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# Is God Dead in Europe? A Vision of the Future, Coming Fast

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Journalist James P. Gannon offers a bracing picture of what happens when secularism takes hold of a civilization in "Is God Dead in Europe?," published in USA Today.

Consider these observations:

*"Common wisdom has it that alcoholics outnumber practicing Christians and that more Czechs believe in UFOs than believe in God — and common wisdom may be correct," wrote Nate and Leah Seppanen Anderson in a Prague Post commentary; he's a freelance writer, and she's a political science professor at Wheaton College in Illinois and a specialist in Czech politics and society. Surveys show a sharp decline in church attendance and religious practice in most European countries. A series of Eurobarometer surveys since 1970 in five key countries (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy) shows that regular church attendance fell from about 40% of the population to about half that figure. Declines were sharpest in predominantly Catholic nations.*

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*A fierce controversy over any mention of Europe's Christian heritage erupted in 2004 when officials were drafting a constitution for the European Union, Weigel notes.*

*Any mention of the continent's religious past or contributions of Christian culture — in a preface citing the sources of Europe's distinct civilization — would be exclusionary and offensive to non-Christians, many argued. Former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing, who presided over the process, summed up the dominant view: "Europeans live in a purely secular political system, where religion does not play an important role.*

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*Not a single Western European country has a fertility rate sufficient to replace the current population, which demographers say requires 2.1 children per family. Germany, Russia, Spain, Poland and Italy all have rates of about 1.3 children, according to the U.N. The Czech Republic's is less than 1.2, and even Roman Catholic Ireland is at 1.9 children. (The U.S. rate, which has remained stable, is slightly more than 2 children per woman.)*

*Fifteen countries, "mostly located in Southern and Eastern Europe, have reached levels of fertility unprecedented in human history," according to the U.N.'s World Population Prospects 2004 revision.*

*As children grow scarce and longevity increases in Europe, the continent is becoming one vast Leisure World. By 2050, the U.N. projects, more than 40% of the people in Italy will be 60 or older. By mid-century, populations in 25 European nations will be lower than they are now; Russia will lose 31 million people, Italy 7.2 million, Poland 6.6 million and Germany 3.9 million. So Europe is abandoning religion, growing older, shrinking and slowly killing itself. These are signs of a society in eclipse — the Roman Empire writ large. Is this any model for America?*

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