A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.



Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.

Some believe that the phrase "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms" creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the "individual right theory,"{1} that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase "a well-regulated Militia" means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state's right of self-defense. This

view is called the “collective rights theory.”{2}

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”{4}

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals

or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms."{5}

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."{6} However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over

for the practice of evil.

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual’s right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the “individual rights theory” of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person’s rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs, etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person’s right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons

such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court's position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do

these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey— a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus' day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead.{7} Peter was carrying his sword in the

garden when Jesus was arrested.{8} While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a "sword control" campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government "of the people, by the people and for the people," while we wait for Christ's bodily return.

Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment
2. Ibid.
3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceeding in the Cnvention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*
4. Ibid., Noah Webster, "An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution." *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.
5. Ibid., James Madison, "Paper 46," *The Federalist Papers*.
6. Romans 13:4
7. Luke 22:35-38

8. John 18:10

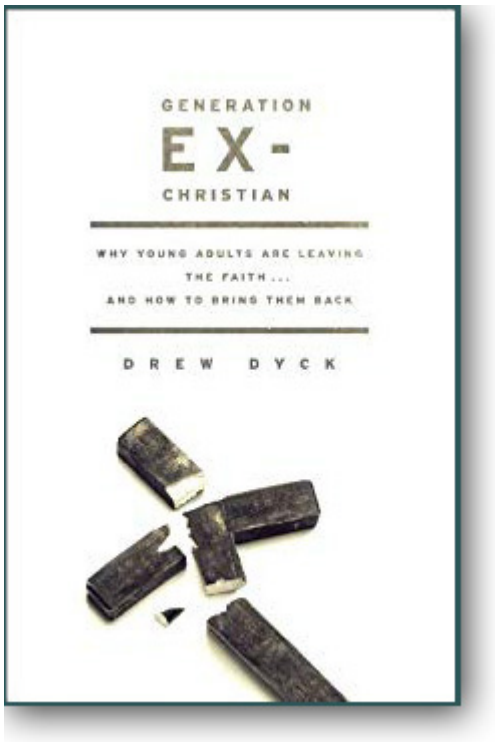
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Ex-Christians: Ways to Bring Back the Leavers

Steve Cable provides an overview of why young people leave the church based on Drew Dyck's book Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back.



Over the last several years, Probe has been reporting on a changing young adult society that is marginalizing the church at an increasing rate. When we analyzed relevant survey data and our own survey taken of 18- to 40-year-old, born again Christians, the data revealed that even among Evangelicals, cultural captivity was the norm for the vast majority of Christians. One result of culturally captive Christians is that their children often become "leavers," leaving the faith entirely once they are out on their own.



Are there others who are seeing the same degree of disconnect with the truths of Scripture in the life styles and life choices of young, adult Americans? I want to look at one such prominent voice speaking out about these same concerns. Drew Dyck is the author of *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*{1} and managing editor of *Leadership Journal*.

Six Types of Leavers

Dyck's book is not primarily driven by general survey data. Instead, it tells a more personal story. He connected with people who had left their Christian upbringing. He talked with them about their life choices *and* he attempted to share Christ in a way that would be meaningful in the context of their personal journeys. As a result of this experience, he felt that those leaving their Christian influenced youth to enter into adulthood without a total faith in Christ could be placed into one of six different categories. He entitled these categories:

- Postmodern leavers – those adopting a postmodern view where no meta-narrative is to be trusted
- Modern leavers – those who believe only what they can prove and Neo-Darwinism seems more provable
- Neo-pagan leavers – those who gravitate to an earth-based religion where they are essentially their own gods
- Rebel leavers – those for whom a sinful lifestyle appears more appealing or who don't want to "give in" to God

- Recoilers – leavers who withdraw because of an emotional hurt associated with people claiming to represent Christianity, and
- Drifters – perhaps the largest group of leavers who gradually drift away because their faith was never that deep to begin with.

Each category of leaver creates a different challenge for one who desires to lead them into a true knowledge of Jesus. Just as Paul used different approaches to share the gospel in the synagogue, the marketplace and the philosopher's meeting place in Athens, so we need to tailor our approach to communicate effectively with our audience. In what follows, we will consider each of these categories and some of the ways one can best share with them.

Postmodern and Modern Leavers

Postmodern thinking is becoming the cultural norm for young adults. The postmodern view holds that there is no objective truth applying to all, but rather each person or group of people defines their own truth. As J. P. Moreland puts it, "In a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective truth, reality, value, reason and so forth."{2} Yet, many young adults still adopt modernity, the dominant view throughout the twentieth century. Those with a modern view believe linear thinking and rational thought can lead us to objective truths valid for all. In his book *Generation Ex-Christian*, Drew Dyck finds both of these viewpoints create stumbling blocks for belief.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true for all people in every age. This view runs counter to the "true for you but not for me" mentality of the postmodern generation. Many young adults influenced by postmodern thought have a difficult time accepting the all-encompassing, meta-narrative of the gospel. These leavers believe that Christianity is too narrow and

judgmental to be a part of their own truth sphere.

Dyck points out that those with a postmodern perspective are not really interested in hearing your apologetic arguments. Even if you weave a compelling logical argument, they will nod, smile, and ignore you. They need to see the impact of the truth of Jesus lived out in your life before them. Invite them to participate with you in serving others, creating an opportunity to share your story. They are, initially, more interested in your personal story. How has Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?

Conversely, those with a modern perspective are not as interested in your personal story. With moderns, ask questions to understand how they decide if something is true. Model a concern for the truth before laying "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" on their plate. Focus on the truth of the gospel, not letting ourselves get sidetracked into other arenas. How satisfying is their alternative view, and what are the consequences if they are wrong in their perception of truth?

