

“For *Whom*, for country....?” revisited

Spirituality in our 70s in the Class of ‘69

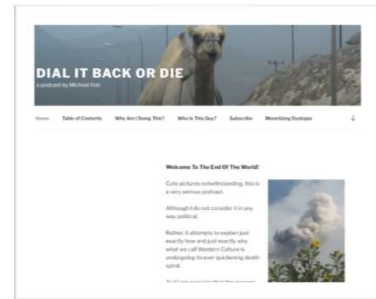


Thank you all for coming. I’m Mike Baum, and this session will revisit a topic we touched on five years ago: the spiritual beliefs of our class, then and now. This will conclude our introductory programming for today; it will run only about 30 minutes and then you can head to TD for cocktails and dinner. I should perhaps give a trigger warning before I start: we are going to be talking a bit about God. So if that bothers you, or you’re just not interested, you can leave right now and get a head start to the bar.

Michael Folz Contributor



- Lifelong traveler
 - India 1970
 - 200 other countries
 - Every spot in North America
- Multiple small businesses
- Veteran podcaster



OK, for those who are still here. I'd like to introduce two collaborators, who can't be here in person but are represented in the handout available at the back of the room. First is Mike Folz, who can't travel because he had a kidney transplant earlier this year. This is unusual for him, as he's traveled extensively all his life, starting in 1970 with 4 months in an Indian ashram, and going on from there. He's owned multiple small businesses, and he is a veteran podcaster on many subjects over the years. The most recent bears the intriguing title "ManWomanSexGod," and it's the origin of much of the material in his part of the handout.

Matt Flynn

Contributor



- Law partner, Quarles & Brady, Milwaukee
- Represented Roman Catholic church
- Author of 4 novels
- ...& one non-fiction book



Second collaborator is Matt Flynn, who is in transit to the reunion but couldn't make it in time for this slot. He's a longtime lawyer: recently retired after 41 years at a firm in Milwaukee. He extensively represented the Catholic church in litigation about sex abuse issues. Along the line he still found time to publish four novels, and most recently, one non-fiction book, *Confessions of a Church Lawyer*. This book is half about his experiences with the church's sex abuse challenges, and half about matters referenced in **his** part of the handout: why, after all these years and all the issues, he remains a firm believer in Christianity, and even believes there's life after death.

Maytal Saltiel

Respondent



- Yale Chaplain January 2024
- Johns Hopkins: international relations, psychology
- Mentored by Sharon Kugler, 1st woman chaplain of Yale
- MDiv, Harvard Divinity School
- Interfaith work



My third co-participant is up here with me on the platform. Maytal Saltiel, recently promoted to head the Yale Chaplain's office, where she has served since 2013. She's our first Jewish Chaplain, and after 323 years of Yale history I'd say it's about time! Her undergrad was from Johns Hopkins; at Hopkins she was mentored by Sharon Kugler, who later became Yale's first woman chaplain. Maytal got an M Div at Harvard, and has been active in interfaith work throughout her career. She also recently succeeded in getting the university to move the chaplains office out of the basement at Bingham Hall, which I'm sure all of you who lived in Bingham freshman year will support. We'll hear from Maytal a bit later on.

Way back before COVID....

- For the 50th, we asked the class a lot of questions about “spirituality”:
 - Belief in God
 - Importance of religion
 - Religious affiliation
 - Etc.

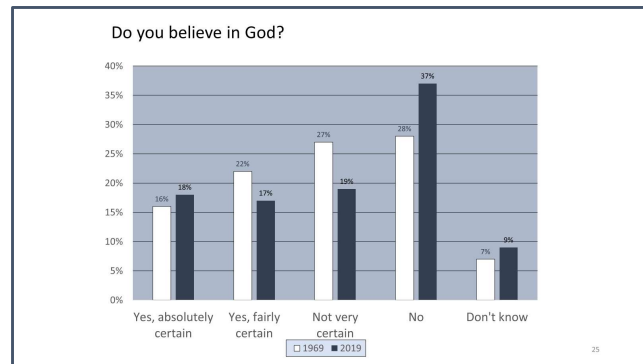
“For Whom, for country, and for Yale?”



