

The Future of Baptists (and Christianity) in America: Is there One?  
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC  
July 15, 2018

- *What does the changing nature of Sunday mean for the church of the 21st century?*
- *How do religious communities respond when many Americans are distancing themselves from religion?*
- *What are some strategies for religious communities during this time of great change?*
- *How is religious identity passed on to a new generation?*

**The American Context: A Legacy of Religious Identity**

1. An Immigrant People: A Welcoming Nativism
2. Religious Freedom: A (Grudging) Liberty
3. Chosen Nation (Exceptionalism): Who are 'elected'?
4. Denominational Commitments: Sectarian Divisions
5. Religious Experience: Conversion/Nurture/Spirituality
6. Biblical Authority: Whose interpretation?
7. The Sociology of Sunday: Major familial/cultural changes
8. Beliefs: Multiple American "orthodoxies"
9. Baptists: Multiply by Dividing

**American Christianity: Current Statistics**

- "Mainline" Churches=13% of population
- "Evangelicals" peak 29% in 1990s, 17% by 2017 (PRRI)
- Roman Catholics=18%, "catastrophic" decline in "Anglo-Catholics" (65 million)
- "Nones"—No religious affiliation; increase from 7% to 25% in polls in 3-5 years
- "None's"—One in five generally; one in three "Millennials"

**Millennials (Young Americans, 18-30): Pew Research, 2014**

1. "Relatively unattached to organized politics and religion."
2. "Linked by social media."
3. "Burdened by debt," especially education.
4. "Distrustful of people" and institutions.
5. "In no rush to marry."
6. "Optimistic about the future."
7. Most racially diverse generation, 43% non-white, become a majority ca. 2043.
8. Politically independent, lean left

**Current Trends: A Sampler**

1. *Denominational systems disconnecting, disengaging, debating (SBC a case study)*
2. *Fewer individuals think of religious identity as denominational.*
3. *Congregations minimize relationships with parent bodies.*
4. *Demographics of economics, race, region, marriage*
5. *Non-denominational "fellowships" or "community churches" increasingly "normative"*
6. *Non-affiliation—"believers, not belongers"—expanding*

7. *Public theological/ethical/denominational debates turn Americans away from religious affiliation.*
8. *Declining funds for traditional programs, buildings, budgets*
9. *“Spirituality” movement reflects growing pluralism*
10. *“Conviction” may seem “bigotry” in Public Square*

### ***Congregations: Strategies for the Future***

1. Congregations reaffirm identity—Hospitable Traditionalism.
2. Congregations come to terms with their own localism. The needs of their community and the specific sociology of Sunday?
3. Congregations reclaim rituals—global and local.
4. Congregations rethink identity in light of the loss of “Protestant Privilege.”
5. Congregations define and explore pluralism and particularism locally, nationally, globally.
6. Congregations clarify theology and witness regarding race, gender, sexuality, ecumenism and interfaith issues.
7. Develop “signature” ministries.
8. Congregations and individuals revisit/retell the “Jesus Story.”

### ***Retelling the Jesus Story***

1. Gospel as a door to “Spirituality”—a new “nurture”

2. Retelling the Jesus Story

- Take no details of the story for granted
- Begin on the lakeshore— “The kingdom of heaven has come near” God’s new day is present now!
- Ask: What is the nature of faith how do we articulate and “enact” it? (Read St. Paul through Jesus!)
- Engage community; don’t wait on community to find us.
- Revisit Jesus’ radical ethic in response to the margins
- Listen and be able to respond to the “nones.”
- Revisit the church’s “witness” in the world: Agents of “justice, compassion, and reconciliation.”
- The power of symbol and sacrament, awe and mystery; contemplation and reflection.

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those... who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an inexplicable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.” (Albert Schweitzer: *Quest of the Historical Jesus*)



# The Baptist Future: Is there one?

- *What does the changing nature of Sunday mean for the church of the 21st century?*
- *How do we call people to faith and discipleship when many Americans are distancing themselves from religion?*
- *What are some strategies for religious communities during this time of great change?*
- *How is religious identity passed on to a new generation?*
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Binkley Baptist Church

