the American Dream*

	Biblical 1760	Republican 1880	Economic 1950	Therapeutic
<i>Religion</i>	Puritanism	Evangelical Civil Religion	Secularism	
<i>Religious Focus</i>	Salvation	Society	Self-Realization Self-Fulfillment	
<i>Values</i>	Divine	Corporate	Individual	
<i>Authority vs. Freedom</i>		Freedom of Restraint	Freedom from Restraint	

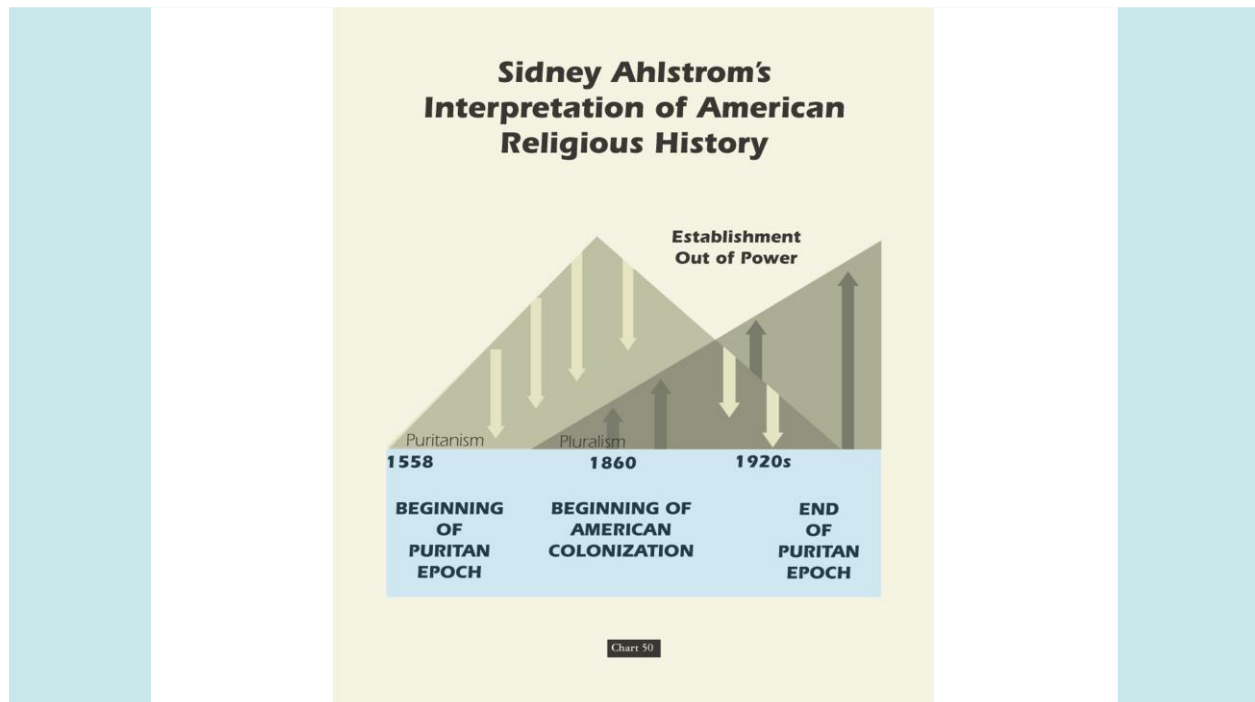
John Hannah's Interpretation of American Church History

THEME: *The Kingdom of Enlightened Man*

	Age of Divine Sovereignty 1760	Age of Biblicist Rationalism 1880	Age of Rationalism, Science 1960	Age of Privatism, Self
<i>Historical Structure</i>	Colonial Period	National Period	Modern Period	Postmodern Period
<i>Truth Base</i>	Theocentrism	Biblicist Rationalism	Rationalism	Individualism
<i>Historical Motif</i>	Migration	National Birth	Maturation	Uncertainty, anxiety, awareness

