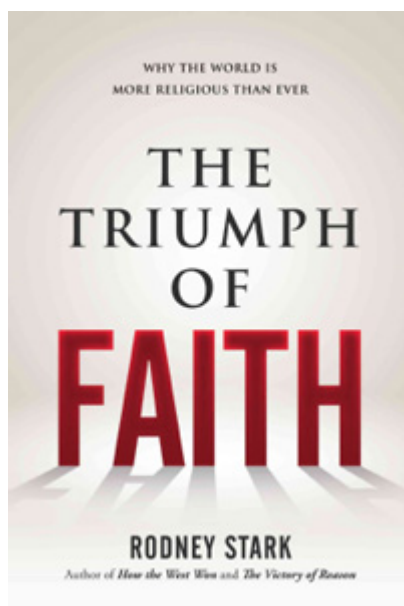


# Book Review: The Triumph of Faith

October 16, 2015

[\*\*The Triumph of Faith\*\*](#) by Rodney Stark (ISI Books)



Reports about the death of religion in the United States are greatly exaggerated, sociologist Rodney Stark insists in a book to be published Nov 16. And researchers who report the inevitable global triumph of secularism over supernaturalism need to check their facts, he asserts.

Stark, distinguished professor of social sciences at Baylor University and co-director of the school's Institute for Studies of Religion, uses the Gallup World Polls, census data and other evidence to bolster his contrarian view that says the world is more religious than ever before. Citing surveys of more than 1 million people in 163 nations, he points to massive worldwide religious awakening. He notes 80 percent of the world's population belong to an organized religion. Furthermore, predictions Islam will overtake Christianity numerically appear unfounded, at least in most parts of the globe. He specifically references the growth of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as increasingly strong Christian churches—both evangelical and Catholic—in Latin America.

In a particularly provocative section, Stark takes issue with the much-

reported rise of the “nones” in the United States. He cites data indicating the percentage of people who do not attend houses of worship remains steady, and the increase in nonaffiliated Americans appears to be drawn from that subset of the total population. Also, he disputes the assertion that young adults are less religious than in previous decades. Rather, he notes young adults attend church less often than older adults—but so did their parents at their age.

Baptists and others in the Free Church tradition will be encouraged particularly by Stark’s conclusion that “the more religious competition there is in a society, the higher the overall level of individual participation.” Where a state church receives tax subsidies and a virtual monopoly, churches grow lazy and church members grow lax in their commitment. Where people freely choose whether to associate with a church, and churches depend on the voluntary contributions of the members they are able to attract, religion thrives.

Stark stands on solid footing when he draws conclusions based on social science research. Readers may want to place less faith in him when he makes suppositions about theology, such as the broad caricatures he draws of liberation theology in Latin America and the so-called “liberal” mainline Protestant denominations in the United States. Even so, readers will benefit from reading Stark’s findings and conclusions that defy conventional wisdom.

Ken Camp, managing editor

*Baptist Standard*