"For *Whom,* for Country…?" Revisited
Spirituality in our 70s in the Class of '69

Summary

Our 50th Reunion Survey asked some probing questions about our collective approaches to spirituality; the 55th Reunion Survey sought to determine whether beliefs have continued to evolve. This presentation will examine the spiritual state of our class, raise some questions about why it is what it is, and present some individual views and questions to ponder as we age.

This session is the combined effort of three 1969 class members: Michael Folz, Matt Flynn, and Mike Baum. Due to scheduling issues the only presenter on platform will be Baum, who will try to do justice to the other two's ideas. For more details on their points, see "Additional Resources" below. Following Baum's summary, our new Yale Chaplain Maytal Saltiel will respond

The following is an outline of the general points made in the session, serving as context for the two co-presenters' resources.

- Background: Spiritual views at the 50th (based on survey of views in 1969 & views 50 years later)
  - Belief in God:
    - 38% believed in 1969; 35% in 2019
    - 28% firmly disbelieved in 1969; 37^ in 2019
    - **7 times as skeptical as college grads nationwide; 82% of Baby Boomer grads believe**
  - Importance of religion:
    - 11% "very important" in 1969, 18% in 2019
    - But 37% "not at all" in 1969, 41% in 2019
    - Yale classes of '65 and '70 had similar findings at their 50ths
    - By comparison, 64% of us think climate change is very important
  - Religious affiliation:
    - Mainline Protestants dropped precipitously 1969-2019; Christians overall lost 43%
    - Jews held their own
    - "Agnostic," "atheist," and "spiritual but no church" shot up
- Survey for the 55th
  - "Importance of religion": 8% reported increased importance since 2019, vs 2.7% "less important"
  - Agnostics, atheists, "spiritual but not" declined
  - But no huge swings either way
  - Similar to 1965 and 1970 50th survey data
  - Today: "Another Ivy League college" finds similar low "religiosity" among today's freshmen
- Questions
  - Why are we such skeptics?
  - What, if anything, has taken God's place?
  - Does our approaching mortality make a difference?
- Reasons to seek "things of the spirit"
  - Practical:

- Feel better
- Treat each other better
- Things work better
- Social support
- Stories to explain things

➢ And maybe more than that…
- Suppose God really does exist? (See **"God/Science"** by Mike Folz)
  - No conflict with science or reason
  - The "fine-tuning problem": logically, the Universe shouldn't exist.
- Suppose there's life after death? (See **"Memento mori"** by Matt Flynn)
  - People have always believed there is…
  - ….and that we're accountable for our acts.
  - "Memento mori": "Remember that you must die."

References from Co-Contributors

The following essays flesh out the points at the end of the outline above.

GOD/SCIENCE

Michael Folz, Class of '69

I think by now that most of us have found out the hard way that it is impossible to convince anyone of anything. And that's probably true in spades when it comes to questions about, um, religion or spirituality. What complicates the problem is that many of us still hold onto our youthful beliefs and/or our adolescent skepticism. Further, although some of us have more contemplative natures, whereas many of us are, frankly, not all that much into that.

Once one hits 76 or 77, though, it starts getting a bit harder to ignore the reality that The End Is Near. Especially when all of those trusty body parts start failing, and/or a spouse or a good friend dies.

Anyway, in this essay I'm not going to try to argue the truth or falsity of any or all religions. Instead I'm going to address the rather strange conception that science and religion are somehow inevitably at odds.

Now, given how far they got with mathematics and the natural sciences, we certainly tend to think that the ancient Greeks were rationality par excellence. But they themselves would have thought it beyond bizarre to put up some barrier between rationality and the divine and/or the spiritual. Indeed there was even a religion devoted to Pythagoras and mathematics. And although we tend to think of pagan thought as having to do with Zeus and Hermes, in reality the ancient Greeks had quite sophisticated ideas about first causes, the afterlife, and the God that created all this. Far more sophisticated than did the ancient Hebrews.

But although how advanced the Greeks got, most historians do not believe that they had really worked out even the outlines of what is now known as the Scientific Method. That honor is usually given to a group of Franciscan monks sometime during the 13th Century. And you might not have heard of Robert Grosseteste. But you might well have heard of Roger Bacon. As well as William of Occam, who has lent his name to the idea known as Occam's Razor.