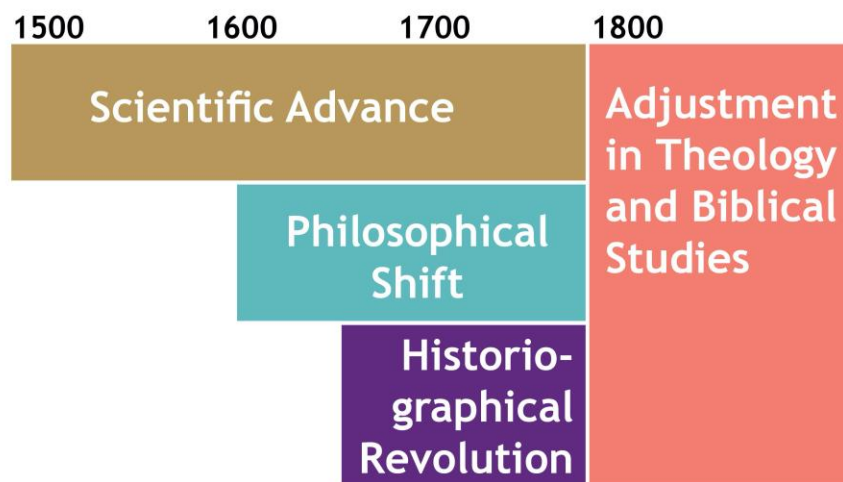
When the nation was born, Christianity was dominant in the populous but not so much in the learned class reflected in clerics, politicians, and lawyers, Through the Second Great Awakening Christianity captured the popular mind, though the Enlightenment gained increasing influence

as the nineteenth century progressed. By 1900 Christianity and secularity were equalized; in the twentieth century secularity dominated the centers of learning and became overwhelming.

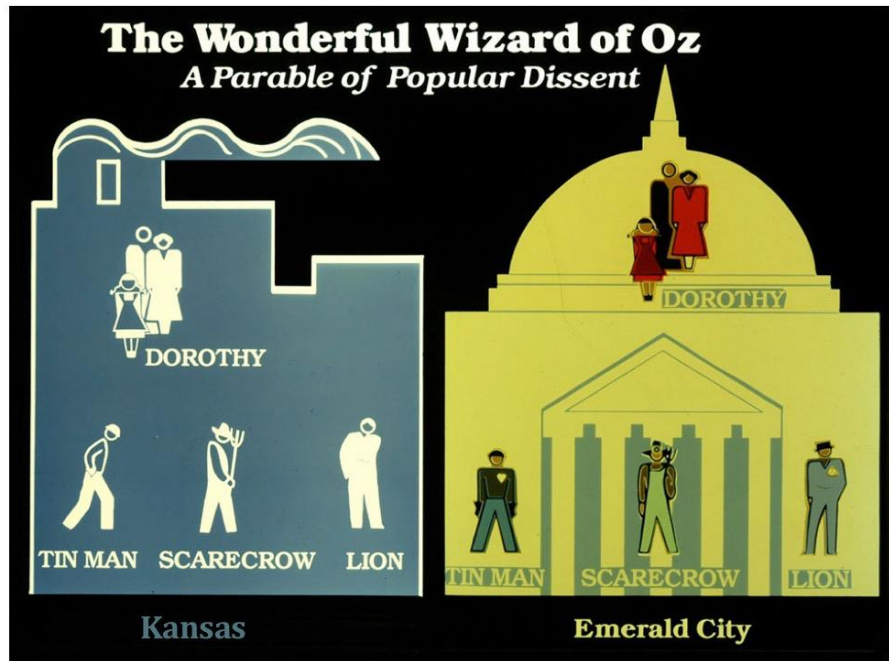


The sciences brought the authority of the Bible into question; philosophy separated the search for truth from the Bible, and literary criticism cause the Bible to be viewed, not as revelation but human, fallible literature (not from God, but merely about God).

The Rise of the Sciences: The root of change in religious understanding



One answer among some Christians was the Social Gospel which view sin as society conflict and answers in governmental assistance, vividly portrayed in the *Wizard of Oz* series. People without hope sought hope through society improvement of social ills.



New Theology Hermeneutic

“What is the relation between Christianity and modern culture; may Christianity be maintained in a scientific age? It is this problem which modern liberalism attempts to solve. Admitting that scientific objections may arise against the particularities of the Christian religion—against the Christian doctrines of the person of Christ, and of redemption through His death and resurrection—the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain of the general principles of religion, of which these particularities are thought to be mere temporary symbols, and these general principles he regards as constitution “the essence of Christianity.”

—J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 6

With the discrediting of the Bible, Christian faith faced a crisis. Believing that Christianity was absolutely essential though the Bible was not longer to be believed word-for-word, how was the faith to be preserved? The answer for many was to redefine it and that is American Religious Liberalism and 1920's would create a crisis? Liberal churchmen believed that the only way to preserve the dominance of Faith was to conform it to the finding of science.

