

# RELIGION SHOWS POCKETS OF OPTIMISM

Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith is the author of *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America*. Of course, the demise of religion has long been predicted, yet it never seems to die.

A new Pew Research Center survey shows that after a “prolonged period of religious decline,” conditions have stabilized, and this is certainly true of Christianity. More encouraging is the finding that “today’s youngest adults are more religious than today’s second youngest adults.” An earlier survey by the Barna Group came to the same conclusion.

Over the summer, hundreds of thousands of young people from all over the world attended the Jubilee of Youth event in Rome. According to Colm Flynn, an Irish radio and TV host, “When someone told me it was going to be like the Catholic version of Woodstock, I laughed. But as soon as I got there, I thought: OK, now I get it!”

New York City priest, Father Joseph Teller, celebrates Mass on Sunday nights to a crowded audience of young people in Greenwich Village. He notes that the number of converts has tripled in the past year. The same thing is happening at St. Vincent Ferrer on the upper east side. The Basilica of St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral is also witnessing a surge. “We’re out of space and exploring adding more masses,” says Father Daniel Ray.

What’s going on? The spiritual emptiness of the dominant culture is clearly a factor, and it’s widespread. Silicon Valley is bursting with young people looking for meaning in a world enveloped by “God-like” artificial intelligence. They are looking for answers that AI cannot provide.

Catholic commentator Michael Knowles is so encouraged by these new developments that he jokes, "everyone is becoming Catholic." Father Mike Schmitz, a prominent priest who works with young people, says there has been "a resurgence in people asking the question, 'How do we become Catholic?'"

Religion ebbs and flows, just like most elements in the culture, which is why sounding the death bells is *always* premature. Young people are proving that prediction wrong.