



I'm An Observant Jew. Here's Why I Want More Americans To Come To Jesus

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There's no doubt Kanye West has found religion. Listen to the musically arresting "Jesus is King," and you'll hear a powerful, positive case for a personal relationship with G-d. But will secular Americans heed his call?

Considering that we're living in historically peaceful and prosperous times, it's notable how misery stalks many Americans like a shadow. Countless government programs have tried to fix what ails us, at least since the Great Society got going, and it never quite works.

That's why I'm hoping Kanye's music will inspire more Americans to join his religious journey. If there's anything materially wealthy America could use in 2019, it's an infusion of spiritual affluence, something like a 21st century Great Awakening. In other words, America, it's time to come to Jesus.

Now, I'm highly aware that I'm an odd messenger. As a practicing Jew, I readily welcome any secular Jews back into our own religious fold. However, because Jews don't proselytize, and most Americans have Christian roots, I'd like to humbly suggest that "nones" from that latter group consider returning to their own familial faith.

Losing Religious Affiliation Hurts People

Religion is highly personal, and every individual "none" has a story about why he or she has ditched organized religion (and I don't intend to promote any particular church here). But it's hard not to notice that human suffering has increased as rates of religious affiliation have fallen.

It's certainly possible to be a good person without traditional religion. Still, how many lives could be improved if more Americans walked with Jesus, striving each day to be Christ-like? What would American society (and politics!) look like if more Americans loved others as they'd like to be loved, pulled logs out of their own eyes before criticizing the speck in their neighbor's, and cared for the least among us?

In its early years, Christianity overtook paganism. Now, I'm hoping Christianity can persuade Americans to forsake Wokeism. Our culture's secular church has maintained the shame and guilt many Americans associate with old-time religion, but it's eliminated the crucial elements of mercy, forgiveness, and redemption. Find yourself in the crosshairs of Cancel Culture, and your life will be ransacked and ruined.

Meanwhile, more than one-quarter of American children are growing up without their fathers at home, and “some 41 percent (29.8 million) of America’s children were living on the brink of poverty in 2016 — including more than 5 million infants and toddlers under age three.” Is there any doubt there’s major hurt out there, or that our culture could benefit from more of the kindness and compassion associated with Jesus?

The Secularizing Trend Needs to Reverse

When R.E.M. recorded “Losing My Religion” in 1990, an overwhelming 86 percent of Americans identified as Christian. That number dropped to 77 percent by 2001, and according to Pew Research’s new survey of American Christianity, that figure further plummeted to 65 percent of American adults in 2018-19, including only 49 percent of millennials. That’s a seismic change in under three decades. If everything were humming along smoothly, it might not matter. But America, everything’s not okay.

“More than 130 people in the United States die after overdosing on opioids” every day. Substance abuse is so widespread that babies are “born suffering from opioid withdrawal” about every 15 minutes, and the number of opioid-addicted adults unable to care for their own children is overwhelming state foster care systems. “The number of kids placed in foster care in the United States due to parental drug use has more than doubled over the past two decades, rising to nearly 96,700 in 2017 from about 39,100 in 2000.”

Deaths of despair in general, whether by suicide or substance abuse, have been steadily reversing modern medicine’s progress. As Princeton University economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have observed, the mortality rate among non-college educated, middle-aged white Americans has risen since 1999, a ripple effect of globalization and other social changes. As Case told NPR, “These deaths of despair have been accompanied by reduced labor force participation, reduced marriage rates, increases in reports of poor health and poor mental health.”

Americans are indeed lonelier than ever. One quarter of us don’t have anyone to confide in about the ups and downs of life. Last year, Pew Research found that “roughly one-in-ten Americans say they feel lonely all or most of the time across gender, racial and ethnic, and age groups,” with low-income and unmarried Americans more likely to self-identify as lonely.

That’s not only unfortunate, it’s literally unhealthy. The National Institute on Aging warns about links between “social isolation and loneliness” and “high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and even death.”

That picture grows even darker for the young. A 2018 survey by insurer Cigna found “the nation’s 75 million millennials (ages 23-37) and Generation Z adults (18-22) are lonelier than any other U.S. demographic and report being in worse health than older generations. . . . 54% of respondents said they feel no one knows them well, and four in 10 reported they ‘lack companionship,’ their ‘relationships aren’t meaningful’ and they ‘are isolated from others.’”

Family ties are unlikely to replace those disappearing friendships, since families are not only more fragile today, they’re also shrinking. Many young Americans are having fewer children than they’d hoped or are opting out of parenthood altogether. That means children will grow up socializing with fewer siblings and cousins, and adults will have fewer resources for financial and emotional support. They need another option—like church.

What You Really Need Is Jesus

Lest anyone despair, religion offers real hope. As part of a global study, Pew Research found that “actively religious people are more likely than their less-religious peers to describe themselves as ‘very happy’ in about half of the countries surveyed,” including 36 percent of that cohort in the United States.

That same Pew study found “the actively religious are generally less likely than the unaffiliated to smoke and drink,” which might inspire those hoping to kick addiction. A Cato study found religiously observant (Trump) voters are more likely “to have warmer feelings toward racial and religious minorities,” and a Jumpstart study found that religiously affiliated Americans are more likely to help the most vulnerable by donating to charity. Regular churchgoers are more likely to report feeling “‘very satisfied with family life’” and to “gather with extended family at least monthly,” which should help reduce loneliness.

If you’re not entirely convinced by religious beliefs right off the bat, that’s alright; stay open to the possibility that it’ll come with time and know that you can still benefit by participating now. Sociologist Robert Putnam, of “Bowling Alone” fame, and Chaeyoon Lim, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, found that “religious people are more satisfied with their lives than nonbelievers,” because of the “social networks they build by attending religious services.”

Humans are social creatures. We’re happiest when we build and nurture positive relationships. So crank Kanye’s latest, let the music wash over you, and consider where a religious community might be waiting to welcome you.