

Atheists likely to outnumber Christians in England in 20 years

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LONDON (RNS) Christianity is waning in England and could be outnumbered by nonbelievers within 20 years, according to a new study.

The study conducted by the British Parliament showed there were 41 million Christians in Britain, down nearly 8 percent since 2004. Meanwhile, the number of nonbelievers stood at 13.4 million, up 49 percent over the same period.

Researchers at the House of Commons Library concluded that Christianity had declined to 69 percent of the population while those with no religion increased to 22 percent.

"If these populations continue to shrink and grow by the same number of people each year," the study said, "the number of people with no religion will overtake the number of Christians in Great Britain in 20 years."

The research was based on the government Office for National Statistics' annual labor force survey, considered authoritative because it examines a sample size of 50,000 people.

The "Religion in Great Britain" survey also found that from 2004-2010, the number of Muslims in Britain grew by 37 percent, to 2.6 million.

England's Hindu population rose by 43 percent, to 790,000, and Buddhists by 74 percent, to 340,000. The numbers of Jews and Sikhs were reported down slightly, at 270,000 and 340,000, respectively.