Church Struggles in North

- Northern Baptists
- Northern Presbyterians
- Northern Methodists

The 1920 was a decade of defeat tradition Christian faith. As the Depression gripped the nation a greater tragedy unfolded in the churches. Many felt compelled to depart from the historic denominations for the sake of the preservation of the gospel and thus entirely new organizations were formed in the 1930s-50' (schools, mission boards, para-ecclesiastical and groups, denominations, Bible Church Movement.

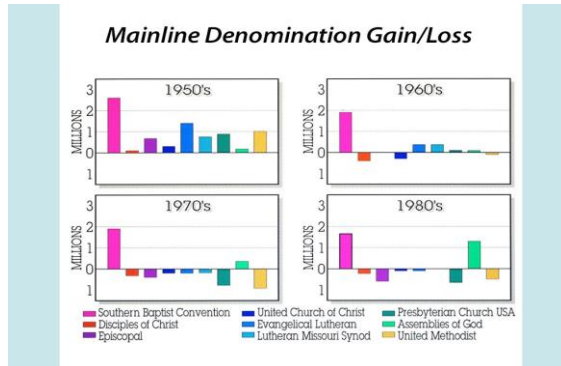
The Realignment of Evangelicalism in the 1930s and 1940s



Chart 52

The claim of the Liberal Movement in Christianity was fundamental changes in Christianity were needed if it was to remain integral and important in American life. Traditional Christ was the death-knell of Christian dominance in America. What the post-war era evidenced? Are

conservative churches in decline while more culturally concessive churches are maturing and strengthening in numbers?



The statistics overwhelmingly argue that culturally-defined churches are in rapid decline, while Bible-believing churches are growing.

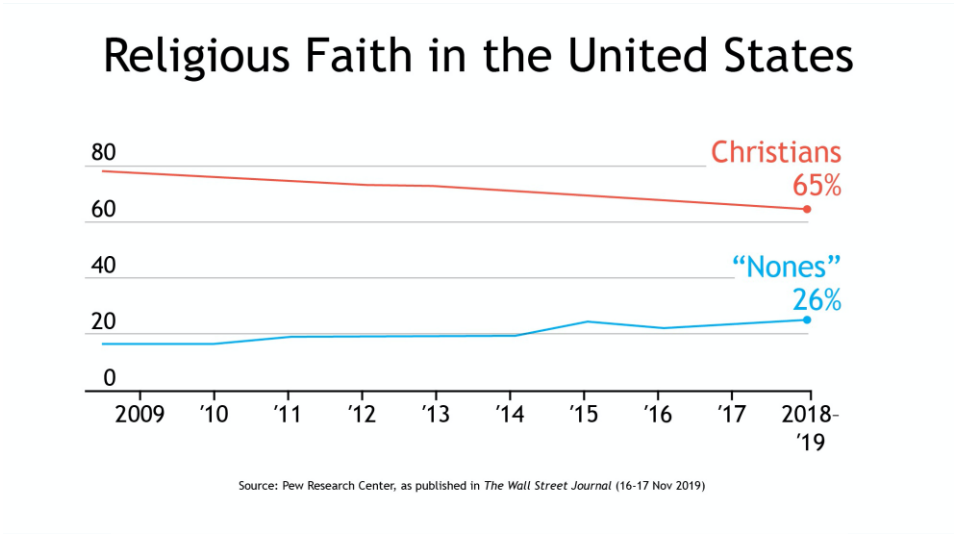
Numerical Decline within Mainline Denominationalism

Denomination	1990 Membership	2003 Membership	Decline	% Decline
American Baptist Church, USA	1,549,563	1,442,824	106,739	-6.88%
Episcopal Church	2,455,422	2,233,327	12,095	-4.97%
Disciples of Christ	707,985	518,434	189,551	-26.77%
Presbyterian Church, USA	2,929,608	2,493,781	435,827	-14.88%
United Church of Christ	1,644,787	1,359,105	285,682	-17.37%
United Methodist Church	9,055,575	8,298,145	757,430	-8.36%

