Monica Gresham May 13, 2020

WDC626A Journalism is the Digital Age

Prof. M. Greene

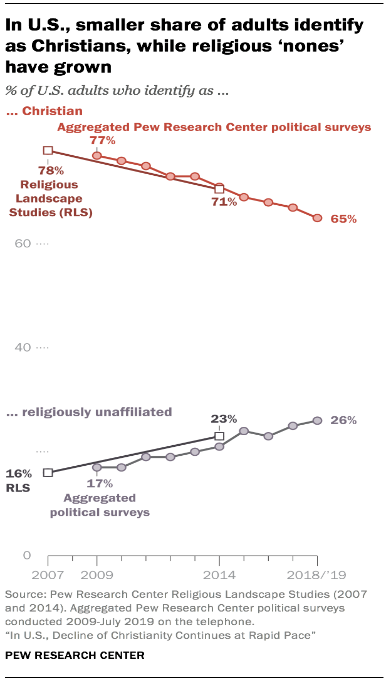
**Final** **Draft**

*“I have been in Sorrow’s kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and a sword in my hands.*

Zora Neale Hurston 1891-1960

*I remember the thick green grass that tickled my bare feet as she led me across the yard to the gray wooden shed. Her head wrapped in the bright white cloth that circled it like waves of clouds and a long dress, the same and a stark contrast to her ebony skin. The big door swung open without a touch, she led me through the darkness to the candlelight. My eyes grew wide at the shiny trinkets and the rainbows of colors from the jars on the altar. I inhaled the smells of the flowers, fruits, and freshly overturned dirt for planting. I felt like I could fly as I raised my arms to the sky. Her chuckle deep and bounced like drums as I looked up with the sun blinding my eyes. “Hey, little brown baby, smile it’s me by your side.” She anointed me.  It would be years before I found out who the old black woman of my dreams was that called me brown baby. When I did, something opened that I didn’t have a name for but had a presence throughout my life that demanded attention. Great Grandma Baby Lee, an old woman that read tea leaves for the Greek shop owners and made paste from the weeds that cured eczema in the fifties.*

As an African American woman, church and God were consistent in my childhood.  Historically, it was the safe haven for blacks and a place where God watches over his children. For me, it wasn't so cut and dry. I had a demon. Well, that was what I was led to believe because of my many questions challenging male authority and God’s love for women. It was later I found out my demon was spiritual gifts. It left me with more questions as to the source and why I was led to think differently?

 In 2019, Pew Research’s Religion & Public Life released statistics showing a steady decline in religious identities and beliefs. Today, the News is filled with religious leaders praying, declaring war, and challenging the faithful’s trust in God. Familiar, in a Plagues of Egypt kind of way, but the shelter in place as the virus passes over doesn’t quite fit for some. We sit in front of digital devices horrified at the faithful declare being covered in the “blood of Jesus” through face masks as they protest the right to go back to work and Covi19 claims more victims and even rebel leaders. As the numbers of the “religiously unaffiliated grows” many have asked, how can God exist in a world filled with so much hate?

I’ve asked myself for many years, in a world where religion has done more harm than good and left multitudes of victims, where does one go to feed their souls? There was no doubt that God existed though His motives were questionable.

The article, **What is the** **Difference between Religion and Spirituality** answers as believing versus being. Religion emphasizes the content of a follower’s belief and how those beliefs play out in their everyday lives. On the other hand, the focus of spirituality is on the process of becoming attuned to one’s inner self. My journey to find the higher source outside of man-made religious ideologies and infrastructures brought enlightenment and the greatest gift to man, the healer woman and Divine Feminine Conscious. The journey wasn’t kind as I struggled for balance between who I was and who I will become.

My journey to find the truth and God for myself started at the age of 16. I was given a choice by my angel-voiced mother to decide if I wanted to continue the 24/7 cycle of church life, her life. I was shocked I was given the choice though I felt she knew the answer before she asked. Mother’s always do. I told her, “it doesn’t feel the same.” The feelings of being surrounded by light energy and love had started to wane over the years. The real problem was even scarier, I was having visions and hearing voices. I was scared, confused, and didn’t have the words to explain what was happening to me. I did what I know was best, I started researching and asking questions of others. Over the next twenty years, I explored different religious concepts, consulted histories, questioned clergy of my findings and went back to the church after getting married. With the new acquired knowledge, that special feeling had become a comfortable fitted jacket that drew people with its tailored look but became tight in certain places and company. I left the church again determined to solve the mystery of me.