So to start our deliberations – cast your mind back to our **last** reunion in 2019, back before COVID. Our survey then asked questions about belief in God, importance of religion, religious affiliation. And related issues....

The results weren't very inspirational...

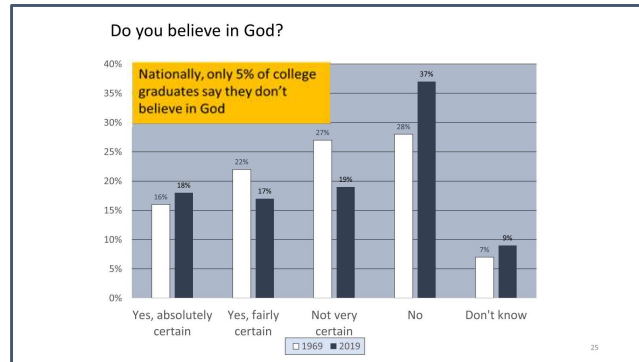
- **Belief in God:** skeptical in 1969, more so since:
 - “Absolutely” or “fairly” certain:
 - 38% in '69
 - 35% in 2019
 - “No”:
 - 28% in '69
 - 37% in 2019



...and the results showed we were pretty skeptical in 1969 and we've **only** gotten **more** so in the ensuing years. Only 38% of us believed in God with any certainty in '69, and even fewer 50 years later. And over a third of us just flatly don't believe. Now in case you think, like some classmates I've spoken to, that this just means that educated people are **automatically** skeptics...

The results weren't very inspirational...

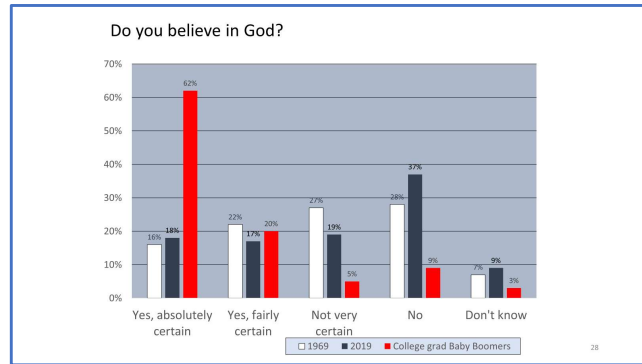
- **Belief in God:** skeptical in 1969, a bit more so since:
 - “Absolutely” or “fairly” certain:
 - 38% in '69
 - 35% in 2019
 - “No”:
 - 28% in '69
 - 37% in 2019
 - **...7 times as skeptical as college grads nationwide**



...national surveys say not so: Only **5%** of college graduates nationwide are unbelievers. So we are **seven times** as skeptical as our national peers.

Outliers

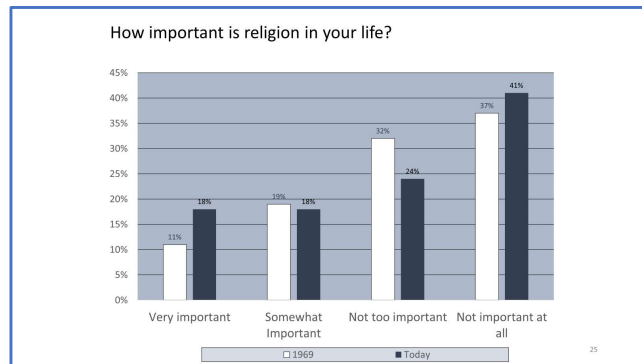
- **82% of Baby Boomer college grads believe in God**



And our views are outliers even if you narrow it down and just look at **Baby Boomer** college grads. 82% of Baby Boomers who went to college believe in God – “absolutely” or “fairly” certain.

