

Religious or Non-Religious Commitment or Staying Loose of Any Commitments at All

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Soren Kierkegaard speaks approvingly of a crucifixion of the intellect when it comes to religious faith. Crucify it in making a religious commitment. That is just what you have to do if you will live authentically, or so Kierkegaard had it. He was prepared to do so for himself concerning religious faith. But what he thought when taken literally was utterly mistaken when taken as something that was the *only* way to make sense *of* one's life or *in* life or of human life. Religious belief, as Kierkegaard thought and indeed as many do (though a decreasing number), is required for making sense *of* life or *in* life or *of* human life. We frail reeds, it is thought, need religion.

My rejection of a Kierkegaardian-Pascalian way as incoherent or at best just mistaken is on my part, some think, mere assertion by me. It is too much, it may be thought, like saying that it is true because I say so. But *au contraire* this is not so. For starters, keep in mind that fewer and fewer think or try to think in that way anymore. That is to say in the manner—in each case a different manner—as Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard or Tillich did. All of them were religious in various ways but fewer and fewer go in for any of them now or anything like them. Religious non-interest has grown in developed societies, though it is alive and kicking in Africa and though *some* in developed societies strangely think of themselves as spiritual but not religious. The number of those who move away from religion increases with their level of education. *Generally*, the better educated the less religious. Is it that these changes, connected with education or not, are just arbitrary changes in *zeitgeist*? No, that is not so. Where there is more knowledge there is less religion. Not invariably, of course, but generally so. Just take note of the typical behavior of many people in developed societies

staying loose from religion and indifferent to it. In developed societies more people educated yields diminished religious orientation.

What are we to make of this increasing religious indifference? Isn't a religious orientation usually linked with being dumbed down? When we are better educated, religion tends to wither away. Even in our dark times—increasingly dark times—do we not see religiosity withering away? Look at Italy and Quebec, for examples. I do not need to turn to Denmark or Sweden where it has long been so.

What should we make of this? What import, if any, does it have? It has never been true that there are no atheists in foxholes. Do numbers count? Perhaps we should have Kierkegaard's indifference or contempt concerning the number of Christians in the Christian Kingdom of Denmark? Perhaps we should have Freud's, not Kierkegaard's, attitude toward religion? I do. Am I wrong? Am I right about the numbers? Perhaps we should think, as does Alasdair MacIntyre, that our increasing fate is merely the misfortune of being enculturated into the culture of modernity? What he thinks is our misfortune I think is a good thing. Am I right about the numbers as I am confident that I am? And is that important? The issues I am concerned with here are not vote issues. I am glad of my enculturation. It is as steadfast at 90 as it was at 30. It is not true that there are no atheists among the aged as it is not true that there are no atheists in foxholes.