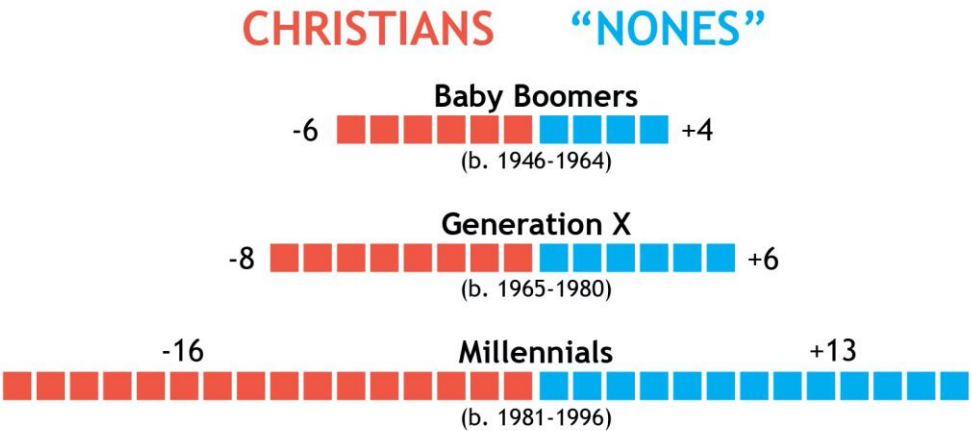
Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches (1990, 2003)

The distressing evidence in the decline of culturally concessive churches is that religion as a whole is declining in America. While I see Liberal churches as generally devoid of the true gospel, at least in the early twentieth century the more latitudinal churches embrace the same ethics and moral virtues and their nemesis (us). Today many of those church look more like the culture and Christian. For the nation, this is tragic!

Fewer and fewer American are claiming any religious affiliation as the decades pass. We are becoming a radically secular culture and nation (*The Wizard of Oz*, revisited).

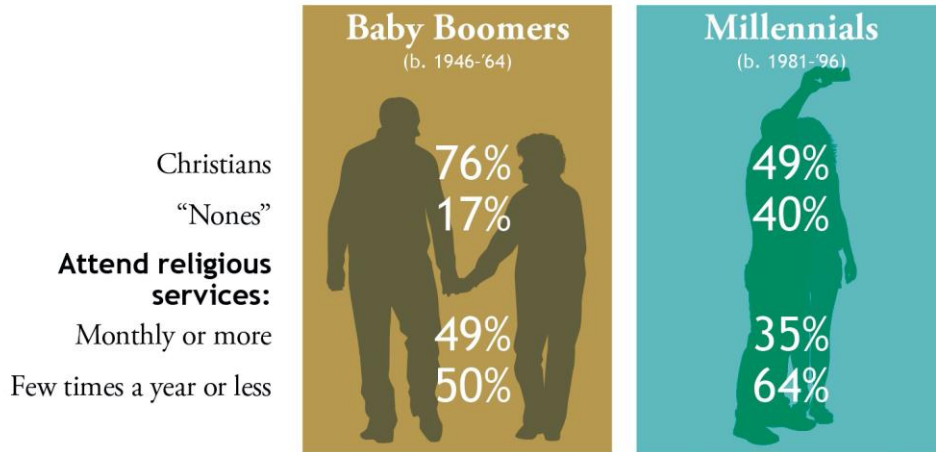


Changing of Religious Affiliation in the U.S. (2009-2019)



Source: Pew Research Center, as published in *The Wall Street Journal* (16-17 Nov 2019)

Changing Patterns: The Religious Landscape



Source: Pew Research Center, as published in *The Wall Street Journal* (23 Dec 2019)

What can we conclude?

1. You cannot have morals without a moral standard, a supreme foundation that rises above individual wants and prejudices. Western Christianity, in large part, not the whole, has conceded that foundation.
2. The Liberal attempt to preserve faith, the path of cultural concession, has failed. It has become a secular movement with only a distant vestige of biblical Christianity.
3. The loss of early, moral Liberalism is tragic because it sought to maintain the moral of Christian faith, the consequences, without the essence and has now largely lost both. This is a negative for all of us.
4. Is what we have been seen transpiring over the last four centuries evidence of the nearness of the catastrophic judgments of the Revelation? Is God preparing the way for just judgment of the nations?
5. Is there hope in all this? I firmly believe so because God is gracious and full of compassion.
 "... and my people who are called by my name will humble themselves
 and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways,
 then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sins.
 and will heal their land (II Chron. 7:14)."