

# MEDIA DISTORT RELIGION SURVEY

Bill Donohue comments on the results of a new Pew Research Center survey on religion:

Once again, Pew Research Center has done a fine job surveying the public on religious beliefs and practices. And once again, some in the media are distorting its findings.

Rachel Dicker of [usnews.com](http://usnews.com), and Paul Bedard of the Washington Examiner, would have readers believe that America is fast becoming a nation of atheists. They are not only wrong, they are deceitful.

Dicker's column is headlined, "More Americans Are Turning Their Backs on Religion, and Here's Why." The headline for Bedard's piece reads, "Pew: Americans Giving Up on God, Miracles."

Here are some data from the report that neither reporter discloses: 51% of Americans now attend church regularly, and 49% rarely do. Of the majority who attend religious services regularly (the 51% figure is actually higher than what is typically found), 23% say they have always been regular attendees, but 27% *say they are attending more now than in the past*. (My emphasis.) Of the 49% who rarely attend, most say this is nothing new: 27% have always attended rarely and 22% say they are attending less often now than in the past.

In other words, what Dicker and Bedard say is not only wrong, the evidence supports the opposite conclusion: Americans who are regular churchgoers report that they are more likely to go today than they were in the past. Moreover, the contra is also true: a minority of those who rarely attend say they are going less often today.

Dicker quotes one respondent as saying, "I think that more harm has been done in the name of religion than any other

area.” What the reader doesn’t know is that this respondent is a freak: Exactly 1% of those who claim no affiliation (the “Nones”) say “religion causes conflict.” So why did Dicker highlight this response? Because it fit with her narrative.

Bedard tells the reader that Americans have given up on God and miracles. Yet Pew concluded that “about three-in-ten current religious ‘nones’ (29%) indicate they *have* searched for a new congregation at some point in their lives.” (Italic in the original.) Furthermore, not only is there no evidence that Americans are less likely to believe in miracles, there is no mention of the word “miracles” in the entire report. Bedard simply made up this “fact.”

By the way, the purpose of the Pew survey had nothing to do with what these reporters discussed. Its central finding is that “About half of U.S. adults have looked for a new religious congregation at some point in their lives, most commonly because they have moved.” That is why the report is titled, “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship.”

Neither Dicker nor Bedard even bothered to mention this, and that’s because they were determined to search for any finding that might fit their negative portrait of religion in America. There was a time when reporters would be fired for seriously misrepresenting the news, but too often today it is tolerated, which explains its frequency.