Many modernists report that most Christians hastened their departure from the church through trite, unhelpful answers to the questions they were asking. Be willing to do the research to answer their questions thoughtfully and with confidence. Remember, there are good cogent explanations to their questions and their objections.

As Dyck discovered, effectively sharing with a leaver today requires us to know whether their general thought process is more shaped by modernism or postmodernism. Their answer determines whether we start with our personal experience or with the total truth of the gospel.

Neo-Pagans and Rebels

Two more groups of leavers Dyck labels Neo-pagans and Rebels.

Dyck discovered a surprisingly large number of Neo-pagan leavers. Neo-pagans have gravitated to the beliefs that they are ultimately gods living in a society where the earth is to be nourished and women are as important, if not more so, than men. One common example of this religious view is Wicca.{3} Another example is Oprah's mishmash of Eastern mysticism.{4}

As with other leavers, begin by asking them questions to understand what they believe and what attracted them to it. With Neo-pagans, Dyck suggests starting by sharing with them our appreciation for nature and our sense of responsibility to care for it as God commanded. We also can share the honor that Christ and the church gave to women. They need to understand that women are "fellow heirs," not maidservants in Christ's kingdom. Upon earning a listening ear, we can share how we have experienced God's presence in our midst. Share our spiritual experiences with them. Above all, recognize that you are engaging in a spiritual battle that must include fervent pray on their behalf.

As he examined his relationships with different types of leavers, Dyck realized that some of them leave not to follow after a different belief system but, instead, to rebel against their view of a creator who is attempting to limit their self expression. Some rebels are motivated by a desire to do their own thing and participate fully in the short-lived pleasures of this world. Others are motivated by a desire to spit in the face of God, declaring their independence.

To effectively reach out to spiritual rebels, we need to let them know we care about them as persons. The world is already showing them that in their rebellion they are not really free. Everybody serves something. Get them to talk about what they are serving, whether it is money, success, clothes, power, etc. Then share with them how you experience true freedom as a captive of the source of all true freedom, Jesus Christ. As Paul tells us in Galatians, "For you were called to freedom, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the

flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

Drifters and Recoilers

Drifters and Recoilers are two more kinds of leavers.

Dyck identifies the Drifters as the largest group of leavers, exhibiting "that entrenched human defect—the tendency to drift from God."{5} They did not set out to walk away from the faith of their parents. Over time it became less important to them, until it played no real role in their lives. As Dyck put it, "the biggest danger to Christianity is Christians."{6}

Recent surveys showed 18- to 29-year-olds who indicated they had no religion growing from 11 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2008.{7} Of these young adults, two-thirds of them were leavers from an earlier point in their life where they considered themselves Christians. Their most common reason for leaving was not some intellectual epiphany, but rather they "just gradually drifted away from the religion."{8}

Drifters are not driven by specific intellectual objections. They may have no real objections or arguments against Christian beliefs. Instead, they are apathetic toward it. It just is not important in their life.

To reach Drifters, one must redefine their perception that a Christian life is not worth pursuing. They need to see us loving Jesus because of who He is and not because of what He can do for us. It is not about getting God to do something for us. It is about the opportunity for eternal fellowship with the One who created us all.

The Drifters need to be connected with older adults who are living with an eternal perspective. Who are "redeeming the time because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). We need to raise the bar on the Christian life. It is more than the sterile, play-acting game they may have seen from their parents. You

cannot call them back to a watered down Christianity that was unable to hold their allegiance in the first place. Instead, we need to live out before them the radical lifestyle of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

The final group of leavers are the ones Dyck calls the Recoilers. These people are a special case. Their lives have been marred by significant pain. They relate the source of this pain to their Christian experience. For the Recoilers, it is typically only in the context of a relationship that healing can take place. On the one hand, we need to empathize with them, while, on the other, they need to see the joy our faith brings to our lives. Gradually, we may be able to help them delineate between God who loves them and the people who hurt them.

Reaching This Generation

In *Generation Ex-Christian*, Drew Dyck identified six different types of faith leavers: Postmoderns, Moderns, Neo-pagans, Spiritual Rebels, Drifters, and Recoilers. Recognizing that we are called to be "all things to all men so that we may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22), we can tailor our approach to more effectively reach each type of leaver.

Let's consider five aspects that need to be consistent regardless of which type of leaver you are dealing with.

Listen to them to understand which type they may be. If we jump into sharing without knowing, we run the risk they will tune us out permanently.

Articulate why we believe what we believe. We need to have a good basic understanding of why we believe the gospel is true. If we have a good grasp of the basics, we can tailor our approach to the type of leaver we are addressing.

Enter into relationship with the long view in mind. Don't

expect to reverse their dismissal of Christianity overnight. Over time we want clear away some of the obstacles standing between them and a vibrant faith. Be prepared for this effort to take time.

Focus on forging loving relationships. All the intelligent words in the world won't matter if they view us as hired guns adding another notch to our tally. Paul reminded Timothy, "The aim of our instruction is love proceeding from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). Demonstrating Christian love makes them more willing to sincerely listen to us.

Consistently pray for the leavers in our lives. As Dyck put it, "We can give our loved ones who have strayed no greater gift than time spent in the presence of God on their behalf. Plead, ramble, cry, rage—but don't stop." Pray that "God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ . . . that we may make it clear in the way we ought to speak" (Col. 4:2). If we are not bringing God into the relationship through prayer, we are not speaking with His effectiveness.

I don't believe the God who "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) would at the same time desire a large portion of our young adults to leave behind faith in Jesus Christ. We are not to throw up our hands in surrender, but rather to dedicate ourselves to sharing Christ in ways that communicate the truth to different sets of ears. Let's commit together to reach out and bring these leavers into an eternal relationship with Christ.

Notes

1. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back* (Moody Publishers, 2010), Kindle edition.
2. Ibid., Chapter 2.