Importance of religion in our lives

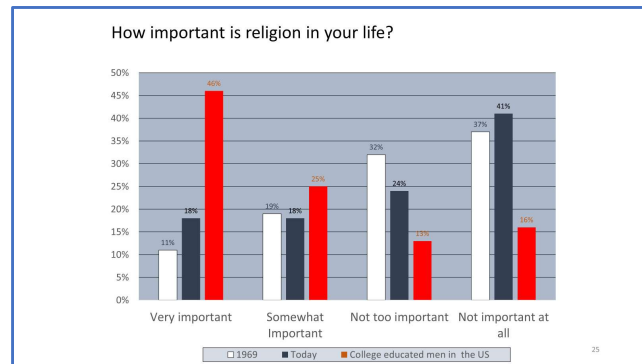
- Not so much
 - “Very important”:
 - 11% in '69
 - 18% in 2019
 - “Not at all” went from 37% to 41%



We also asked how important religion is in our lives. This isn't necessarily the same question as belief in God: it's possible to be religious without strong belief. But our results paralleled the answers about belief. Importance was only 11% in 1969, though it did go up a bit over the 50 years. But in the same period, "not important at all" also increased.

Importance of religion in our lives

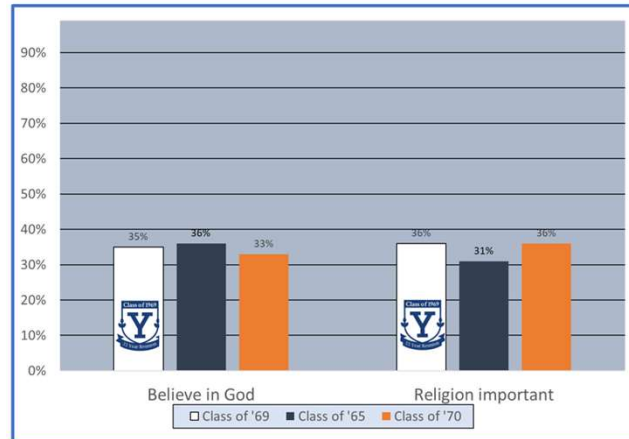
- Not so much
 - “Very important”:
 - 11% in '69
 - 18% in 2019
 - “Not at all” went from 37% to 41%
 - **Again, way out of line with other college grads**



Once again, we're outliers. **71%** of college grads in general say religion is very or somewhat important, vs 36% for us. Now, for today's presentation I did some further research, and I **did** find two college peer groups we **are** similar to...

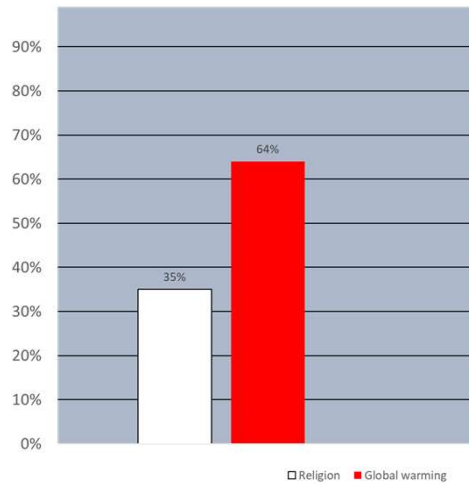
Peer groups we're similar to...

- Yale '65 and '70 did 50th reunion surveys too....
- “Belief in God” and “Importance of religion” look pretty much like us.



....namely, two other Yale graduating classes, 1965 and 1970. These data are courtesy of my colleague Tom Guterbock, who was connected with **their** 50th reunion surveys. On both metrics – belief and importance of religion – they were pretty close to us. So Yale in general, at least our generation, seems pretty skeptical.

By comparison...



By comparison, while only 35% of our class think **religion** is important, **64%** think **climate change** is important. So we're a lot more interested in global warming than we are in the fires of Hell, so to speak.

For more on **climate**, come back tomorrow

Friday, May 31, 2024

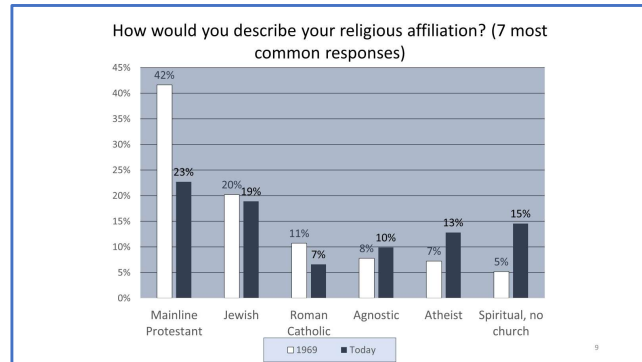
4:45 PM – 6:00 PM For God, for Country, and for the Planet (Redux): How Do Members of the Yale Class of 1969 View What Is Happening on Climate and Energy?