July 15, 2018

- **The American Context: A Legacy of Continuing Impact**
- 1. An Immigrant People: A Welcoming Nativism
- 2. Religious Freedom: Granted Grudgingly
- 3. Chosen Nation (Exceptionalism): Who are 'elected'?
- 4. Denominational Commitments: Sectarian Divisions
- 5. Religious Experience: Confusing Message and Method
- 6. Biblical Authority: Whose interpretation?
- 7. The Sociology of Sunday: Major familial/cultural changes
- 8. Baptist Beliefs: Conflicting "orthodoxies"
- 9. Baptists: Ceaseless Multiplying by Dividing

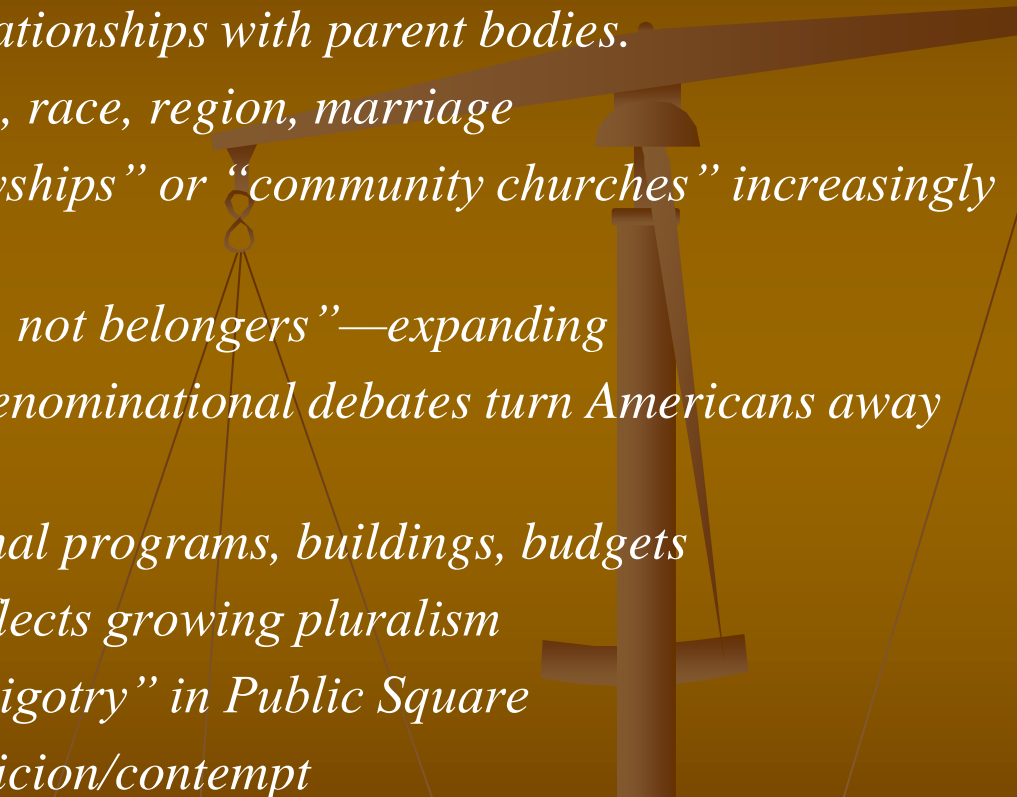
# American Christianity: Stats

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- Baptist Demographics: More Mainline than Evangelical

# Millennials: Pew Study, 2014

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2. “Linked by social media.”
3. “Burdened by debt,” especially education.
4. “Distrustful of people” and institutions.
5. “In no rush to marry.”
6. “Optimistic about the future.”
7. Most racially diverse generation, 43% non-white, become a majority ca. 2043.
8. Politically independent, lean left.
9. While 86% believe in God, only 58% “certain”