3. See Michael Gleghorn, "Wicca: A Biblical Critique," Probe Ministries, 2002, probe.org/wicca-a-biblical-critique/.
4. See Steve Cable, "Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring A New Earth," Probe Ministries, 2008, probe.org/oprahs-spirituality-exploring-a-new-earth/.
5. Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, chapter 16.
6. Ibid.
7. Kosmin & Keysar, *American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population, A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008*, commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf, "Highlights."
8. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S., 2009, www.pewforum.org/Faith-in-Flux-Changes-in-Religious-Affiliation-in-the-US.aspx

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Darwinism: A Teetering House of Cards



Steve Cable examines four areas of recent scientific discovery that undermine evolution.

The Origin of Life: A Mystery

Confidence in Darwinism erodes as new discoveries fail to produce supporting evidence. Three books released in 2017,

- *House of Cards* by journalist Tom Bethel
- *Zombie Science* by biologist Jonathan Wells
- *Undeniable* by biologist Douglas Axe



address areas where Darwin's grand idea is weaker now than 150 years ago. As Bethel states, "Today, it more closely resembles a house of cards, built out of flimsy icons rather than hard evidence, and liable to blow away in the slightest breeze."{1} It is not just critics who recognize this weakening. In 2016, the Royal Society in London convened a meeting to discuss "calls for revision of the standard theory of evolution."{2}

Four areas where Darwin hoped future work would support his theory will be examined. The first area is the origin of reproducing beings.

Darwin only hoped that life may have originated in a "warm little pond." But as one scientist states, "The origin-of-life field is a failure—we still do not have even a plausible coherent model, let alone a validated scenario, for the emergence of life on earth."{3}

Darwin assumed the first reproducing cells were very simple. In truth, the simplest cells are composed of impressively complex machines which could not have arisen directly from inorganic components. But there are no known simpler life forms. As Michael Behe commented, "The cell's known complexity has increased immeasurably in recent years, and points ever more insistently to an intelligent designer as its cause."{4}

The probability of even one of the amino acids necessary for life appearing by random mutations is effectively zero even given billions of years. As Doug Axe writes, "(Examining how)

accidental evolutionary processes are supposed to have invented enzymes without insight, we consistently find these proposals to be implausible."{5}

Another professor states, "Those who think scientists understand the issues of prebiotic chemistry are wholly misinformed. Nobody understands them. . . . The basis upon which we . . . are relying is so shaky we must openly state the situation for what it is: a mystery."{6}

Facing insurmountable odds against life appearing, some materialists propose an infinite number of parallel universes.{7} With infinite chances, even the most unlikely events could occur. But, as Axe points out, "The biological inventions that surround us (are) fantastically improbable, with evolution explaining none and the multiverse hypothesis explaining only those absolutely necessary for wondering to be possible, . . . this hypothesis fails to explain what we see."{8}

Even after resorting to unobservable fantasy situations, the challenges presented by the origins of life cannot be overcome. A Darwinian model begins with a self-replicating life form. Currently, this appears to be a hill that no one knows how to climb.

An Example of Macro-evolution: Still Searching

Darwin's theory is dependent upon the unobserved concept of macro-evolution, i.e. intergenerational differences accumulating into different species over time. Darwin believed his magic wand of natural selection could direct this process toward increasingly complex beings. Has further research confirmed his belief?

Let's begin with fossil evidence.

The number of fossils studied has blossomed over the last 150 years. All the types of species which exist today appear in the fossil record over a relatively short period of time.{9} And, in most cases, with no transitional forms between them undermining Darwin's theory. As science historian Stephen Meyer concludes, "As more . . . fossils are discovered (failing) to document the great array of intermediate forms, it grows ever more improbable that their absence is an artifact of either incomplete sampling or preservation."{10}

And evolution proponent Stephen Gould wrote, "The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees . . . have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference."{11} *Nature* editor Henry Gee put it this way: "To take a line of fossils and claim that they represent a lineage is not a scientific hypothesis that can be tested, but an assertion that carries the same validity as a bedtime story."{12}

Cleary, the fossil record challenges rather than supports conventional evolutionary theory.

Let's continue by looking at experimental evidence.

Perhaps someone has recreated macro-evolution in the lab. Studies of fast replicating populations have shown no ability to accumulate multiple changes. Attempts to create macro-evolution in fruit flies, bacteria and viruses concluded "Neither in nature nor under experimental conditions have any substantial effects ever been obtained through the systematic accumulation of micro-mutations."{13}

Bethel points out, "The scientific evidence for evolution is not only weaker than is generally supposed, but as new discoveries have been made . . . , the reasons for accepting the theory have diminished rather than increased."{14}

Yet biology departments still spout their unfounded belief in

the “magic wand” ability to produce an unimaginable array of advanced creatures in what “amounts to the triumph of ideology over science.” Even some materialists see through this charade. One geneticist at Harvard wrote, “If scientists are going to use logically unbeatable theories about the world, they might as well give up natural science and take up religion.”{15}

“Darwin might well have been dismayed (at) the meager evidence for natural selection, assembled over many years. . . . It is worth bearing in mind how feeble this evidence is any time someone tells you that Darwinism is a fact.”{16}

The Challenge of Irreducible Complexity

Darwin wrote his theory would “absolutely break down” if an organ could not be formed by “numerous, successive, slight modifications.”{17} Have such organs been found? Irreducible complexity and functional coherence say yes.

Irreducible complexity means that some known functions require multiple parts that have no purpose without the other parts. For a Darwinian process to create these functions would require useless mutations to be indefinitely maintained until combined with other useless mutations. Michael Behe’s analysis has shown the 4 billion years of the earth’s existence are not sufficient for such complex functions to be created by random mutations.