The challenging relationship between people and the planet has been one of the defining issues of the half century since we graduated. Nowhere has this issue been more fraught than on climate and energy. **How do members of the Yale Class of 1969 view what is happening?** This popular topic from our 50th reunion will add new voices and share class survey results on climate change, plus the latest science and what we Boomers can do about the issues. We will hear from **Derry Allen '69, Tom Emmons '69, Tom Guterbock '69, Skip Hobbs '69, Eugene Linden '69, and Wayne Willis '69.**

Which gives me an opportunity for a short commercial: for more about our views on climate, come to the session tomorrow that Tom mentioned earlier. This time **tomorrow, right here in SSS 114.**

Religious affiliation

- The biggest losers: Mainline Protestants
- The Jews held their own, just barely
- “Agnostic” and “atheist” went from 15% to 23%
- “Spiritual but no church” tripled



Getting back to religion: Another survey question asked religious affiliation, and not surprisingly that also changed a lot since 1969. The biggest losers last time were mainline Protestants, going from 42% to 23%. Most of the Jews stayed Jewish but that's as much a cultural identity as a religion. The increases were among agnostics, atheists, and people who said they're spiritual but don't attend church.

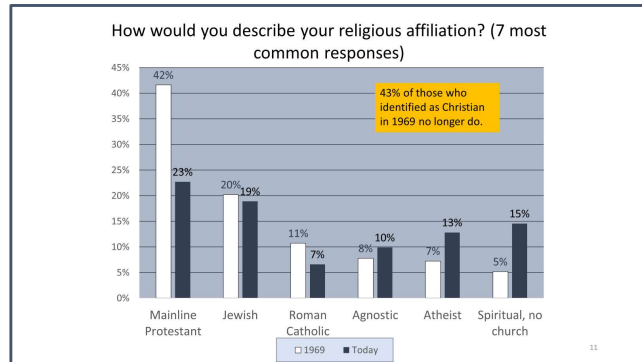
Spiritual but not religious

“God is the land. God is the galaxies. God is the grass and the birds and the beauty and the miracles that are going on within us and all around us all the time. I believe in the great universal spirit....So I would say that I am ‘spiritual’ but not at all ‘religious’ as generally defined.”

The identity of “spiritual but not religious” has gained ground nationally in the past few decades. Here’s how one of our recent survey participants described himself. While “spiritual but not religious” was gaining ground over the years, the biggest **losers** since 1969.....

Religious affiliation

- The biggest losers: Mainline Protestants
- The Jews held their own, just barely
- “Agnostic” and “atheist” went from 15% to 23%
- “Spiritual but no church” tripled
- **Christians overall lost 43%**



...are Christians overall. Over 40% of Christians in 1969 **weren't** Christians 50 years later.

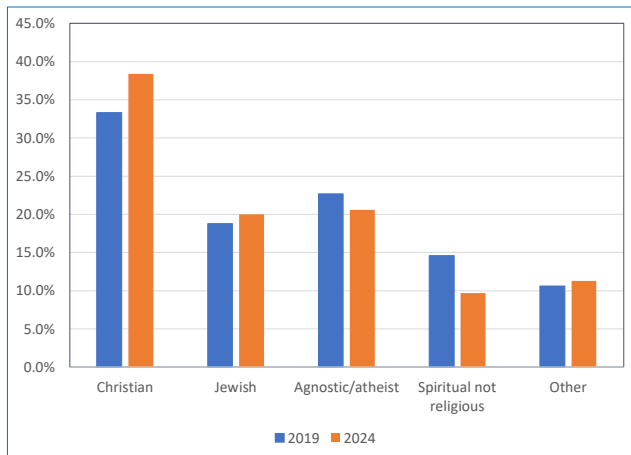
So how about the latest survey?



Importance
of religion:
↑ 8%

So what about the **latest** survey we sent out this year? Tom and I wondered if in the past five years, as we all get closer to the Pearly Gates, there's been a change in our views about religion. The answer: no huge changes, but some move back to faith. About 8% said religion is more important now than five years ago, though still only about a third of us report it as important.