But Franciscan monks? Weren't they the ones who were about devotion and serving the poor? Yes, but… Because of their *faith*, they didn't need to *believe* anything a priori, whether it was scripture or ancient Greek writings. So that they were in a unique position, whereby they could *experiment* and actually find

out what was going on. Further, since they believed in a loving God, then their hypothesis was that such a God would have only given humans rationality because the Universe must be a rational place. And it is interesting that present day physicists are still somewhat wonderstruck that the Universe *is* a rational place.

What's more, this first hypothesis—that the Universe could be described in rational and mathematical terms—turns out to have been the driving force behind Science itself. And it has been argued that, were it not for devotional Christianity, the scientific method would have never happened.

Of course, Medieval reality intervened to temporarily halt the March of Science. First, around the year 1300, the climactic change now called the Little Ice Age began, which caused the economic collapse of the High Middle Ages. Second, instruments for exactly measuring one's experimentation, such as the telescope and microscope, were still three centuries off.

Nor did Copernicus have anything to do with what happened next. After all, although being a sincere and intelligent person, not to mention a member of the clergy himself, all Copernicus did was to dust off an ancient Greek heliocentric theory, first proposed by Aristarchus of Samos back around 250 B.C. And this had been soundly rejected by the ancient world back then. Not because people had arrogantly presumed that they were the center of the Universe. But because there were already any number of sound scientific reasons why putting the Sun in the center screwed everything up.

Here are the two main ones.

First, by now everyone already knew how large the Earth was. Around the same time that Aristarchus lived, another Greek, named Eratosthenes, had calculated the Earth's circumference within 1% of its true value. So, since one could easily calculate the weight of a cubic cubit of rock, one could easily calculate the weight of the Earth. At the same time, though, no one had the vaguest idea of how big the Sun and the Moon were. Nor how far away they were.

Nor did anyone have a clue as to what kind of force could push such a massive mass as the Earth around the Sun. Even worse, if the Sun appears to rise every 24 hours, this would imply that the Earth was spinning around at 1,000 miles an hour. So, in a world where the fastest racehorse ran at 40 mph, how could that happen? Further, why then didn't everything immediately fly off of the ridiculously spinning Earth?

And here's the second major problem with heliocentricity. Because the ancient world almost worshiped the circle as *the* ideal form. And when you put the Sun in the center of the solar system, the planets kind of go round in circles. But they really don't. And the more closely one measured their orbits, the more obvious the lack of circularity became. Which is why Earth-centric astronomical models, such as that made by Ptolemy, had the other planets suddenly going backwards in epicycles.

And which is why Copernicus' model also still had those epicycles.

In fact, Copernicus was so unsure of his own idea that he refused to have it published until the year of his death in 1543. Not because he was afraid of the Church or theology. Indeed he had presented the hypothesis to Pope Clement in 1521. And Clement thought that it was a fascinating hypothesis. Hypothesis. Because at that point, that's all that it was.

And it wasn't until 1608, when Johannes Kepler came up with his brilliant insight that planetary orbits were ellipses, that this problem was solved. (Although both Kepler and Galileo believed until their dying days that the whole ellipse thing was spurious. And that *of course* planets *must* travel in circles.)

Anyway, the other major problem had to do with the wonders and strangeness of what we now know of as gravity. And *that* was solved by Isaac Newton with the publication of Principia Mathematica in 1687. Which no one at the time was ready for. But, once it was out there, it was then and only then that the heliocentric model was finally confirmed.

Of course, what with the invention of the telescope and microscope, not to mention the thoughts and writings of Francis Bacon (no relation) and Rene Descartes, there was so much new science being discovered in the 17th Century that nowadays that era is referred to as the time of the Scientific Revolution. And Newton's discoveries seemed to top it off. After all, if capital S Science had been founded on the hypothesis that God's Universe could be discerned through reason and mathematics, then said hypothesis had now been spectacularly proved.

God had been proven.

Except that…

Well, it started with the proto-existentialism of John Locke. And then, a half century or so later, there was the full blown Skepticism of David Hume. (Although, if you really bought into the philosophy of Hume, then you wouldn't believe Science at all.) But, anyway, it turned out that by the end of the 18th Century (the so called Age of Enlightenment) a certain number of 'cutting edge' philosophes came out as atheists. And their self-justification for doing that was that 'all you need is science'.

Even though almost all scientists at that time were themselves religious. Indeed, many were even clergy themselves. Further, through the 19th Century, most scientists were still highly religious. Further, polls conducted throughout the latter half of the 20th Century showed up to 70% of working scientists believed in God. Today, even in our postmodern world, the latest Pew Research finding is that 51% of scientists still believe in God. And a whopping 76% of medical doctors, those people who most deal with life and death, believe in God.