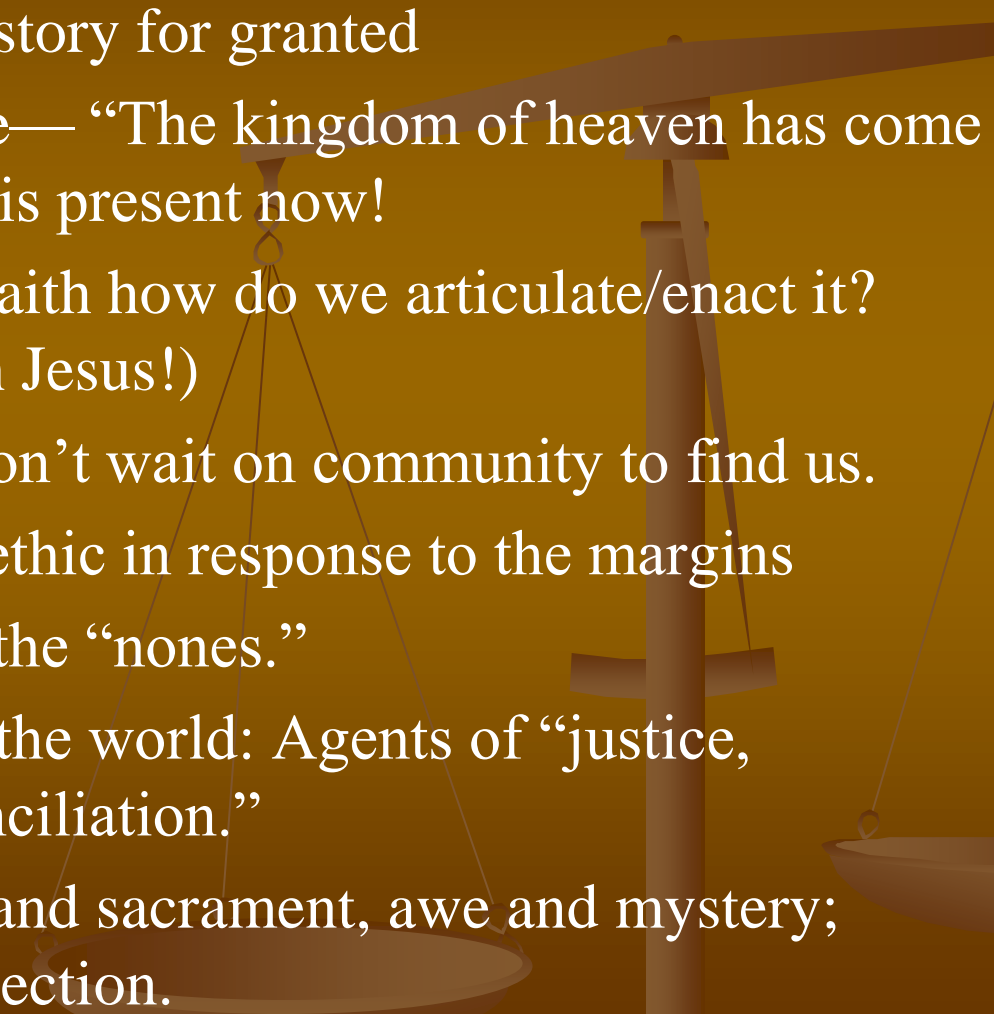
## CURRENT TRENDS: A SAMPLE

- *Denominational systems disconnecting, disengaging, debating (SBC a case study)*
  - *Fewer individuals think of religious identity as denominational.*
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  - *Demographics of economics, race, region, marriage*
  - *Non-denominational “fellowships” or “community churches” increasingly “normative”*
  - *Non-affiliation—” believers, not belongers”—expanding*
  - *Public theological/ethical/denominational debates turn Americans away from religious affiliation.*
  - *Declining funds for traditional programs, buildings, budgets*
  - *“Spirituality” movement reflects growing pluralism*
  - *“Conviction” may seem “bigotry” in Public Square*
  - *Baptist Name: publicly suspicion/contempt*
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- *Congregations: Strategies for the Future*
  - Congregations reaffirm identity—Hospitable Traditionalism.
  - Congregations come to terms with their own localism. The needs of their community and the specific sociology of Sunday?
  - Congregations reclaim rituals—global and local—Baptism, Communion, Laying on Hands
  - Congregations rethink identity in light of the loss of “Protestant Privilege.”
  - Congregations define and explore pluralism and particularism locally, nationally, globally.
  - Congregations confront theology on race, gender, sexuality, ecumenism/interfaith issues.
  - Congregations develop “signature” ministries.
  - Congregations and individuals revisit/retell the “Jesus Story.”



## ■ *Retelling the Jesus Story*

- 1. Gospel as a door to “Spirituality”—a new “nurture”
  - 2. Retelling the Jesus Story
  - Take no details of the story for granted
  - Begin on the lakeshore— “The kingdom of heaven has come near;” God’s new day is present now!
  - What is the nature of faith how do we articulate/enact it? (Read St. Paul through Jesus!)
  - Engage community; don’t wait on community to find us.
  - Revisit Jesus’ radical ethic in response to the margins
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  - Revisit a “witness” in the world: Agents of “justice, compassion, and reconciliation.”
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