So how about the latest survey?



The affiliation question is more interesting. Christianity regained some ground – small but statistically significant. Interestingly enough, atheists and agnostics declined, and so did the “spiritual but not” group – that lost about a third of its adherents, down to about 9%. That’s really low compared to national stats from Pew. Nationally, “spiritual but not religious” make up about 22% of the population. So it looks like traditional religion is gaining a bit – but maybe spirituality as a whole is declining!

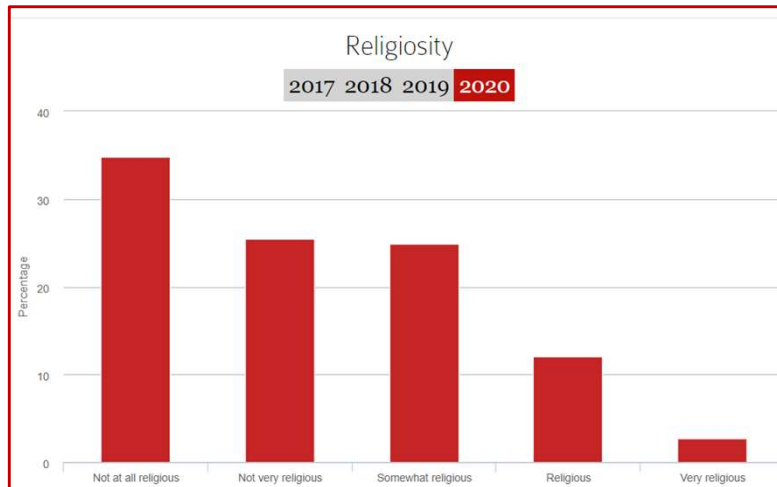
Why are we such skeptics?

- Even today, Yalies seem to be outliers
- Possible explanations
 - We're just smarter than everyone else
 - We're successful and independent
 - There was something in the water (or the curriculum)
 - Was it just the '60s?

So again.....why **were** we, and **are** we, such skeptics? Even in a decreasingly religious world, Yalies seem to be outliers. Some possible explanations:

- We're just **smarter** than everyone else, even other college grads.
- **Or** we're so successful we don't see a need for God.
- Maybe it's Yale – something about student selection , or maybe how we were taught. Mike Folz observed that many of our liberal arts courses were harder on belief than the science courses.
- Or was it just the '60s, where we questioned everything? Are things different now?

The other place...



Well, it probably wasn't just the '60s. Here's some recent data from one other Ivy League college, which will remain nameless, but you might get a clue from the colors here. They survey their freshman classes on what they call "religiosity." The latest results I could find were from the class of 2020. This chart reads in the opposite direction to ours, because of course this nameless college does everything backward, so the negatives are on the left. But if you go over to the right, you can see that only about 40% are even **somewhat** religious – probably pretty close to our data. And this isn't the '60s, it's now.

Why are we such skeptics?

- Even today, Yalies seem to be outliers
- Possible explanations
 - We're just smarter than everyone else
 - We're successful and independent
 - There was something in the water (or the curriculum)
 - **Is it the Ivy League?**

So instead of it being just the '60s, maybe it's just the Ivy League? Again, why are we such skeptics?

Questions...

- Why were we, and are we, such skeptics?
- What, if anything, has taken God's place?
 - Worldly success
 - Politics or activism
 - Sheer materialism ("If that's all there is....")
 - ?????



Let's keep that question in front of us, for Maytal and anyone else who wants to chime in, later on. But I'd like to pose a second question: What, if anything, has taken God's place in our lives?

- Worldly success – again, do we just not think we need God?
- Politics or activism – global warming or any other cause?
- Have we all just become materialists – people whose life soundtrack is the old Peggy Lee song "If that's all there is?" (And if you remember who Peggy Lee was, you're just as old as I am)
- Or what? And just one more question for possible consideration later.....

Questions...

- Why were we, and are we, such skeptics?
- What, if anything, has taken God's place?
 - Worldly success
 - Politics or activism
 - Sheer materialism ("If that's all there is....")
 - ?????
- What's death got to do with it?