As opposed to our Class…

(I had to get that in there.) Anyway, the point is, if you don't believe in God, it probably doesn't have anything to do whether or not you aced Chem 14. Rather, it probably might have something to do with some of the totally non-science classes which you took.

All of which brings us up to what's called the 'fine-tuning problem.' Which could also well be called the 'fine-tuning miracle.' But, again, that would have to do with one's ideological predisposition.

Okay. In case you didn't ace Chem 14 back in the day, there's a little math involved in order to understand this. Namely, one needs to refresh one's memory on the idea of scientific notation. That is to say, in science we don't say 'a million'. Instead we say '1 times 10 to the sixth,' Which you can visualize as 1 followed by six zeros. Which is a million. Or 'a billion' is 10 to the 9th. All of which gets handy when you're dealing with extremely large or extremely small numbers. (For instance, One one/thousandth is 10 to the minus 3rd.) All of which leads to being able to understand what it means when somebody talks about an order of magnitude. That is to say, an order of magnitude is when some quantity is ten times larger than another. Two orders of magnitude means, approximately, a hundred times bigger. And so on.

Which is pretty much all the math that we need. Oh, and except that, once you start playing around with high exponents, you can start to forget just how large (or small) those numbers really are. For instance, in the 14 billion years since the Big Bang, there have 'only' been 10^{17} seconds. Or you could count the microseconds, which are millionths of a second. There have been 10^{23} of those. Since the beginning of time. OR: It has been calculated that, since the Universe has around 200 billion galaxies, and each of those with around 200 billion stars, then there are therefore a total of around 10^{89} atoms in the entire Universe. That's it.

Anyway, sometime in the 20th Century somebody noticed that the various parameters which hold the Universe together, forces such as the strong nuclear force, the electromagnetic force, gravity, etc., etc., seem to exist in rather tight constraints.

For instance, if the strong nuclear force were 2% stronger than what it is, then all of the Hydrogen in the Universe would have been used up in the first few minutes after the Big Bang. OR take the difference between the electromagnetic force at the level of a pair of protons, and the gravitational force between those two protons, that's 10^{24} larger. Move that up a tiny bit, and the entire Universe collapses upon itself. Move it down a bit, and everything immediately flies apart.

And there are now acknowledged to be 25 different, independent of each other, such parameters. 26 if you count the cosmological constant. Speaking of which, this is now understood to be around 10^{-122}. Now that's tiny. So tiny that this would only affect an area that is at least a billion light years across. But it's not zero. No, it's 10^{-122}.

Now it is often said that the Universe seems to be 'fine-tuned' for life to exist. But it's truer to say that the Universe has been fine-tuned just for itself to exist. Change any of those 26 parameters ever so slightly, and it either immediately collapses into itself, or it goes flying out into infinity and beyond.

When confronted with this inconvenient fact, even atheists are going to be stumped by this. Indeed, a famous British astronomer named Fred Hoyle, a lifelong atheist, had to look at the math, and then come to the (for him) sad conclusion that God indeed did exist.

Of course, Hoyle was an honest guy. Most other present day atheist scientists instead tightly cling on to the fantasy of the Multiverse. That is to say, the fantasy that, if there *were* an infinite number of Universes, then it therefore just so happens that we ended up in that one Universe out of that infinite number, where we could exist. QED. And so on to the next inconvenient fact that we don't want to deal with.

Except.

Because in Science, you're not supposed to just make stuff up. I mean, wasn't that why Religion was supposed to be so bad: Because *they* just made stuff up? No, the point about the scientific method was supposed to be that a hypothesis could only be a valid hypothesis if it was falsifiable. Which meant that you just couldn't make stuff up. And that said hypothesis could only be proven true or false through experimentation, etc.

And, um, so far no one has put forward the slightest plausible suggestion as to how you could prove that there was another Universe next to ours. How could you, given the definition of a Universe?

Yet all kinds of supposedly high level physicists keep on blabbing about Multiverses. I even saw one article where someone was arguing that maybe it was time to reconsider the Multiverse theory. What theory?? I mean, it's like believing in leprechauns. At least some Irishmen have claimed to have seen them. But Multiverses? I don't think so.

