

College Students & Religious Tolerance

by Robert Hatfield

The University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) recently received a six-year grant to research the spirituality of college students during their undergraduate years. The study found that “the students’ overall level of spirituality, as defined by the researchers, increases” (O’Keefe, 2008) between the students’ freshmen and junior years.

The key to the results of this study lies within the definitions of the words “spiritual” and “religious.” The researches at UCLA claim that religiousness (attendance of worship services) is neither the same nor related to spirituality (a search for meaning and purpose in life). In fact, the study found that three-of-four college juniors agreed that “most people can grow spiritually without being religious” (O’Keefe, 2008). Researchers rejoice at these results:

To us, this is a positive finding in the sense that students display a good deal of tolerance for differing approaches to religion and spirituality on the part of their peers (as quoted in O’Keefe).

Present-day college students are not only more tolerant of their peers’ doctrinal beliefs of religion, they are also liberally tolerant of today’s “hot-button” issues such as abortion and homosexuality. The study shows that this tolerance *increases* as the students progress through college! In other words, today’s college freshmen have a tendency to become more accepting and tolerant of homosexuality and the legality of abortion.

“No man can serve two masters” (Mat. 6:24). “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). The New Testament does not distinguish between attendance of worship services and seeking the true purpose of life (cf. Eccl. 12:13). Rather, both the search for truth and the attendance of worship to the Father simply are called *obedience*. Individuals who are truly spiritual and obedient seek to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” and to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:21-22).

Truth is larger than any person’s interpretation, tolerance level, or sincerity. It is absolute, as defined by God; no level of academia can change that which is forever settled in heaven (Psa. 119:89). In a world permeated with religious ignorance and indifference it might be nice to be nice if Christians could be religiously tolerant and

remain acceptable to God, however, the role of the Christian is one of *submission* (cf. Phil. 2:5-8), not of authority. The faithful humbly submit to His terms in order to be saved forever in heaven (Rev. 2:10; cf. John 12:48).

Who influences college students to think the way they do? UCLA’s research revealed that college students influence *each other* through their friendships:

The faculty doesn’t appear to make much of a difference in this. We have looked at that in great depth, and it appears the main source of influence in the peer group (O’Keefe, 2008).

The sage advice from the New Testament rings true: “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33, ASV).

If nothing else, the results of this study should serve as a “wake up call” to all Christians. This is the growing reality of the present, and is a sign for the future (the Lord providing that time). George Gallup, Jr. is quoted as saying:

This breakthrough study, exploring new territory, is much needed because college students are the leadership of the future and **will set the moral tone of society in the years ahead** (Spirituality..., emp. mine, RH).

REFERENCES

O’Keefe, Mark (2008), “UCLA Study: Students Become More Spiritual in College,” [On-line], URL: <http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=168>

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