

Gods Next Door [slide one]

I. Overview

- A. We live in a very different time than did our grandparents. [slide two] Most of us can't remember a time when the TV only had three channels and it signed off after the Tonight Show. We can't remember when stores were closed on Sundays and everybody who was anybody went to church. That church might not have been our church, but they all affirmed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
- B. But no longer. [slide three] We can now go into all the world merely by going to the mall, going to work, or going to school. [Patrick speaking to Rochester High School groups that included Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Wiccans]
- C. As we come into contact with these people who have deeply held religious beliefs that differ from ours – or even clash with ours – how are we to react?
 - 1. Do we just try to reach more believers in other tribes and let the nonbelievers sort themselves out? In other words, do we ignore the existence of our neighbors and their beliefs?
 - 2. Alexander Campbell had the chance to cripple Mormonism, but he refused to address it saying that it was so ridiculous on its face that it would never survive the next decade. Uh....
 - 3. The question is: [slide four] is Jesus Optional?

II. Those other religions

- A. Let's face facts: this is still, nominally, a Christian nation; if we define "Christian nation" as a nation where the majority of the people call themselves Christian.
 - 1. The panic-meisters need to settle down.
 - 2. Immigration is raising the level of non-Christians among us, but it is raising the level of Christians faster (Catholics from Mexico, Ireland, Poland, etc.)
- B. [slide five] Those who self-identify as Christian is down or up according to which instrument you use to measure it.

The average seems to come out to 76%. [slide six] The numbers of Christians is up 5% in the last ten years.

1. The second in the list [slide seven] of top twenty religions in America is “Non-religious, non-churched” at just over 13%. That group has grown 110% in the last ten years.
2. Then comes [slide eight] Judaism at 1.3%. Note: this represents around one third of the Jewish people in America. Two thirds of Jews in the US are nonreligious, non-practicing Jews. This number is down 10%.
3. [slide nine] Islam is, as of 2001, 0.5% of our country. This number is up 109%. Again, not all Arabs are Muslims nor are all Muslims Arabs. A great many Arabs are Christian and many Muslims are Persians or Europeans.
4. Then comes [slide ten] Buddhism which, at 0.5% of the whole doesn't seem impressive until you realize that represents a 170% growth in the last ten years.
5. [slide eleven] Agnostics make up another 0.5% and atheists come just below that at 0.4%.
6. [slide twelve] Hinduism is only 0.4% but it has grown 237% in the last ten years.
7. [slide thirteen] Unitarian Universalists – 0.3%, up 25%.
8. Pagan/Druid/Wiccan – 0.1%
9. Spiritualist – 0.05%, no record of growth
10. [slide fourteen] Native American Religion, 0.05%, up 119%
11. Baha'i, 0.04%, up 200%
12. New Age, 0.03%, up 240%
13. Sikhism, 0.03%, up 338%
14. Scientology, 0.02%, up 22%
15. Humanist, 0.02%, up 69%
16. Deist, 0.02%, up 717%
17. Taoist, 0.02%, up 74%
18. Eckankar, 0.01%, up 44%

- III. **[slide fifteen] Among Believers** (figures are for all Americans, not just Christian ones)
- A. Protestants make up 52%, down from 53%.
 - B. Roman Catholics make up 24%, up from 23%.
 - C. Mormons are steady at 2%.
 - D. Orthodox is steady at 1%.
 - E. “Something else” is 2%. (half of us identify ourselves as protestants and half as ‘something else’ so we are split into these two groups)
- IV. **How Do We Interact? The Irreducible Minimums. [slide sixteen]**
- A. Christ gives us rules that are not optional and they apply in every situation, including those where we come into contact with those who do not hold our beliefs or are hostile to them.
 - B. “Going” is not optional. (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - C. “Speaking the truth in love” is not optional. Eph. 4:15
 - D. “Loving and serving” is not optional. (The Good Samaritan story in Luke 10.
 - E. “Doing good unto all” is not optional. (Gal. 6:10)
 - F. As we study these faiths and how we may show them Jesus, we will remember the command of Jesus as he sent out the twelve: as wise as a serpent, as harmless as a dove. (Matthew 10:16)