Even if an improbable series of events occurred allowing **one** of these complex forms to arise through a set of random mutations, it would need to happen thousands, if not millions, of times to produce our complex life forms.

In *Undeniable*, Axe introduces “functional coherence,” defined as “The hierarchical arrangement of parts needed for anything to produce a high-level function—each part contributing in a coordinated way to the whole.” Axe examines the role of

functional coherence as a microscopic level and concludes, “The fact that mastery . . . of protein design is completely beyond the reach of blind evolution is . . . evolution’s undoing. . . . The evolutionary story is . . . something much less plausible than hitting an atomic dot on a universe-size sphere over and over in succession by blindly dropping subatomic pins.”{18}

In *Zombie Science*, Jonathan Wells considers the number of irreducibly complex subsystems required to evolve fully aquatic whales. These features include flukes with specialized muscles, blowholes with elastic tissues and specialized muscles, internal testicles with a countercurrent heat exchange system, specialized features for nursing, and many others. For Darwinism, these changes are insurmountably large. Whales certainly appear to be the product of design, not unguided evolution.

He also points to advanced optical systems. The process by which light detection becomes an intelligent signal to the brain is irreducibly complex. Two scientists wrote, “the prototypical eye. . . cannot be explained by selection, because selection can drive evolution only when the eye can function at least to a small extent.”{19} These scientists determined the eye was irreducibly complex and could not be developed by natural selection.

Richard Lewontin, a committed materialist, does not believe natural selection can explain complex life forms. He cannot conceive of any gradual set of useful incremental changes resulting in a flying being. Unless a small change gives an advantage, “the change won’t be selected for, and obviously, a little bit of wing doesn’t do any good.”{20}

So we can agree with Darwin on this issue: his theory “absolutely breaks down.”

DNA and Molecular Science Muddy the Scenario

Has uncovering the role of DNA filled the gaping holes in Darwinism or created more?

A species's DNA sequence, we are told, contains all the information needed to create new members. But Douglas Axe states, "(We) would be shocked to know the . . . state of ignorance with respect to DNA. The view that most aspects of living things can be attributed neatly to specific genes has been known . . . to be FALSE for a long time."{21}

The higher-level components making up a species are not entirely specified by its DNA. As Wells explains, "After DNA sequences are transcribed into RNAs, many RNAs are modified so they do not match the original transcript. . . . (changing) over time according to the needs of the organism." The claim that "DNA makes RNA makes protein" is false."{22}

Creating new complex functions requires multiple changes in the DNA sequence AND in other elements making the chance of random mutations creating new species untenable.

The original conflicting "trees of life" were created examining the morphology, i.e. the structures of species. These trees suggest different major nodes but almost no transitional forms. Can DNA analysis help? Research has shown that groupings based on morphology are not supported by DNA analysis. As Wells notes, these conflicts "are a major headache for evolutionary biologists."{23}

This disconnect from recent gene research is not limited to a few cases. As reported in 2012, "incongruence between (trees) derived from morphology . . . , and . . . trees based on different subsets of molecular sequences has become pervasive."{24}

But DNA analysis alone has a great degree of uncertainty. In one study looking at fifty genes from seventeen animal groups, multiple conflicting ideas on the evolutionary relationship between the animal groups were proposed.{25} All had seemingly absolute support from the DNA evidence, but all could not be true.

Originally scientists thought DNA was primarily junk sequences not contributing to the characteristics of a species. This junk represented functions which were replaced or had no current usefulness. As Francis Crick, one of the discoverers of DNA's structure, said, "The possible existence of such selfish DNA is exactly what might be expected from the theory of natural selection."{26}

But recent research shows at least eighty percent of the human genome contributes. As Wells reports, "The evidence demonstrates that most of our DNA is transcribed into RNA and that many of those RNAs have biological functions. The idea that most of our DNA is junk, . . . is dead."{27}

The facts uncovered about the functioning of DNA and other elements in passing on characteristics to the next generation appear to make more holes in evolutionary theory.

A Philosophy Props Up Its Poster Child

Recent, scientific insights have weakened Darwin's theory. Yet many are unwilling to discuss its weakness. Why this reluctance? It falls into two camps: 1) a commitment to materialism and 2) a desire for academic acceptance. Materialism is a religious viewpoint where everything has a natural explanation. A spiritual component or events resulting from an outside force are rejected. Science is not materialism. Science attempts to identify and quantify the forces that make the universe. A materialist scientist adds a religious restriction: only natural forces can be considered.

Bethel states, “Although Darwinism has been promoted as science, its unstated role has been to prop up the philosophy of materialism and atheism.”

Wells suggests, “Priority is given to proposing and defending materialistic explanations rather than following the evidence wherever it leads. This is materialistic philosophy masquerading as empirical science, . . . zombie science.”{28}

Atheist Colin Patterson offers an honest view regarding the theory of evolution as “often unnecessary” in biology. Nevertheless, it was (taught as) “the unified field theory of biology,” holding the whole subject together. Once something has that status it becomes like religion.”{29}

Until they have a better theory, they will stand behind it rather than consider alternatives. They fear any uncertainty will lead to questioning other aspects of materialism, such as that free will and love for others are simply a façade promoted by natural selection.

Bethel points out, “If our minds are . . . accidental products of a blind process, what reason do we have for accepting materialist claims as true?”{30} After all, our minds are selected to improve our survivability, not to discern what is true.

Many scientists are not die-hard materialists. They believe there may be a spiritual aspect of our existence. Yet they promote the materialistic view. For most, this inconsistent approach is a reaction to the threat of censure from the establishment.