I encountered several people that helped me understand why religion didn’t quite fit any longer. More importantly, a lifetime of experiences, religious research and confusion led back to Grandmother Baby Lee’s shed. As I was guided to these beautiful spirits filled with knowledge, patience, and love, I would like to introduce them to you. Each one represents pivotal points in my spirituality journey to the Divine Conscious. In a series of questions, they will share their experiences, beliefs and destiny to heal the masses as Divine Feminine.

I sat in the red armchair at Ms. Dee’s Place watching the traffic go by on Ralph David Abernathy in the historic Westend area of Atlanta, Ga. I was filming for a feature story on an energetic young sister determined to change the constructed pathways to the prison system for African American youth and the gentrification of the landscape of black consciousness, resistance, and education. A young, thin, chocolate brother with thick locks to his shoulders, Ru’Lay, who was part of the first **Gangstas to Gardeners** program had a message for me, “I came here for you.” The day filled with original designs of Afrocentric costumes, art, sculptures and fashion from the Black Panther movie and fashion history next door to the store front restaurant dining hall was priceless. Our conversation flowed naturally into African Spirituality, trauma, and healing at The Merkaba House. My cell phone buzzed; an Instagram notification of a new follower. The vision of black folks enjoying the day as they entered shops went back to the reality of boarded windows and bare sidewalks. A touch or two, and there she was.

**A person posing for a picture

Description automatically generatedShaman Priestess** **Onika Osunlewa Long** is in Snellville, Ga and specializes in the Orishas of African Spirituality and healing. The 37yrs old was initiated an Oshun Priestess on August 6, 2016. She performs healing practices at **The Merkaba** **House** using crystals, herbs and natural ancient healing rituals. Long sites her beginnings in the Christian faith under the guidance of her parents, Black Panthers, “Growing up Christian, then finding my home with African Spirituality, it definitely shocked a few of my family members, friends, and people who don't know me who had negative things to say, or proclaiming that Christianity is the only way.” She defines “religion as an organized structure put in place to give people spiritual guidance from a middleman so to speak (pastor, preacher, priest),” and “spirituality as an individual spiritual path of self-discovery and spiritual growth.” Long understands the importance of religion in the spiritual journey, “I respect all religious text. I feel they serve their purpose when used in the right context.” She was surprised to discover, “A lot of things I learned where stolen from earlier texts and most of the stories were written in allegory not literal.” For those that question the existence of spirituality, “I won't tell them anything because everyone is on their own spiritual path, and this may not be their time to wake up and spiritual elevate this lifetime.” When asked about the declining numbers of religious affiliations, “The children are seeing the wrongs and their souls are not being fulfilled. They have no connection and answers to questions - Empty/No Resources.” As with Ru’Lay, many African Americans have looked to the spirituality of Africa’s west coast reintroduced by the captive slave, “There is a lot of negativity around Voodoo (fear) based on constructed narratives of the worship of the dead.  Many have gone to Wicca (white based) mystical thought for answers and some to Luciferian concepts.” She went to Wicca for written ideologies and found they were watered down African Spirituality, “One of the differences between the two ideologies is good and bad doesn’t exist, there is no concept of the Devil, and the balance of body and mind are core to overall wellbeing. The key to balance is Body and Mind, both must be balanced. Disease is the buildup of bad bacteria. Think of a river and the flow being blocked by bad bacteria. Small mounds get bigger and then the beavers come to build homes. The Mind balance is the same 80% good and 20% bad energy is the balance.  In 2012, there was a Big Awakening. A thirst for knowledge to explain certain cultural behavior. The ghetto honoring fallen ‘homies’ by pouring libations on the ground. This practice has foundation in ancestral worship practiced in West Africa and many other cultures around the world.”

I rushed into my cubicle, late from a client visit as a Telecommunications Project Manager for the State of Georgia. It was my first year in the position and fourth year as a resident of Georgia. I was meeting my new Customer Service Representative. She introduced herself and took a seat. Her eyes were big, bright, and kind; her flawless dark skin reminded me of my Grandmother, who’s picture sat on a small glass table in the corner. We finished with pleasantries and she went back to her cubicle in front of mine. I was responding to emails, when she asked, “Who is that woman in the picture?” My gentle response shocked me, “Who is she to you?” She answered, “Rev. Ev,” and I confirmed, “Yes, my grandmother.” Her eyes got wide as she smiled, “I know you. You’re Pat’s daughter. I was best friends with your Aunt Gregg before she died,” and now she is one of mine.

