



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

“Nones” reach 30%

“The nones account for a large portion of Americans, as shown by the 30% of U. S. adults who claim no religious affiliation in a survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Other major surveys say the nones have been steadily increasing for as long as three decades. So who are they? They’re the atheists, the agnostics, the ‘nothing in particular.’ Many are ‘spiritual but not religious,’ and some are neither or both. They span class, gender, age, race, and ethnicity.” ~ Peter Smith, “Nones’ grow in number: 30% of U. S. adults report no religious affiliation,” Associated Press, via *The Washington Times*, October 10, 2023. Read the AP story [here](#) and a more detailed look at the NORC Center’s survey [here](#).

Thinking matters

“The heart cannot delight in what the mind rejects as false.” ~ Clark Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case* (The Craig Press, 1967), 3

The preacher’s task

“The preacher is not a chef; he’s a waiter. God doesn’t want you to make the meal; He just wants you to deliver it to the table without messing it up. That’s all.” ~ John F. MacArthur Jr., “Light the Lamp,” *The Accordance Newsletter*, Oct. 2023

Christians Out-Thought the World

David Anguish

Wherever Jesus Christ has been, the demons have gone. “There used to be fairies,” said an old woman in the Highlands of Scotland to a friend of mine, “but the Gospel came and drove them away.” ~ T. R. Glover

Although manifested in countless deities, cults, and creeds with homage offered in myriad venues that included temples, trade guild meetings, home gatherings, and civic centers, the religious climate in the first century AD was effectively a monolith that made peace with, adapted, and adopted all-comers—or at least all who would consent to being accommodated. Religions that made exclusive claims—like Judaism, that had been granted legal status, and Christianity, that had not—encountered varying levels of bewilderment, suspicion, ostracism, and persecution (see Hurtado 2016).

Helping us see the relevance of that aspect of the ancient religion is the insight of a French scholar cited by T. R. Glover: “where there is polytheism there are no false gods” (Glover 1917, 191). Substitute *pluralism* for *polytheism*, and his statement effectively summarizes the modern West’s “my truth-your truth” / “my faith-your faith” outlook.

Having [previously elaborated](#) this singular aspect of Greco-Roman religion, we turn to the question of how, in just three centuries, “this ludicrous collection of trivial [Christian] people” went from a numerically insignificant, illegal, and persecuted faith to be Rome’s dominant religion that “held the world” so completely that “all the gods have gone, utterly gone—they are memories now, and nothing more” (Glover 1917; 186, 200)? What can we learn from their conquest?

First, “the Christian Church refused to compromise.” Glover tells of an Emperor, ca. 200 AD, who included Jesus among the five statues of the gods in his private sanctuary. Why not? Greco-Roman religion could accommodate Jesus as well as any other deity. But the Christians rejected such accommodation. They would not allow Jesus to be included in the pantheon or worshiped alongside other gods, including

Religions without conversion

“Even if one became a devotee of Isis or another such imported deity, this was never understood as involving a neglect, much less any renunciation, of one’s previous and other religious devotion, such as one’s ancestral traditions or the deities of one’s locale or city. That is, any spread of new deities in the Roman period did not really involve a ‘conversion’ from previous religious practices to new and exclusively religious commitments.” ~ Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Eerdmans, 1999) 17

Common big questions

“Though philosophy and religion often use different language and often arrive at different conclusions, they deal with the same questions, which include questions about what exists (metaphysics), how humans should live (ethics), and how human beings know (epistemology).” ~ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Zondervan Publishing House), 21

Centered worship

“When the music becomes the central focus of our assemblies, we have missed the point of worship altogether. When we approach our worship assemblies with an individual and collective passion focused on presenting an offering pleasing to God, we will experience the true joy of worship as God intended.” ~ Philip Camp, “Singing and Worship from the Perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church,” *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 70

(or especially) the emperor. Instead, “the Christian proclaimed a war on religion in which there shall be no compromise and no peace, till Christ is lord of all” (Glover 1917, 200).

Refusal to compromise was vital, but of itself, was not sufficient for a successful conquest. How did the Christians wage their “war of religion”? Glover answers:

Here we touch what I think [*sic*] one of the greatest wonders that history has to show. How did the Church do it? If I may invent or adapt three words, the Christian “out-lived” the pagan, “out-died” him,” and “out-thought” him” (Glover 1917, 200).

The way they lived, with a depth of morality that imitated and lived Jesus’ example and teaching (cf. Matt 5.17-48), and their commitment to be “faithful unto death” (Rev 2.10) in a way that influenced many pagans to investigate the faith are important traits that deserve more elaboration. But in our pluralistic world, which also shares with antiquity a form of religion that elevates feeling over intellect (Glover 1917, 189), we must pay more attention to what it meant for the Christians to out-think their world. Most useful from Glover’s elaboration of what they did is the following:

The Christian read the best books, assimilated them, and lived the freest intellectual life that the world had. Jesus had taught him to be true to fact. Why had Christian churches to be so much larger than pagan temples? Why are they still? Because the sermon is in the very center of all Christian worship—clear, definite Christian teaching about Jesus Christ. There is no place for an ignorant Christian. From the very start every Christian had to know and to understand, and he had to read the Gospels; he had to be able to give the reason for his faith. He was committed to a great propaganda, the preaching of Jesus, and he had to preach with penetration and appeal. There they were loyal to the essential idea of Jesus—they were “sons of fact.” They read about Jesus, and they knew him, and they knew where they stood. This has been the essence of the Christian religion. Put that alongside of the pitiful defense which Plutarch makes of obscene rites, filthy images, foolish traditions. Who did the thinking in that ancient world? Again and again it was the Christian (Glover 1917, 204-205).

Why did they devote attention to their thought life? For the same reason they committed to out-living and out-dying the pagans: Jesus and the apostles had taught them to do so—teaching we need to consider more.

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Works Cited

- T. R. Glover. 1917. *The Jesus of History*. New York: Association Press; New York Public Library reprint.
 Larry W. Hurtado. 2016. *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press.

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