Christianity dying among young people, but Islam soars

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A large scale poll of 20,062 people, carried out for Lord Ashchroft, shows a dramatic decline in Christianity among young people and an equally striking rise in the numbers adhering to Islam in the same age group.

The poll is mainly about attitudes to immigration, but a question was included asking: "To which of the following religious groups do you consider yourself to be a member of?" (sic). In the 18-24 age group, 46% said they had no religion while 33% said they were Christian.

The response across all categories was 55% saying they were Christian with 36% saying they had no religion.

The general response among those who identified as Muslim was 3%, but this rose to 11% among the 18-24 age group.

Hindus came to 1%, rising to 3% in the 25-34 age group.

Other religions were much less statistically significant.

Meanwhile the British Social Attitudes Survey's 30th annual report was published this week, and also measured the level of religious adherence in this country, albeit using a much smaller sample (3,000).

The authors of the report noted that, in relation to religion over the past thirty years "there is little doubt that a substantial change has taken place, with a marked decline in the proportion who describe themselves as belonging to a particular religion.

"In 1983, around two in three people (68%) considered themselves to belong to one religion or another; in 2012, only around half (52%) do so."

"This decline is in practice a decline in attachment to Anglicanism; in 1983 two in five people (40%) said they were Anglican, and the Church of England could still reasonably lay claim to being England's national church (and thus, arguably, to some extent its fount of moral authority). But now only 20% do so. In contrast, the proportion saying they belong to a religion other than Christianity has tripled from two to six%. Britain's religious landscape has not only become smaller but also more diverse."

The survey also looked at attitudes to personal morality in issues that traditionally the churches have claimed to be arbiters. On the issue of voluntary euthanasia, the report says:

"The view that life is a sacred gift means that religious institutions often oppose euthanasia as well as abortion. This is a topic where the traditional religious view has long lacked widespread public support. Even 30 years ago (in 1983) only 23% of the public agreed that if a patient has "a painful incurable disease" a doctor should *not* be allowed "by law to end the patient's life, if the patient

requests it". The proportion now stands even lower, at just 16%. But, in contrast to both abortion and same-sex relationships, this is one topic on which the country's legislators have so far proved reluctant to align the law with majority public opinion."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "This confirms the rapid downward trend among Christians and bodes extremely ill for the future of that religion in Britain.

"The large number of young people identifying as Muslims – much larger than previous generations – suggests that Islam will soon be a much more significant force in this country than it is at the moment."

Mr Sanderson said that the figures strengthen the case for disestablishment of the Church of England. "It is a well-known phenomenon that when answering pollsters' questions, people tend to overstate their religious allegiance, so it is likely that these figures are very much on the conservative side," he said.

"It is probable that religious adherence is actually much lower than these already catastrophic figures indicate.

"It is hard to know how much more evidence politicians need before they face the fact that England's established church has become an anachronism that has no place in a modern democracy."

See the British Social Attitudes Survey report here

See the whole Lord Ashcroft poll here

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