**A person wearing a suit and tie

Description automatically generatedAssociate Pastor Gina Ushry** ministers at the Worship Center International Church, Inc., under the guidance of Bishop Billingsly in Atlanta, Ga that follows Christian theology infrastructure. The 62yrs old performs counseling session, biblical teachings, and delivers sermons to the congregation. Dr. Ushry speaks proudly of a bloodline of pastors, ministers and evangelists, her Floridian childhood and “Ms. Evangeline Melvin and the neighborhood psychic’s prayer rock given to her Grandmother after a late-night phone call. A rock covered in prayer oil and placed under her uncle’s pillow that saved him from a horrific car crash with a tractor trailer and three bullets shot through a pillow. She describes a year of searching in pagan thought, “even Satanism,” to find answers, “I was witnessed to by my cousin in 1975 and said the Repentance Prayer. My journey began then.” Assoc. Pastor Ushry thoughts on the differences, “Religion is something you do as a ritual and spirituality, you are touching a higher being, God, If you will.” Her past made others doubt her Christian dedication, “I have lost family and friends behind my conversion. They didn’t believe God could or would change me. I have the gift of discernment and a word of wisdom. I can pick up on something from people by just passing and speaking with them. I don’t back down when it comes to what and who I believe in and I tell everyone there is a God, Higher Being or Power, whatever name you’re comfortable with. I tell people to read not only the Holy Bible but the Quran and any other materials to find God for themselves.” When asked of her role in male dominant religious infrastructures, “This is a Good Ole Boy Network when it comes to women with spiritual power. It is impossible to change some of their minds towards women empowered by Higher Source, God. The Divine Feminine is an energy that has been with us since ancient times.”

I checked the room twice to make sure things were neat and in place. My excitement was on overload at the thought of seeing my friend again. Family Issues, you know the ones that make you pick sides and reminisce of happier times had kept us apart at a crucial time in our spiritual awakening. She came in like a sunny day, her signature premature grey white as snow and more than I remembered. She shined. We hugged long and hard with tear rimmed eyes. “Sis, it’s time, you’re ready,” said in a voice that spoke to my soul.

 **Joelle Coachman, The Viberarian** is in Atlanta, Ga and accessible through social media platforms, YouTube, and BlockTalkRadio. She specializes in the Metaphysical, tarot readings, crystals, and Reiki. **The Elevation Station** has a series of events with showcase artists, vendors, and spiritual practitioners. The 48yrs old is a Preacher’s kid. Her father, a United Methodist minister, was supportive when she decided to pursue her gifts in divination. She explained the Christian denomination approach is based in “research and intellectual perspective,” and not as rigid to other religious infrastructures. The once music director and organist left her place in bringing God’s presence through songs of worship for tarot cards and crystals using other vehicles to reach the masses. Instead of being beholden to hymnals, she teaches a higher spiritual consciousness and its presence in the everyday life of her followers.  Joelle describes her experiences as the child of the Pastor and the organ player, “Religion was about spirituality, it was present, until a Youth Church Retreat. I connected with spirit (Holy Ghost) and wanted to know more. In college at HBCU Clark Atlanta University, African Spirituality showed the lies within religion.” She married a Pastor’s son but with more questions and experiences, “I became unchurched.” Following in line with her librarian degree, she went on a fact-finding search and cataloged information until the day it made sense. In 2011 sitting in her office at home. She reached for an item and the office chair tipped over and she hit the ground, “I was knocked back in alignment after a car accident years’ earlier and bumped into a different reality.” She started receiving messages describing it as an awaken confirmation and feeling activated. She quit her job as the State of Georgia Law Librarian 2015 and a new journey began, “I am in a constant receiving – the Lotus is in bloom,” as an entrepreneur of Info2Go, a law research firm and new identity as the **Viberarian** of the **Elevation Station**, an online library of different practitioners, vendors and tarot reading for public consumption. Joelle doesn’t align with any indoctrination. When asked the difference between religion and spirituality, she answered as if they didn’t define her work. “I don’t practice a specific thing. My life practice is in spirit. I am spirit in Action, not being spiritual. I am God in motion. I exist in a state of awareness – the spiritual presence in all ways a part of my existence. I believe in the Creation force that is unconditional love and light, call it God, Goddess or Higher Source. It is more than any label (gender) that man assigns. I believe I’m God, that’s unconditional love and light experiencing through my human physical form. I am an Oracle – information conduit of the Divine Feminine, Twin Flame, a healer, clairvoyant, hear spiritual being and have psychic abilities. When I speak with ancestors (departed), I get a smell.” Joelle describes resistance in a positive way, “A good majority of friends feel I’m out there. They have no idea what I am doing. I’m fine with that, I found a tribe (Metaphysical and Spiritual) that understands, and we are growing.” Conflict doesn’t seem to fit in her thinking now as she chalks it up as part of the journey and lessons. She feels some people are meant to receive new information or codes from the beyond and others not in this lifetime.

