



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 25, 2019

Decline in U.S. Birth Rates, Church Attendance Portends Societal Change

There has been much hand-wringing of late over declining birth rates and church attendance (especially among young people).

Gerald Seib is one of those wringing his hands. [Writing in the Wall Street Journal on Monday](#) Seib said these two trend lines have “social and economic significance,” and he explained why.

First, according to a recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll, just 29 percent of Americans say they attend religious services at least once a week, down from 41 percent in 2000. The group who say they never attend church has, over the same period, risen to 26 percent, up from 14 percent two decades ago. Seib noted that “the share of ... younger Americans who never attend religious services has more than doubled, to 36 percent.”

Seib also lamented the decline in America’s birthrate, reporting that “the number of babies born in the U.S. last year fell to a 32-year low ... [while] the general fertility rate — defined as the number of births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 — fell to the lowest level since the start of federal record-keeping.”

He then marks out the obvious: if these trends continue, Social Security and Medicare will be in ever-worsening shape due to a lack of new people entering the workforce and paying for those who are leaving it. He says that unless something happens to change the trajectory, “the need for immigrants to retain a robust workforce will increase.” Seib makes no reference to the decline of those in the evangelical community who supported Donald Trump in 2016, nor does he suggest that they have become so emaciated through age and attrition that they will have little impact in the 2020 presidential election. But a reader drawing those trend lines into the future can be excused if he comes to that conclusion.

Except that that conclusion would be wrong, seriously wrong. A closer look at that poll, along with studies derived from data provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), show that the fertility rate among women ages 35 to 44 is increasing, not decreasing.

At least two reasons are given for that apparent anomaly: student debt and more professional young women in the workforce. Both work to delay — not eliminate — child-bearing among older women. Once they have achieved a measure of financial security, and a marriage that has survived the early years, then they appear to be more willing to have babies: lots of them.

This bodes well as the Millennial cohort — currently numbering more than 70 million and expected to





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peak at 76 million in 2036 — moves into early and middle age, for it is then more than likely to make up for lost time.

As for the decline in church attendance, *The New American* addressed that issue directly in January. According to Ben Trueblood of Lifeway, a research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, young people aren't leaving the church because of the atheistic environments found on the college campus, nor are they leaving out of bitterness: "What [our] research tells us [is that] there was nothing about the church experience or faith foundation of those teenagers that caused them to seek out a connection to a local church once they entered a new phase of life."

What about the Gospel message? Were they not exposed to it during their "church experience"? Did not this lay a "faith foundation" once they moved on from their teen years? Was this not adequate to carry them through the changes and crises they faced as they moved through life?

What Lifeway discovered is that, for many, the answer is no. It wasn't that the Gospel wasn't preached; it was that it wasn't received. It wasn't planted deep enough to survive the lean and dry years.

But there is always a Remnant, and there always will be. Libertarian Albert Jay Nock paraphrased the call of God upon His prophet Isaiah to make that point. Using the vernacular of his day (the turn of the 20th century), Nock retold the story. God told Isaiah:

There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on.

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