.....does our imposing **end of life** make any difference, or should it? We know death is coming; as we mentioned in the last session, about 18% of us have already gone. And more than a third of us survivors have made at least some preparation for our funerals. Is the Grim Reaper starting to affect our thinking, or should it?

Reasons to seek “things of the spirit”

- **Feel better:** Joy, peace, “Flow”
- **Moral:** Treat each other better
- **Ethical:** Things work better
- **Social:** Support each other
- **Stories:** Things make more sense

Mike, Matt, and I would argue that we’re missing something important if we are not actively seeking “things of the spirit” – I’ll use that as a more concrete term than “spirituality.”

There are some practical reasons for spiritual awareness, mentioned in the handouts. But here’s a quick summary.

- At least if you look at the various types of prayer and meditation, they make us feel better, including the phenomenon known as “flow” where high level mental activity has a measurable positive impact on physiology.
- Morally, **all** the spiritual disciplines teach us to treat each other better.
- And from morals flow ethics: a spiritual society works better. Even an outstanding atheist like Richard Dawkins says he prefers living in a Christian country, even though he doesn’t believe a word of Christianity.
- Belief systems also have a social element leading to mutual support....
-and **religions** provide a shared narrative base, so reality just makes more sense.

These are all **practical** reasons to look for things of the spirit. But they all somewhat beg the question of whether there’s something outside material existence to **be** spiritual **about**.

Two modest proposals...

- God does, in fact, exist
 - So we can't keep ignoring Him.
- There is, in fact, life after death
 - So we can't keep ignoring It.



So let me close my remarks with two modest proposals, which are further articulated in the handout from my two collaborators.

- One proposal is: maybe, just maybe, God does exist after all. And if he does, as Mike Folz argues, we can't just ignore him.
- The **other** proposal has to do with death: Maybe, just maybe, there is life after death, as Matt Flynn argues. If so, we'd better give some thought to getting ready, beyond just writing our wills, and telling the kids where to find the key to the safe deposit box.

Arguments that God exists

- No conflict with Science or Reason
 - Ancient Greeks
 - Great scientific thinkers were believers
 - 51% of scientists believe, and 76% of MDs
- The “fine-tuning problem”
 - Change any of 26 parameters slightly, and the Universe doesn’t exist.
 - Example: Strong nuclear force
 - 2% stronger: no universe
 - Example: Gravitation between 2 protons
 - Increase slightly, universe collapses
 - Decrease slightly, universe flies apart

“A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics...”

Fred Hoyle

Let’s take God first. Mike’s paper focuses on the point that there is no conflict between faith and reason.

- He cites the ancient Greeks who invented logic but believed in first causes and God, not just “**the Gods...**”
- the great scientists in history were all believers.
- Even today 51% of scientists are believers, as are 76% of doctors.

One of the greatest **modern** physicists, Fred Hoyle, said this toward the end of his life: “A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics...”

What Hoyle was talking about is what has been called the “fine-tuning problem”: if any of 26 physical parameters were slightly different, the universe wouldn’t exist, so it’s hard to argue for random chance. See Mike’s handout for detail, but two examples are:

- the strong nuclear force: if it were much stronger, the Big Bang would have burned out very quickly...
- and gravitation.....if it varied much in either direction, there would be no universe. Ergo, Hoyle’s reference to a super-intellect monkeying with physics.

And as to life after death...

- See previous arguments about existence of God...
- Virtues have an origin beyond self-interest.
- People in all cultures have believed in existence after death...
- ...including accountability.
- “Memento mori”: “Remember that you must die.”



Now to the second of our Modest Proposals: suppose there **is** life after death.

- Matt Flynn starts with the arguments that support the existence of God, and goes on to posit that....
-the virtues like truth, beauty, honesty, loyalty, have an origin **beyond** the self-interest which would be implied by strict materialism.
- And unless we just think we’re smarter today than everyone in history, we have to at least consider that **all** cultures have believed in some kind of life after death.....
- which usually included accountability for how we have lived our lives.

