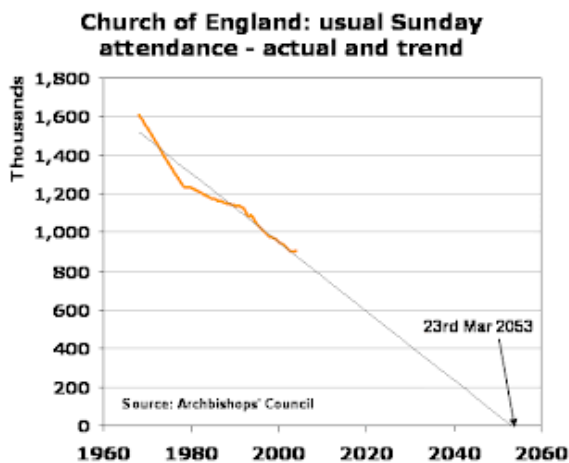


What are you optimistic about?



[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?