Axe claims, “The religious agenda is the enemy that threatens science. . . . Everything that opposes the institutionalized agenda is labeled ‘anti-science.’”{31}

The same arguments used against intelligent design apply more accurately to Darwinism. Bethel states, “(Some) have said that

design can't be measured and therefore it is a religious belief. . . . They might also have said the macro-evolution has not yet been measured, or so much as observed."{32}

In this review, we have seen

1. No materialistic concept for life's origin
2. Little evidence f transitional life forms
3. Strong evidence complex functions could not arise through random changes
4. DNA playing havoc with the basic tenets of Darwinism.

Now we wait for the façade raised by supporters of a flawed concept to collapse.

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Is Theistic Evolution the Only Viable Answer for Thinking Christians?

Steve Cable examines Francis Collins's arguments for theistic evolution from his book The Language of God *and finds them lacking.*

Francis Collins and Theistic Evolution

Dr. Francis Collins, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom for cataloging the complete human DNA sequence, put forth his views on science and Christianity in his 2006 book, *The Language of God*{1}. Could his theistic evolution view resolve the apparent conflict between modern science and the Bible? In this article, we will examine this belief and his arguments for it.



Collins grew up agnostic but became an atheist in his student years. At twenty six, he took on the task of proving Christianity false. Like many before him{2}, this hopeless task resulted in accepting Christianity as true: Jesus as God in the flesh bringing us eternal life. In his role as a medical researcher into the genetics of man, he found himself dealing in a world where many questioned the validity of Christian thought as anti-science.

These conflicting forces led him to develop views reconciling the current positions of science and the truths of the Bible. As Collins states, "If the existence of God is true (not just tradition, but actually true), and if certain scientific conclusions about the natural world are also (objectively)

true . . ., then they cannot contradict each other. A fully harmonious synthesis must be possible."{3} Certainly, this statement is one we all should agree on if we can agree on which scientific conclusions are objectively true.

His resulting beliefs rest on the following premises{4}:

1. God formed the universe out of nothingness 14 billion years ago.

2. Its properties appear to have been precisely tuned for life.

3. The precise mechanism of the origin of life remains unknown,

4. Once evolution got under way, no special supernatural intervention was required.

5. Humans are part of this process, sharing a common ancestor with the great apes.

6. But humans are unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation, pointing to our spiritual nature.

Rather than interceding as an active creative force, God built into the Big Bang the properties suitable for receiving the image of God at the appropriate time. Purely random mutations and natural selection brought about this desired result. Being outside of time, God would know that this uninvolved approach would result in beings suitable to receive the breath of God.

The Argument for Theistic Evolution

Is Francis Collins' theistic evolution the way to reconcile theology and science?

Collins argues the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of this universe are clearly the work of God. After that, no intelligent intervention occurred, even though scientists have

no idea how life began.{5} At some point, God intervened—first, by giving humans moral and abstract thinking, and second, by sending Jesus Christ to perform miracles, be crucified and resurrected, and bring us eternal life.

In Collins's view, God is allowed to perform miracles to redeem mankind, but not in creating physical humans. The alternative theories make the scientific process messy and unpredictable. This position allows him to side with the naturalist scientists who hold sway today. However, it does not prevent naturalists from laughing at your silly faith.

He also appears to believe we are looking forward to new glorified bodies living in a new earth with Jesus. Apparently, at that time, God will disavow His penchant for not making changes in nature.

Collins wrote{6} that our DNA leads him to believe in common ancestry with chimpanzees and ultimately with all life. His conclusion is partially based on the large amount of "junk DNA" similar across humans and other animals. If similar segments of DNA have no function, these must be elements indicating a common ancestry.

Subsequent research undermines this belief. "DNA previously dismissed as "junk" are . . . crucial to the way our genome works,. . . . For years,. . . more than 98% of the genetic sequence . . . was written off as 'junk' DNA."{7} Based on current research,{8} almost every nucleotide is associated with a function. Over 80% of the genome has been shown to have a biochemical function and "the rest . . . of the genome is likely to have a function as well."{9} Collins agrees that his earlier position was incorrect.{10}

In this case, the argument of reuse by an intelligent designer now makes more sense.

On theistic evolution, Collins could be right and it would not

tarnish the absolute truth of the Bible. However, in all likelihood, Collins is wrong. From both Scripture and current observations, it appears much more likely God actively interceded in creation.

Irreducible Complexity

One area of Intelligent Design Francis Collins attacks is the concept of irreducible complexity.

ID researchers define it as: "[A] system of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of them causes the system to cease functioning. [It] cannot be produced directly by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor . . . that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional."{11} A mindless evolutionary process cannot create a number of new, unique parts that must function together before creating any value.

However, Collins believes nothing is too hard for evolution given enough time. He states, "Examples . . . of irreducible complexity are clearly showing signs of how they could have been assembled by evolution in a gradual step-by-step process. . . . Darwinism predicts that plausible intermediate steps **must have existed**, . . . ID. . . sets forth a straw man scenario that no serious student of biology would accept."{12}

One of Collins's examples, the bacterial flagellum, is "a marvelous swimming device"{13} which includes a propeller surface and a motor to rotate it. ID researchers identify it as an irreducibly complex. Collins suggests this conclusion has been "fundamentally undercut," stating that one protein sequence used in the flagellum is also used in a different apparatus in other bacteria. "Granted, [it] is just one piece of the flagellum's puzzle, and we are far from filling in the whole picture (if we ever can). But each such new puzzle piece provides a natural explanation for a step that ID had

relegated to supernatural forces, . . .”{14}

Today, seven years later, ID researchers are not backing off. A recent article concludes, “The claim . . . to have refuted . . . the bacterial flagellum is unfounded. Although there are sub-components . . . that are dispensable . . ., there are numerous subsystems within the flagellum that require multiple coordinated mutations. [It] is not the kind of structure that one can . . . envision being produced in Darwinian step-wise fashion.”{15}

Evolutionists have been trying for over 15 years to attack irreducible complexity. Rather than discrediting the theory, their efforts have shown how difficult it is to do so. Collins’s claims put him in the company of those relying on the ignorance of their audience to cow them with logically flawed arguments.

