THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF FREETHOUGHT

Predicting the future has been an interest of people going back into prehistory. All the ancient cultures and civilizations had their seers, prophets, soothsayers, oracles, and augurers. Innumerable methods were used to facilitate these activities from casting lots, interpreting dreams or observing the behavior of animals and other natural events and phenomena. Predicting the future also goes by the term “divination” because it was generally believed that it involved divine inspiration. The Bible actually prohibits divination but, clearly, it was done regularly, especially with the “Urim and Thummim.” In fact, correct prophesying was viewed as a sign that the prophet was speaking with the authority of Yahweh.

We have plenty of modern-day “psychic” prognosticators and are familiar with the sort of predictions they like to make, especially around the time of the new year. Of course, these are typically made in profusion since this increases the chance of any one of them being a “hit,” and most often they are somewhat indefinite and ambiguous so that there are more ways for any of them to score a “hit.” Of course, it’s always safe to predict the illness or death of prominent people who are old and already in bad health, or to predict something that happens nearly every year: a volcano erupts, a plane crashes, someone goes on a murderous rampage, an upset occurs during an athletic event, and so on. One particularly good strategy is to predict that ongoing events will continue or that trends already underway will persist. Thus, for 2013:

There will be violent conflict in the Middle East.
Taxes will increase and so will government spending.
The US will run a trade deficit.
The Federal Reserve will further monetize the US debt with “QE” purchases.
The US public debt will exceed $17 trillion.
Scandals in the banking industry will be exposed.
Drought conditions will worsen during the summer.
New gun control legislation will be introduced.
US domestic gas and oil production will increase.

One trend in particular is a welcome one for Freethinkers and that is the continued growth in the numbers of atheists, agnostics and “nones,” people who do not identify with any particular religious affiliation. The Pew Research Center reported this past October that “nones” had increased from 15% of the population to just under 20%. Among adults under 30 the proportion is a full third. Moreover, “In 2007 60%
of those who said they seldom or never attend religious services nevertheless described themselves as belonging to a particular religious tradition.” In 2010 that figure fell to 50%. Many of the “nones” – 2 of 3 – say that they believe in god(s), and 1 in 5 say that they pray. A majority also say that churches “benefit society.” So “nones” are not just atheists who don’t want the label.

The Pew Research Center has modified how they ask about religious preference and what specifically they ask. Not only has this fleshed out the “nones” but it has also found that 14% of self-identifying atheists and 56% of self-identifying agnostics say that they believe in some sort of deity or “universal spirit.” Strange? Consider that 2% of self-identifying Christians say that they don’t believe in god(s).

Many questions remain. How do “nones” get that way? What proportion of “nones” persist over time as opposed to going on to identify as atheists and agnostics or, perhaps, become affiliated with one of the traditional mainstream religions? What is most important to people in falling out of traditional mainstream religions, or joining one?

The “secularization thesis” – the idea that modernity with its technological innovations and consumerism undermines traditional religions – remains an excellent working hypothesis, but the details are murky. Some research suggests an inverse “hydraulic” relationship between the ability of society and governments to provide security to people and the inclination to believe that supernatural powers can provide such security. But the most important thing about the evolving religious landscape in America appears to be that, perhaps for the first time, significant numbers of people are willing to question and doubt the theological doctrines taught as dogma by the mainstream religions. That can only be a good thing.

"If we open a quarrel between past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future.”
- Winston Churchill

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!! (AND NECESSARY FOR AN AUSPICIOUS START OF A NEW YEAR!)

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH: “FEELINGS: GOOD OR BAD?”

>>> Sunday, February 3rd, 2013 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS