Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title] In Spirit and In Truth
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Worship in America is usually measured by church attendance. Research organizations have surveyed residents in the United States for years and have tracked trends among age-groups, denominations, genders, political preferences, and generations. With the 10th anniversary of 9/11 next week, some have wondered about the worship practices and church attendance of residents of New York City. The Barna Group has just released (Aug. 29, 2011) a research report on this.

“In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, millions of Americans flocked to churches and houses of worship. But, for most, the shift in spiritual behavior was short lived. According to tracking research by the Barna Group, within a few months the spiritual lives of the nation’s population were back to pre-attack levels. As the tenth anniversary of America’s largest terrorist event approaches, a new analysis of Barna Group tracking data examines the long-term spiritual profile at one of the epicenters of the attacks—New York City. [T]he faith profile … changed significantly over the last decade and a half, but many of these shifts may not be attributable to 9-11.

“Residents of the New York City media market are more spiritually active today than they were in the late 1990s – and more so than they were in 2001. Reported weekly church attendance, for instance, was lowest in 1999 and 2000 (31%), but has since grown to represent 46% of the market’s residents. In addition to worship attendance, several other measures of faith also showed increases in the New York market, including Bible reading (growing from 29% to 35%) and those who qualify as having an active faith. Active-faith adults, a multiple-activity indicator that represents those who pray, read the Bible and attend church in a typical week, has increased from 17% to 24%.”

In another survey by the Gallup organization (June 25, 2010)... “Americans' self-reported church attendance has continued to inch up in 2010, with 43.1% of Americans reporting weekly or almost
weekly attendance. This is up slightly from 42.8% in 2009 and 42.1% in 2008. The increase comes as Americans’ economic confidence has also risen, suggesting that, instead of church attendance rising when economic times get bad, as some theorize, the opposite pattern may be occurring.

“Major correlates of church attendance include politics (with Republicans and conservatives more likely than others to attend), race (with blacks more likely to attend), age (with older Americans more likely to attend), region (highest in the South), marital status (married adults more likely to attend), and gender (women more likely than men to attend).”

As we continue to study worship in our Sabbath school lesson, we grapple this week with balance in worship. Jesus described true worshippers as worshipping “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). Are there “multiple-activity indicators” of true worshippers? What are they?

~Cr

1. Barna
2. Gallup

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