God of the Gaps and *Ad Hominem* Attacks

Francis Collins states, “ID is a ‘God of the gaps’ theory, inserting . . . the need for supernatural intervention in places its proponents claim science cannot explain.”{16}

This statement mischaracterizes Intelligent Design. “ID is not based on an argument from ignorance.”{17} It looks for conditions indicating intelligence was required to produce an observed result. The event must be exceedingly improbable due to random events and it must conform to a meaningful pattern. “Does a forensic scientist commit an ‘arson-of-the-gaps’ fallacy in inferring that a fire was started deliberately. . .? To assume that every phenomenon that we cannot explain must have a materialistic explanation is to commit a converse ‘materialism-of-the-gaps’ fallacy.”{18}

ID researchers identify signs that are consistent with intelligent design and examine real world events for those same signs. In addition, a number of non-ID scientists having

reached the conclusion that Darwinism is not sufficient, are looking at other mechanisms to explain certain features of life.

Another aspect of Collins's defense of theistic evolution is using overstated and unsubstantiated attacks to discredit other views.

Of the young earth creationists, he states, "If these claims were actually true, it would lead to a complete and irreversible collapse of the sciences of physics, chemistry, cosmology, geology, and biology."{19} This is a gross overstatement. In truth, belief in a young earth creation does not prevent one from making predictions based on micro-evolutionary effects or investigating the physical laws of the universe from a microscopic to an intergalactic level.

Collins also states, "**No serious biologist** today doubts the theory of evolution."{20} And, "ID's central premise . . . sets forth a straw man scenario that **no serious student** of biology would accept."{21} So, those differing with Collins are not even serious students of biology. Collins ignores the over 800 Ph.D.s who signed a document questioning the ability of Darwinian theory to explain life.{22}

In discrediting ID, he misrepresents the premise of this field, saying ID is designed to resist an atheistic worldview. As one researcher, William Dembski, explains, "Intelligent Design attempts only to explain the arrangement of materials within an already given world. Design theorists argue that certain arrangements of matter, especially in biological systems, clearly signal a designing influence."{23}

Collins would rather pursue an answer that was wrong and exclude the actions of an intelligent designer, than consider the possibility of intelligent design.

Perverting the Views of C. S. Lewis

Did C. S. Lewis support theistic evolution? Francis Collins quotes Lewis{24}, postulating God could have added His image to evolved creatures who then chose to fall into sin. Although consistent with theistic evolution, Lewis' thoughts are more consistent with ID tenets.

Lewis begins, "For long centuries, **God perfected** the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the **image of Himself**. **He gave it** hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, . . ."{25} So, God was actively involved in bringing about the human form; God intervened to produce the desired outcome. This view contrasts with Collins's view that God took whatever evolution produced and breathed into it His image.

BioLogos extends the thought, stating "(Lewis) is clearly a Christian Theistic Evolutionist, or an Evolutionary Christian Theist."{26} They point out passages from Lewis showing the evolutionary theory of physical change was not contradictory to the gospel. They suggest Lewis would accept today's theories as truth and reject ID.

John West's research{27} finds Lewis was not saying evolutionary theory was definitely true, but rather that it did not refute Christian belief. Lewis wrote, "belief that Men in general have immortal & rational souls does not oblige or qualify me to hold a theory of their pre-human organic history—**if they have one**."{28} In *Miracles* he wrote, "the preliminary processes within Nature which led up to" the human mind "**if there were any**"—"were **designed** to do so."{29} In both these quotes, Lewis caveats evolutionary theory by adding a big "if."

Lewis did not embrace a simple-minded view of natural science as fundamentally more authoritative or less prone to error than other fields of human endeavor. Lewis argued that

scientific theories are “supposals” and should not be confused with “facts.” . . . We must always recognize that such explanations can be wrong.{30}

Clearly, Lewis did not feel that a young earth view a necessity. But, he was adamantly against the thought that science trumped theology. Although, one cannot know with certainty, it appears that Lewis would resonate with the methodology and claims of Intelligent Design theorists.

I appreciate Collins’ faith journey. However, I wish he would say “We really don’t know the details of man’s creation, but we know God was intimately involved.”

Notes

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Pew Research on Religious Beliefs of American Christians

Looking across the seven-year period from 2007 to 2014, we find that the percentage of Evangelicals holding a biblical worldview is continuing to decline, and the percentage of Mainline and Catholics holding such a worldview is declining at an even higher rate.

Overall, 13.3% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 27 held a biblical worldview in 2007. By 2014, for the same segment of Americans who are now between the ages of 25 and 34, this number had dropped to 11.5%.

In this post, I continue my exploration of the two large surveys by Pew Research entitled U. S. Religious Landscape Surveys, taken seven years apart (i.e., 2007{1}] and 2014{2}). In prior posts, I looked at the growing number of Nothing at All respondents and at the breakdown of Americans by religious affiliation{3}. Now, I want to look more deeply at the religious beliefs of Evangelicals and Other Christians (i.e., Mainline Protestants and Catholics).

Using these surveys, we can look at five key questions on religious beliefs. The first four questions we will call Basic Doctrine. The questions are:

1. Do you believe in God or a universal spirit? *Absolutely or fairly certain.* Which comes closest to your view of God? *God is a person with whom people can have a relationship and is not an impersonal force.*
2. Which comes closest to your view: The Bible is the word

of God. (versus the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.)

3. Do you think there is a heaven, where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded? *Yes.*
4. Do you think there is a hell, where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished? *Yes.*

Clearly these questions do not express Evangelical doctrine perfectly, but they are worded the way that Pew Research chose to express them and I can't go back and fine tune them.