*The church was full of those ready to use every second of the sabbath to praise God. It didn’t matter the late hour nor that Monday, the next day meant early rises for school and work.  Children dosed on hard pews despite the loud organ music setting the tone to usher in the spirit for their parents’ holy dance. The two older Morris children sat in the center of the third row from the front to get a better look at the soloist, their mother. She started slowly, her high soprano voice calling to the heavens with the passion of the lowly of God’s children seeking guidance. She thanked Him for the trials and tribulations of this broken world that taught her of His unconditional love if she praised His name.*

*The people drawn to their feet at the riffs of her melody that echoed the collective desire to be in the presence of greatness. As the choir behind her joined in harmony, the audience screamed encouragement and some in despair to the unseen thing that sent tingles through the siblings. It had arrived. As their mother pleaded with the Creator for help, they locked hands for they knew the evil that awaited them at home. Her pain was their pain in an unspoken narrative that was acceptable in society’s eyes but shouldn’t be for a dedicated servant of God with the voice of an angel.*

*The youngest of the siblings, a girl pressed closer to her big brother to make contact with what was real. She didn’t like this part much; she didn’t know how to explain it, so she kept quiet. She held her brother’s hand tighter as the first one moved past unseen. She laid her head against his shoulder and concentrated on the angelic voice of their sorrow. “Can you see it? Sister, can you see it,” said big brother clearly despite the cries of God’s children in total praise with elevated hands and tear streaked faces as they wailed to the all-seeing Savior. “There, there, Sister, did you see it,” he said with excitement before looking down at her? She shook her head no. “Look, right before they fall, it touches them,” he said looking left again.*

*Though tall for their age, he was taller and could see over the shoulders of the many standing adults. She forgot about the unseen for seen standing on her tippy toes to see what her older brother saw. She saw Sister Helen leap in the air screaming a different language and then Deacon Wade take off for his sprint around the sanctuary three times, sometimes a fourth if his gout wasn’t acting up. Yet, she didn’t see what touched them to fill them with the Holy Spirit. She didn’t see what her big brother saw. Suddenly he stepped behind her directing her head to the left as a row of people went down like bowling pins, “slayen in the spirit,” is what they called it as he whispered for her to relax and see. And there it was, a tracing of shimmering light around a robed figure without features.*

*In a blink, it was gone as a tap on the shoulder directed attention to the mean face usher’s demand for the children to stop playing in church.*

The ladies interviewed share the common element of a childhood spent in religious communities. Each experienced an uncomfortableness which inspired action to know God for themselves that grew into a destiny to heal to the masses. It is not farfetched to say religion opened the door and maybe spirituality is the connection to the trueness of a Higher Source. What is apparent, the journey is an individual quest that changes one’s life. Priestess Onika Long characterized my childhood and Grandma Baby Lee’s shed. They are the true roots to the simple beginnings of my ancestors’ worship of nature and the love for all born of Earth.

Assoc. Pastor Gina Ushry embodied my journey and the efforts of man to make sense of his existence in conjunction to the Creator. Joelle, The Viberarian bought an understanding of why, unconditional love. I learned the mind comprehends based on the knowledge it obtains and new information changes perspectives and definitions. The word demon or negative spirit is redefined as the voice and presence of an ancestor, guardian spirit. An old black woman dressed in white that visited my dreams, warned of danger and narrated others’ thoughts. I asked Joelle are we different? Her answer was said in a peaceful tone of wisdom, “Everyone is different, and everyone is not different, similar frequencies. I don’t feel superior (more woke) than others, just a different indoctrination. We shouldn’t have an opinion as to others God factors. We are all feeding into the great experience.”

**Research (Evidence and Data)**

<https://www.happierhuman.com/difference-religion-spirituality/>

African Cosmologies: Spiritual Reflections on the “Black Panther” movie

<https://religionnews.com/2018/02/19/african-cosmologies-spiritual-reflections-on-the-black-panther-movie/>

2018 was the year American Women embraced their inner Witch

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/opinion-witchcraft-women-2018_n_5c1d227ce4b0407e907a9c7f>

Examining the Growth of the “Spiritual but not Religious”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/us/examining-the-growth-of-the-spiritual-but-not-religious.html>

Spiritual Matters:  Inspiring Clinical Care

<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/cultural-psychiatry/spiritual-matters-inspiring-clinical-care#sthash.8cECzSih.dpuf>

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<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>