

US religion worth \$1.2 trillion

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It's not often that an academic report changes the conversation about religion in America, but one just did. Georgetown University professors Brian Grim and Melissa Grim of the Newseum Institute have unveiled their [groundbreaking study](#): "The Socio-economic Contributions of Religion to American Society: An Empirical Analysis." Here's the [summary](#):

- Religion in the US contributes \$1.2 trillion each year to our economy and society.
- Despite declining religious affiliation in the American population, religious organizations have tripled the amount of money spent on social programs in the last fifteen years—to \$9 billion.
- Religion's \$1.2 trillion impact is more than the annual revenues of Apple, Amazon, and Google combined.

The study notes that congregations and religiously affiliated charity groups are responsible for:

- 130,000 alcohol and drug abuse recovery programs.
- 94,000 programs to support veterans and their families.
- 26,000 programs to prevent HIV/AIDS and to support those living with the disease.
- 121,000 programs to provide support or skills training for unemployed adults.

While religion contributes \$1.2 trillion each year, religious tax-exemptions [cost](#) the US \$71 billion. In other words, religion contributes seventeen times more to America than it costs.

This good news comes as we are facing unprecedented attacks on religious liberty and increasing skepticism regarding our contribution to the common good. For instance, 63 percent of atheists and agnostics believe that religious institutions contribute not much or nothing at all to solving social problems.

Other institutions face similar trust issues. FBI Director James Comey [bemoaned](#) this week the loss of public trust in government institutions like the one he leads. He lays much of the blame on social media: "Things like Twitter offer us the opportunity only to encounter views consistent with our own, 24 hours a day. There's an opportunity to feed that monster of a bias, that confirmation bias, all the time. So it accelerates the fractionalizing of our society."

Social media is undermining trust, but apparently conventional media isn't helping. A just-published [Gallup poll](#) shows that only 32 percent of Americans either trust the media "a great deal" or "a fair amount." That's by far the lowest percentage in the forty-four years Gallup has

asked this question. Seventy-two percent of Americans trusted the media in 1976, but less than a third of us do so today.

In a skeptical day, the best way to gain trust is to do what the culture values. Our society clearly values deeds over doctrines. People believe that our faith is real when they see that it is relevant.

Here's an example: Acts 5 notes that "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (v. 12). As a result, "The people held them in high esteem" (v. 13) and "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (v. 14).

When skeptics claim that religion is irrelevant or even [dangerous](#), we can cite the Grims' study to show that they're wrong. But we must not stop there. We demonstrate the personal value of our faith when it moves us to personal ministry: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Do good today for God's glory. This is the sum of life.

Note: For more on the Grims' report, see Nick Pitts's [Religion Contributes \\$1.2 Trillion Each Year to US Economy](#).