The fifth question is:

5. When it comes to questions of right and wrong, which of the following do you look to most for guidance? Religious teachings and beliefs{4}

We will refer to all five questions combined as a Biblical Worldview (BWV).

Let's begin by looking at Evangelicals. In Table 1, the percentages of each age group for both survey years are tabulated.

Table 1 – Christian Beliefs for Evangelicals

Evangelical (All)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18 – 27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Basic Doctrine	59.1%	56.2%	61.1%	53.1%	57.6%
Biblical Worldview	33.6%	33.6%	36.2%	31.7%	39.5%

Note: Those 18-27 in 2007 would be 25-34 in 2014, which is why 2014 is broken up differently than 2007

And we see that the youngest group in each survey tends to be slightly higher the older respondents in most areas. In 2014, we see a significant dip for those 25 to 34 years of age versus those younger and those older. It also appears that

there is a slight uptick in both basic doctrine and BVW belief in 2014 over 2007. However, we need to look at the percentage of the entire age group to get the full picture.

Table 2 – Percentage of an Entire Age Group for Christian Beliefs of Evangelicals

Evangelical (All)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
% of All People in Age Group	28.0%	32.7%	23.8%	26.5%	32.9%
Basic Doctrine	16.6%	18.4%	14.6%	14.1%	19.0%
Biblical Worldview	9.4%	11.0%	8.6%	8.4%	13.0%

Now we see that against the entire population, the percentage of those in 2014 with a Basic Doctrinal view and a Biblical Worldview and younger than 35 is less than the 18–27 year-olds from 2007. They went from higher in Table 1 to lower in Table 2 because of the fairly significant decrease in the percentage of Evangelicals in those age groups. In fact, comparing 18-27 in 2007 with 25-34 in 2014, we find the number affirming Basic Doctrine goes down by 15% and the number affirming a Pew Biblical Worldview goes down 10%.

When you think about it, the results from these two tables are what you would expect to see. Those who were marginal Evangelicals in 2007 were more likely than those with stronger Evangelical beliefs to identify as something other than an Evangelical by 2014. This action would make the percentages in Table 1 go up in 2014. But there was still some reduction in the number of people who believed in Basic Doctrine and a Biblical Worldview in 2014. Thus, the percentages in Table 2 went down a significant amount.

Now let’s see how Other Christians (i.e. Non-Evangelicals) compare.

Table 3 – Christian Beliefs for Other Christians

Other Christians (Mainline and Catholic)					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Basic Doctrine	32.8%	30.6%	39.0%	30.5%	32.8%
Biblical Worldview	10.5%	11.6%	14.5%	11.1%	16.1%

Comparing Table 3 with Table 1, we see that the percentage of Other Christians holding a Basic Doctrine is just over one half of the rate with Evangelicals. For a Biblical Worldview, it drops to about one third of the rate expressed by Evangelicals. Given that these respondents self-identified with a Mainline Protestant or Catholic denomination, it is disheartening to see that only around 10% of them ascribe to a Biblical Worldview.

Table 4 – Percentage of an Entire Age Group for Christian Beliefs of Other Christians

Other Christian					
Survey	2007 Survey		2014 Survey		
Age Group	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
% of All People in Age Group	36.9%	46.0%	29.5%	28.3%	41.3%
Basic Doctrine	12.1%	14.1%	11.5%	8.7%	13.5%
BWV	3.9%	5.4%	4.3%	3.1%	6.6%

Once again, we see a similar effect when we look at the population as a whole. Given the significant drop in the number of people identifying as Other Christians in 2014 when compared with 2007, we see a large drop (as a percentage) in those professing a Basic Doctrine and a Biblical Worldview. In fact, comparing 18-27 in 2007 with 25-34 in 2014, we find the number affirming Basic Doctrine goes down by 30% and the number affirming a Pew Biblical Worldview goes down 20%. Perhaps more importantly, we see only about 3–4% of the population under 35 are Mainline/Catholics with a Biblical Worldview.

Impact of Pluralism on a Christian Biblical Worldview

Surprisingly, it appears to be possible to have a pluralistic view (i.e. there are multiple ways to heaven) and have a Biblical Worldview as defined by the questions in the two Pew surveys. Let's look at the relationship between these two important views. In an earlier blog post, *Measuring Pluralism: A Needed Correction*, we looked at the number of people who did not take a pluralistic view. In fact, they said,

1. My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life. OR
2. Many religions can lead to eternal life, but only Christian religions can lead to eternal life. (That is: Many Christian religions can lead to eternal life.)

As reported in the earlier post, those who stated either of the items above were as shown below:

Table 5 – Christians Who Are Not Pluralistic

	Evangelical			Other Christian		
Age Range	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
Not Pluralistic	60%	54%	59%	27%	27%	25%

What we want to consider in this post is the relationship between one's view of pluralism and one's view of basic Christian doctrine.

Table 6 – Probability of Holding Christian Doctrine Given One's View on Pluralism

	Evangelical			Other Christian		
Age Range	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-24	15-34	35 plus
One True with Basic Doctrine	72.9%	65.3%	66.8%	56.3%	50.5%	52.3%
Pluralist with Basic Doctrine	43.8%	38.6%	44.6%	32.6%	23.2%	26.3%

One True with Biblical Worldview	47.8%	45.1%	50.4%	27.9%	25.3%	30.7%
Pluralist with BWV	19.0%	16.0%	23.9%	9.5%	5.9%	11.2%
Note: One True = Not Pluralistic						

First, let's look at the impact of pluralism on belief in Basic Doctrine as defined above. For Evangelicals who are not pluralistic, we can see that about two out of three hold to the Basic Doctrine. For Other Christians, it drops to about one in two (or 50%). For Evangelicals who are pluralistic we see a drop down to about 40% across all ages. For Other Christians, the drop is down to around 25% which is only half of the percentage of those who are not pluralistic.

