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October 25, 2009: Secularism Is Growing; But What Kind of Secularism?

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Title: Secularism Is Growing; But What Kind of Secularism?

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10/25/2009--A few weeks ago a new report from the Religious Identification Survey came out with further analysis of the 2008 data that led to their original report last spring. The 2008 report had dramatically identified 15% of the American people as reporting their religion as "none". There had been criticism of at least the implications of the 2008 report because most of the growth in that category seemed to have taken place prior to 2001. Now new analysis suggests to the authors that the "none" category is continuing to grow. [New Report]If this is true, it comes as no surprise, but not for any statistical reasons. The social trends driving secular growth are very powerful and there is no reason that the drift from religion should not continue once the basic hold of religion began to weaken. Nevertheless, precise predictions of this kind are inherently unreliable. The more significant question may be, what kind of secularism is growing? Apparently a little more than half of the "nones" continue to report that they believe in God or a higher power. Then one must ask why such people have not found some religious orientation? It is one thing to leave religion because one no longer believes. Why leave if you still do? It would be unfortunate if the growth of secularism turned out to be in large part a flight from religious authorities. If that does turn out to be the case, America will end up with rootless believers who may fall for the next snake-oil salesman who comes along.