Which brings us back to the fine-tuned Universe. You know, the one which we're living in. And I'm not saying that, at some point in the future, we're not going to have a larger vision of Science where we'll understand some answer to the fine-tuning problem without invoking God (or call it X the Unknown if that makes you feel better) or whatever.

But we're not there yet. Nor, as with the Multiverse idea, can we even begin to hypothesize about how such an answer will present itself. Because since, as we are here, right now, under the rules of the scientific method, we… just… can't. And, for me at least, the best scientific answer for right here, right now is that the Universe might well turn out to be orders of magnitude more complex than we, with our puny human brains, can grasp.

So that, here in our present state, God is the only correct answer. And, like Fred Hoyle did, if we're intellectually honest, we have to suck it up, and admit that.

I mean, dogs are pretty smart animals. They can herd sheep. Lassie can go get help when Timmy falls into the well. But try to explain to the smartest dog in the world how a dog food factory works. No, it's just going to cock its head, stare at you with an empty expression, and wag its tongue.

Note: In addition to this argument for the existence of God, Folz has written an extended analysis of why organized religion persists in the face of skepticism. He also has authored several informed and entertaining podcasts on this and related topics. If you'd like to receive a copy of "The Point of Existence & Organizing Religions," and/or get access to his podcasts, contact Folz at mfolz@q.com.

MEMENTO MORI
Remember you must die
Matt Flynn, Class of '69

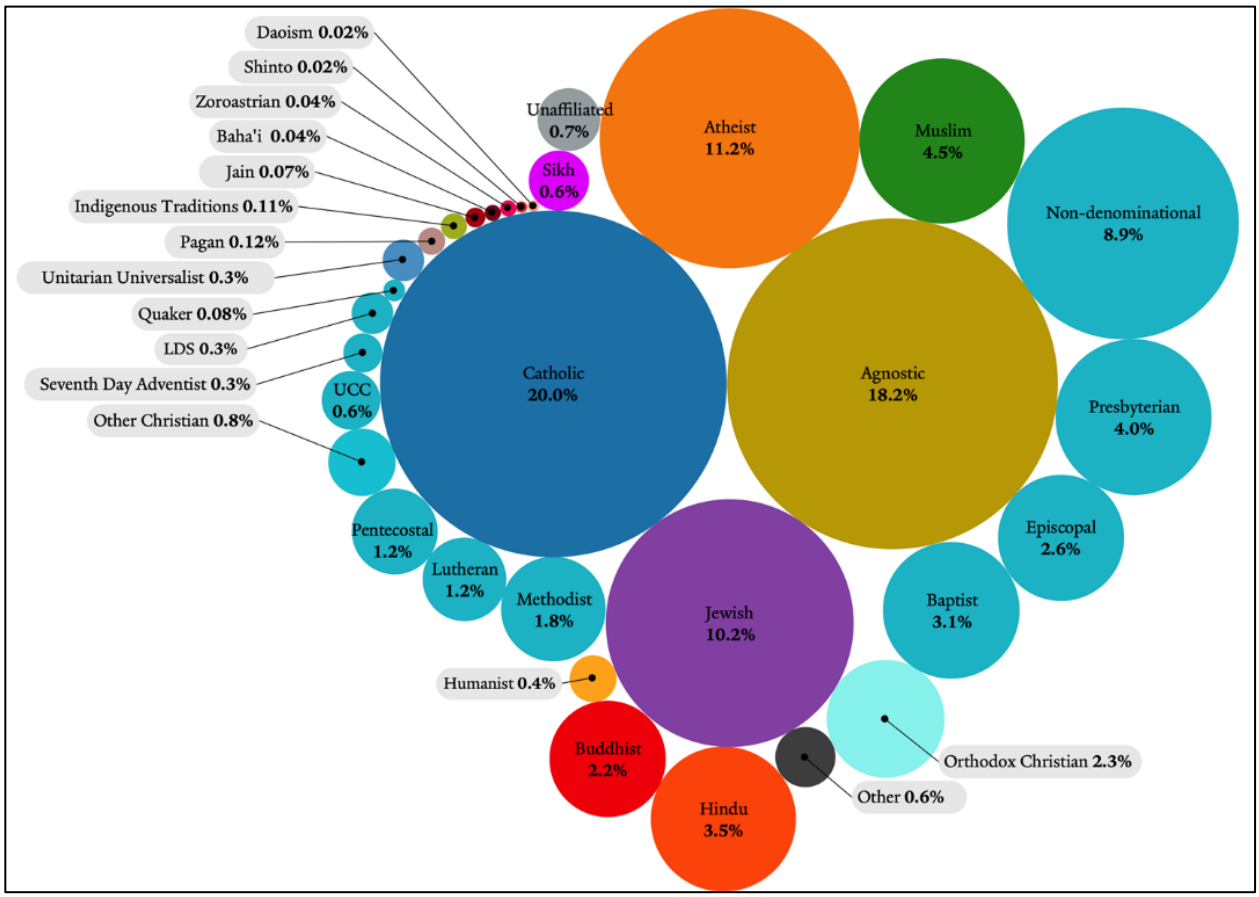
1. Some of us will not be here for the 60th reunion. Even more of us will not be here for the 65th reunion. Is there an afterlife? If so, what is it like? Does God exist? Is there an objective moral order? Is everything random, accidental, self-creating and meaningless? Do you matter?
2. My book, CONFESSIONS OF A CHURCH LAWYER: IN DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANITY was published last August. I argue, based on pure reason, that God must exist, if not in the anthropomorphized sense that we use to discuss God.
3. In my legal practice, I represented the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I have published three fiction titles--MILWAUKEE JIHAD, CHINA CODE, and THE COURT OF LAST RESORT, but my non-fiction CONFESSIONS forms the basis of this presentation. Judeo-Christianity is the basis of Western Civilization, but people of all religions, in addition to Christianity and Judaism, and people of no religion, have a vital interest in solving the foremost enigma facing all human beings. MEMENTO MORI. Remember you must die. What comes next?
4. Both the atheist and the believer argue for an entity that is self-creating, all powerful, inevitable, and eternal, with no beginning and no end. It is impossible for that entity NOT to exist. The atheist calls it the universe. I call it God.
5. The odds of a physics fine-tuned for life occurring by chance is computed by some as 1 in 10 to the 229th power. First, I propose a conjecture. There is no life other than on earth anywhere in the universe, or in any "once upon a time" parallel universes some propose, in spite of the argument that there is probability one that other life exists. Second, I do not accept that virtues such as truth, beauty, honesty, loyalty and love are merely the result of mutual strategic assent or enlightened self-interest,. You can program a computer to cooperate. These virtues go beyond cooperation.
6. Belief in God and an afterlife should not be confused with Intelligent Design. When I share 98.5% of my DNA with a chimpanzee, 60% with a banana, and 25% with a daffodil, and have a lot of junk DNA, it's obvious that evolution took its course.
7. It was fashionable in the '60s to say you were an atheist or an agnostic. That is because you were 22, death was a fuzzy concept a lifetime in the future, and all things were possible. Now it's fish-or-cut-bait time, and the time for virtue-signaling adherence to frozen ideologies of the past is over. Christianity itself incorporates some pagan beliefs from long before the birth of Christ. All people in all cultures, other than sociopaths, at some point consider the question of accountability for how they lived their lives, of how their lives impacted others, and what that means. All of humanity demands to know the answer to this question. If I must die, is there an afterlife?

