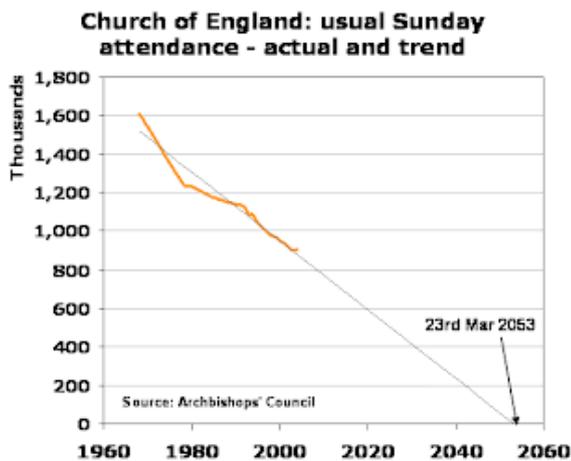


What are you optimistic about?



[Edge](#), the quite-pleased-with-itself forum for “some the world’s most interesting minds”, has posed its 2007 World Question: *what are you optimistic about and why?* [[World Question Center](#)] And it’s worth dipping into.

I particularly liked the contribution from Daniel Dennett, the American Philosopher, that combined urgency about real-world concerns like climate change and development, with inspiration from society’s capacity to change attitudes and behaviours (drawing on experience with smoking), to justify a robust optimism about what he calls [The Evaporation of the Powerful Mystique of Religion](#) as knowledge technologies and communication blast away at the enclaves that can still shelter the strange systems of belief that constitute the main world religions. As he puts it, “eventually the truth will set us free”.

It left me wondering what I am optimistic about...

Actually, I take a lot for granted that for most of human history (or even the last 100 years) would be regarded as optimistic. I don’t expect to be sent off to fight a war, be bombed with nuclear weapons or die of an infectious disease – not even avian flu. I expect to be richer, and if not that will be by choice to achieve better well-being. I’m not expecting unemployment or worried about downsizing, even if its me that’s downsized! Despite the slow-motion catastrophe of climate change, many environmental trends are heading the right way [[UK sustainable development indicators indicators](#)], though the big picture is quite gloomy [[WRI Earth Trends](#)]. More progress expected on the [Millennium Development Goals](#), though with depressing exceptions in Africa. I’m looking forward to a decline in American and British adventurism in favour of a more multilateral approach to the new UN concept of the ‘[responsibility to protect](#)’. I expect to enjoy a lengthy season of political theatre – with a new PM following a contest, bustle for Cabinet

positions, overhaul of Whitehall, and an SNP victory that will spoil the fun for the incoming PM and create an excellent debate about the [West Lothian question](#). I love the Internet and think that will just get better - who imagined Wikipedia, Google, Blogger, Skype and iTunes - to name a few - even just 10 years ago?

Like [Dan Dennett](#), [Richard Dawkins](#) and [Sam Harris](#) I'm optimistic that religion will begin a precipitous decline in the face of a new knowledge-driven enlightenment, and I think it will start (or rather continue) with Christianity in Britain - see chart for the trend in church-going.

Above all, I'm optimistic that England's cricket performances will improve, though probably not until we depart from Australia.

What are you optimistic about?