

## Column

A recent Gallup poll shows a continuing spiralling down in church attendance. Two decades ago an average of 42 percent of U.S. adults attended religious services every week or nearly every week. That percentage currently stands at 30 percent. The study noted that the decline was largely driven by the increase in the number of Americans claiming no religious affiliation, 9 percent in 2000-2003 versus 21 percent in 2021.

While America remains the most religious country among Western nations, these statistics are distressing. Religion, after all, contributes not only to the interior well-being of the individual but also to the well-being of society at large. It provides social cohesion and serves as an anchor against lawlessness and anarchy.

To expand that thought, all that is necessary to destroy a nation is to: wreck the home, undermine the school and minimize the influence of the church. Allow these things to happen and the barbarians are already at the gate. That is where we find ourselves today.

Returning to the findings of the Gallup poll, how should church people respond? Well surely the answer is: get busy evangelizing the culture. But how?

In days gone past, when I was a boy, Billy Graham's great crusades met with some degree of success. Many responded to Mr. Graham's invitation to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and no doubt those who followed through on their commitment had an impact on their local communities.

But, what about today? Are mass meetings, crusades, the best way to evangelize the culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? I am not sure. Perhaps new methods are needed, though many things will stay the same.

One new way is through the use of the Internet, especially You Tube videos. A number of Christian apologists from a variety of backgrounds are employing this means. To name a few: Tom Wright (Anglican), William Lane Craig (conservative evangelical) and Bishop Robert Barron (Roman Catholic).

Another way – one which has not changed with the passing of the years -- is personal evangelism, engaging with people one on one in the course of daily life. Many people in today's virtual world find themselves isolated and in need of authentic human interaction. When such people meet 'authentic' Christians with winsome spirits, they may well be moved to ask questions and listen when answers are given.

This is the place where all who profess and call themselves Christians can join in. Not everyone can have a YouTube channel, not everyone can stage a large-scale gathering with lively music and a Gospel message, not everyone can print and distribute Gospel literature, but everyone can light a candle where he or she is.

I once read about a woman in a laundromat who did just that. While waiting on her clothes to dry, a man obviously inebriated with alcohol came into the building weeping and sat down beside her. She was tempted to get up and take another seat; but, stepping outside her comfort zone, she engaged him in conversation.

He told her of his personal and family struggles. When he had finished, she took his hand and lead him in saying the Lord's Prayer. Who knows how that simple act affected not only the man in need, but those who looked on?

Opportunities for engaging the culture are all around us. Look for new and adventuresome ways. Light a candle where you are.

*O GOD, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)*

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