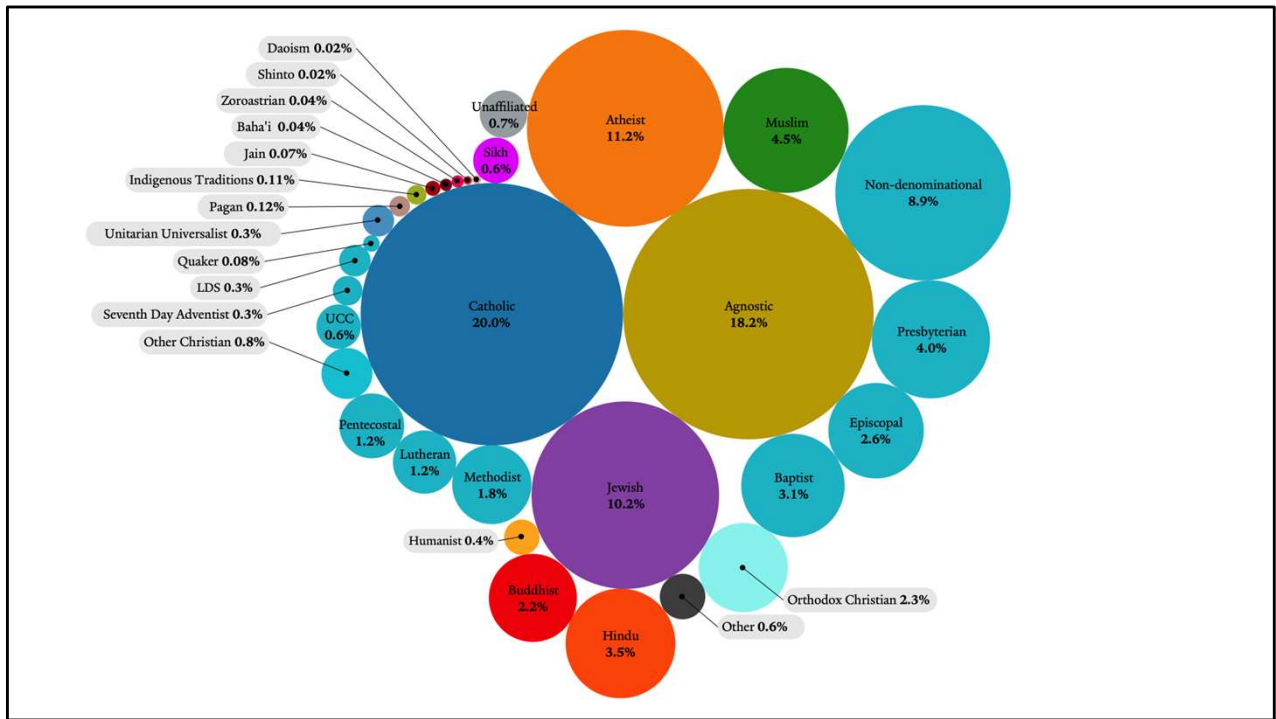
So as we exit our 70s, we might just pay attention to the ancient Stoic philosophers who advised remembering death even in the peak of life, like the person who rode behind the victorious Roman generals during their triumphal processions and kept murmuring in their ear, “Remember that you must die.”

OK, to everyone’s relief, I’m going to stop talking and turn it over to Maytal, and then to you in the audience.

Questions for Maytal

- What is it about Yale?
- What's the status of "belief" at Yale today?
- What kinds of spiritual activities do people today find meaningful?
- Comments on the points so far?

For Maytal, I'd like to pose these questions, plus any other observations she'd like to make. And she has some interesting statistics on the makeup of Yale undergrads today, which is reported on the next slide



Current religious composition of Yale undergrads (self-reported, about 50% responded)

Source: Yale Chaplain's Office

Questions for us

- Why were we, and are we, such skeptics?
- What, if anything, has taken God's place in our lives?
- What's death got to do with it?

And in the time remaining, here are the three questions I posed earlier. Why are we such skeptics? What takes the place of God in our lives? And does approaching death change the picture at all? Anyone want to weigh in to any of them?

Thank you!

“For *Whom*, for country....?”
revisited



That's all the time we have. Thanks to Maytal for participating, to my classmates Mike Folz and Matt Flynn for contributing, and to all of you for coming and joining in. It's time to deal with another type of spirits. I'll see you at the bar at TD. Have a great reunion!