

Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America

Stephen Bullivant

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One in four Americans belongs to no religion, the majority of those having been raised in, and having left, Christianity. In his engaging book *Nonverts*, Stephen Bullivant unearths the stories behind these statistics and presents cogent theories for the cultural and historical factors involved.

While “not an easy group to pin down,” typical “nonverts” or “nones” (the latter a broad term for nonbelievers) are white former Christians; just over half are men. Political and religious nonaffiliation might go hand in hand. For some, a lack of compassion toward mental health issues and sexuality precipitated leaving religion. However, this does not always equate to atheism: 21% of nonverts claim an unshakable belief in God.

Survey results and graphs make the situation plain, but Bullivant remains committed to discovering the real people beyond the numbers. The book is based on 70 interviews and concentrates on four Christian groups: Mormonism, mainline Protestantism, Evangelicalism, and Catholicism. While respondents express gratitude for aspects of their upbringing and affection for church people, hypocrisy and legalism often repelled them. Some blame the Trump presidency for their disillusionment, too.

Bullivant proposes convincing explanations for why the proportion of nones has soared since the 1990s: the waning Cold War connection of atheism with communism, paired with the intensifying demonization of Islam; generational weakening of religious affiliations; readiness to speak out about nonbelief, thanks to public atheists like Richard Dawkins; and the expansion of the internet, where like minded people congregate for “free therapy.”

This methodical, conversational work intersperses its argumentation with colorful portraits of individuals who embody standard development routes. While the focus is on the recent past, Bullivant also casts an eye toward the future, wondering about the COVID-19 effect and whether the nonvert course will decline as immigration bolsters churchgoing populations.

Forecasting the dawn of a less religious nation, *Nonverts* is an accessible, personality-driven guide to recent religious trends.

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