PATREON PREMIUM GUIDE · TEACHING NOTES

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN AMERICAN RELIGION

Dr. Ryan Burge · Salvation Army NAB plenary

Rick & Isabella Piña Coaching · Grace Life Community

Graphs About Religion · thirteen teaching beats · letter booklet

Data over vibes. Six categories. Trust. Cohort replacement. A hope path that still holds.

STUDY SPINE

IN THIS BOOKLET

1. Six-category map
2. Evangelical / non-denom / mainline / Catholic
3. Trust, reputation, Boomer cliff
4. Nones, mid-century map, God gap
5. Hope path (horizontal + vertical)

This guide is not for everybody. If religious data is not your thing, that is fine. If you want a clear map of what is happening in American religion, this is for you.

I sat in the Salvation Army National Advisory Board plenary where Dr. Ryan Burge taught on what is happening in American religion and what that tells us about American society.

I am sharing it because too many of us still lead with yesterday's map. Burge walks the data: evangelicals, mainline, Catholics, non-denom, the nones, trust, and where hope still shows up.

We built you a slide-synced, captioned video of his talk (about 52 minutes), plus the key takeaways on this page and in the PDF.

Watch it. Read the notes. Then decide what your leadership needs to stop assuming.

FROM RICK

This is not going to interest everybody.

If you want this kind of information, here is what it is and why I am sharing it.

I sat in the Salvation Army National Advisory Board plenary where Dr. Ryan Burge taught.

He walked what is happening in American religion and what that tells us about American society.

I had the talk cleaned, slide-synced, and captioned for our members. About 52 minutes.

I am not asking you to become a sociologist.

I am asking you to stop leading with an outdated map if this is the kind of data you actually use.

CREDIT

Presentation by Dr. Ryan Burge · Graphs About Religion · Salvation Army NAB plenary. Mentoring packaging by Rick & Isabella Piña Coaching. Not affiliated with or endorsed by Dr. Burge, Graphs About Religion, or The Salvation Army.

BEAT 01

The six-category map

American religion is clearer when you refuse a thousand micro-traditions and use six buckets.

- Evangelicals
- Mainline Protestants
- Black Protestants
- Catholics
- Other religions (about 7%)
- The nones

> **Not a thousand micro-traditions. Six categories that actually move the national picture.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 02

Evangelicals held better than the narrative

Share fell hard from the early 1990s peak, but the story is not simple collapse.

- Share fell from about 29% to about 19% since the early 1990s.
- That share is still higher than roughly 50 years ago.
- Intensity (weekly attendance) has risen among those who remain.

> **Smaller share. Higher intensity among the people still in the pews.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 03

Non-denom is the second-biggest story

Independent and non-denominational churches are reshaping Protestant America in ways hard to count.

- About one-third of Protestants / about 13% of Americans (roughly 35 to 40 million).
- May approach Catholic scale in raw people.
- Hard to count. Often described as Baptists with a better website.

> **If you miss non-denom, you miss the second-biggest Protestant shift of our lifetime.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 04

Mainline collapse

The historic mainline went from cultural majority to a thin slice of young America.

- From about 52% of America (1958) to under 9%.
- Seven Sisters membership cratered (example: Disciples down about 81%, UMC down about 56% after schism).
- Only about 5% of Millennials and Gen Z identify mainline.

> **A mid-century majority became a single-digit share, especially among the young.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 05

Catholics: identity without Mass

Catholic identity is more durable than weekly practice. That gap is the story.

- Share down about 5 to 6 points in 15 years.
- Weekly Mass from about half to under 25%.
- Rise of cultural Catholicism. Intergenerational handoff of attendance is the core problem.

> **Belonging without Mass is growing. The attendance handoff is where the future is decided.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 06

Christianity's center of gravity flipped

Inside American Christianity, weight moved from mainline to evangelical.

- Evangelicals: about 20% to about 35% of Christians.
- Mainline: about 33% to about 17% of Christians.

> **Same Christianity label. Very different internal balance than a generation ago.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 07

Trust is the hidden driver

Institutional distrust tracks who stays, who leaves, and who builds local alternatives.

- Gen Z is least trusting (about 75% say you cannot be too careful).
- Weekly attenders trust more.
- Non-denom rise and denominational collapse track localism and institutional distrust.

> **Trust is not a soft side issue. It is a structural driver of the religious map.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 08

Religion's reputation lag

Public trust in churches did not crash overnight. It moved through three eras.

- Era 1 (to about 1985): church trusted more than other institutions.
- Era 2 (about 1985 to 2005): parity with other institutions.
- Era 3 (now): trusted less than other institutions.

> **The reputation lag means churches are now starting behind other institutions in public trust.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 09

Boomer demographic cliff

Many Protestant bodies are demographically front-loaded with Boomers. Funerals will surge.

- Huge share of many Protestant bodies are Boomers.
- Funerals surge in 10 to 20 years.
- UMC-style bodies risk down 30 / 40 / 50% members by the 2040s.
- Millennials would need weekly attendance to jump from about 21% to about 48% just to replace Boomers.

> **Without a massive attendance jump among younger adults, membership math gets brutal.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 10

Nones rose after 1991

The nones are not mainly angry atheists. Most are apathetic, and replacement math pushes the share up.

- Flat at about 5 to 6% until after 1991, then about 28% by 2021.
- A recent dip is not revival. Replacement (Silent/Boomer out, Gen Z in at about 42% none) pushes the aggregate up.
- Most nones are nothing in particular, not atheists. Often apathetic, not hostile.
- Lots of residual belief (about 88% of Americans believe in something higher). Few want religion eradicated.

> **Rising nones are mostly disengagement and cohort replacement, not a crusade against God.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 11

63 / 30 / 7 toward mid-century

Today's Christian / non-religious / everyone-else split is not locked in.

- Today: about 63% Christian / 30% non-religious / 7% everyone else.
- Plausible mid-century: about 45 / 45 / 10.

> **If trends hold, Christian plurality and non-religious share converge toward parity.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 12

The God gap / pew gap

Ideology is now one of the strongest predictors of religion in America.

- Very liberal: about 60% none.
- Very conservative: about 12% none.
- Young people often cannot imagine liberal Christianity as a live option.

> **The pew gap is political as much as spiritual. Many young liberals never meet a credible Christian left.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES

BEAT 13

Hope path: horizontal and vertical

Even skeptical generations still affirm that churches strengthen community and help the poor.

- Even Gen Z and many nones affirm churches strengthen community and help the poor.
- Lean into horizontal (social) and vertical (salvation) mission together.
- Friends and community keep people, not preaching alone.

> **Credibility starts where people already agree churches help. Stay there long enough to also name Jesus.**
> DR. RYAN BURGE · TEACHING NOTES