8. The answer is yes, there is an afterlife, but not in the sense that some believe. You will not be immediately transported to your parents' old living room to be reunited with your deceased relatives and friends who will be delighted to see you.
9. Then what is an "afterlife" like? No one in our class was alive in the 19th century. None of us will be alive in the 22nd Century. It didn't bother us then, and it won't bother us in the future. An afterlife must be outside of time. A different dimension. But will you continue to exist in any form? Will you retain your individual consciousness in the afterlife, or will you blend into a final realization of goodness and peace? Does that matter? It does to me.
10. Because my reason tells me that God exists (read the book for more details), because of my conjecture that we are alone in this and all universes, and because I do not believe that human virtues arise solely from enlightened self-interest and mutual strategic assent, I do not believe that we live for only an instant in time, and that's it. An afterlife can't be temporal. But your individuality, your "soul" to some theologians, is beyond time. It will continue to exist.

Note: The book Flynn references above fleshes out his points far beyond this summary, or what Baum will be able to present in 30 minutes. It's available on Amazon in print and e-book formats. If you would like to explore Flynn's ideas further, he's eager to discuss. You can email him at matthew.flynn@quarles.com, or call him at 414-690-8664.

Response by Maytal Saltiel

Distribution of beliefs – today's Yale freshmen



For comparison: Distribution of beliefs – Yale Class of 1969 (then and now)