

How Atheists, Agnostics Engage in Spiritual Warfare Against Christians

Barna Research Group released a study last year that revealed a disturbing trend: The idea that Christianity is irrelevant seems to be morphing into the notion that Christianity is bad for society.

Forty-five percent of atheists, agnostics and religiously unaffiliated in America agree with the statement that “Christianity is extremist.”

According to the findings, the main points that emerged were:

**Adults and especially non-believers are concerned about religious extremism.*

**Nearly half of non-religious adults perceive Christianity to be extremist.*

**The range of what constitutes extremism is broad, ranging from behaviors that are almost universally condemned to more narrowly defined extremism.*

**Evangelicals stand out from the norm in terms of their attitudes on religious extremism—and they exhibit major differences from the skeptic.*

The issues generating the most controversy centered on public expression of religious views, but that broadened into views that Christians are “extremist.” Is this extremism the same kind that describes terrorists? Could findings have a broader application around the world?

TeachBeyond’s George Durance looked at the report and noted a

couple of things. First, "I would say that it's more a European, North and South American thing, than it is a 'global' thing, although it is almost elitist everywhere."

And second, this shouldn't surprise Christians, as it's not particularly unusual throughout history. It says a lot more about the people around Christians and outlines our next step. "Today, our emerging sense of being on the fringe or being labeled as 'extremist' is really a statement about our culture, and not so much about our faith or about Christianity in particular."

How does this information change a ministry's approach? Wherever they are, TeachBeyond encourages partners to be "salt and light" in the local community where they live.

The commitment to biblical truth hasn't changed, but their partners always consider how they can communicate that truth in a way that's perceived to be loving. That usually means investing in the lives of the people they're serving.

For example, Durance was just with TeachBeyond's Asia leader, discussing the open doors that exist for the gospel in India and Bangladesh. "The reverence, the respect, the high regard for Christians involved in education is astonishing. It's so counter to what we're seeing in the press here, and I would say in Europe, and even when I'm in South America."

Why is there such a high regard there? Durance says their partners genuinely show the love of Christ, via the fruit of the Spirit. "We want our people to make their educational program mediated to the community through these fruits of the Spirit, against which there really isn't a law, although there may be all kind of superficial restrictions that seem to constrain and push us in directions we otherwise wouldn't want to go."

It's likely that the view of Christians and extremism will spread. In the countries that are resourcing much of the

Christian education endeavor around the world, says Durance, "We are going to face very serious hostility, on many levels. The faster we can reposition our resources and pass the torch to the very vibrant church that exists elsewhere, the better off we're going to be."

To that end, he urges you to pray " ... because this is the spiritual warfare we're involved in—not only TeachBeyond, but the church, as our society has shifted, and, more and more, we are defined as 'extremism,' not because we have changed, but because society has changed." {eoa}

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