However, when we add in the idea of making decisions on what is right or wrong, we see a significant drop. For Evangelicals who are not pluralistic, about one in two (50%) hold to this Biblical Worldview, a drop of about 30%. For Other Christians, we see an even larger drop down to about half of the level for a Basic Doctrine, i.e. down to about 25%.

We see an even greater reduction in comparing those who are pluralistic with those who are not. For Evangelicals, they are about a third as likely (e.g., 16% compared to 45% for those age 25-34) to hold to a Biblical Worldview. For Other Christians, generally less than 10% of those with a pluralistic view hold to a Biblical Worldview, or less that one third of the rate among those who are not pluralistic.

It is most disturbing, but unfortunately true that the percentage of Evangelicals holding a biblical worldview is continuing to decline, and the percentage of Mainline and Catholics holding such a worldview is declining at an even faster rate. This does not bode well for the future of the church of Jesus Christ in America.

Notes

1. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
2. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
3. **Religious Affiliation of American Emerging Adults: 1996 to 2014**
4. Other choices were Philosophy and reason, Practical experience and common sense, and Scientific information

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Vanguard: Fall 2018 News for Our Donors

Relieved! How You Delivered a Wisconsin Teenager From Anxiety

Paul Rutherford

Free for the summer, Murren wanted nothing more than a little rest from her studies and to leave Wisconsin to go have fun with her friends at Mind Games Camp in Texas. Raised in church all her life by faithful parents who follow Christ, Murren had always been a "good girl" and made her confession of belief in Jesus. But inwardly she wondered, "Am I really saved? Did it really stick?"

Friends in youth group testified to their own life change when they believed in Jesus for salvation, repented of their waywardness, and found life. Secretly Murren wondered if she'd truly found life in Jesus because her testimony wasn't like theirs. She'd never given herself over to a lifestyle of outright rebellion.

That's what this summer was going to be about. Taking a break from her worries. Getting a little R&R, maybe a little bit of that southern Sun (but no sunburn). Murren had gone to a summer camp for teenagers last summer (2017)—Probe's own Mind Games Camp. She had a blast, made some great friends, and looked forward to returning this summer for the fellowship.

When she arrived in Texas it was sunny and hot. Everything was going as hoped. Camp was fun. The fellowship was great. She even saw some of the very same friends! But one subtle recurring theme stuck out to her over and over. "What does it mean to be saved?" It was like she couldn't get away from it—in group time during the talks, around the lunch table,

even conversations with other campers. This gnawing issue hadn’t stayed put in Wisconsin. It somehow followed her all the way down to Texas and settled down in the bottom of her stomach.

Finally one day near the end of camp Murren was seated in a circle for small group discussion. And in the intimacy of that environment she felt safe enough to open her mouth and release worry’s gnawing sensation in her stomach. She hoped for some relief. She let her guard down and wondered out loud through tears confessing, “I don’t have one of those prodigal testimonies. And sometimes I wonder, ‘Am I really saved?’”

The group spoke up immediately to affirm her and point her to the Word of God and to assure her that her salvation is secure in Jesus. “It’s not something you need to worry about. You are saved by grace through faith—not of your own works. It is a gift of God.” She was pointed straight back to Scripture, reminded of God’s sovereignty, of His loving kindness, of His faithfulness, and of the goodness of the gospel.

Relief! Wonderful, marvelous, glorious relief was Murren’s at last! Modest tears continued but this time not for anxiety, but for joy! What terrific relief to be free of the worry at last. Her salvation really is up to God. It doesn’t matter what kind of testimony she has! In Christ she is free! And the freedom is wonderful!

Murren’s hope for 2018’s summer to be filled with friends and fun as a respite from worry and anxiety had been fulfilled and then blessed with so much more! Lies from the enemy held Murren captive to fear and anxiety over her relationship with God. Free in Christ she found new depths to the joy of her salvation!

Doubting University Student Transformed Into Defender of Christianity

Byron Barlowe

“I think in about ten years I will know whether to believe in Christianity,” said Indian university student Shail Karia. Probe staffer Byron Barlowe appealed to him that he may not even have tomorrow, much less ten years! They discussed more reasons to believe.

Shail is one of over 5,000 international students at the University of Texas at Dallas, where Byron co-leads a Reasonable Faith (RF) chapter. The first time Shail attended an RF meeting, he was desperately searching for what to believe.

“I needed answers to my questions. I was seeking,” he shares. Reading everything from the Bhagavad Gita to the Qu’ran to Nietzsche, Shail’s urgent questions included, “What is the correct worldview?” and “How much faith does it take to believe?”

He had to decide about the truth of it all. But how? That’s where you stepped in to guide him through the process. He and Byron talked at length about worldviews. He needed a reference point to begin—a framework to judge each competing worldview. He needed to know which worldview held together best, which one explained more, and dealt with reality most convincingly, on such important topics as life, God, the universe, and man. Thank you for providing that for him.

Shail had become a member of a campus ministry’s Bible study for non-believers. There, he dove deeply into Christian fellowship. As a Hindu background young man, his worldview was “all over the place.” He was drawn in immediately.

“My small group was one of the most pivotal things for me” Shail shares. “It made me start questioning. Initially I was hesitant, but people were sharing their deepest darkest secrets. That drew me closer to them as I shared my own secrets.” Shail experienced life with others who were vulnerable. He made deep connections. He witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit.

That’s when the meaty substance of the faith, the reasonableness, beauty and meaningfulness of Christianity, began to solidify for Shail. Byron invited him back to an RF meeting, where he heard lectures on such topics as Miracles, and the Resurrection. Shail had to decide his ultimate question: “Do I know enough to believe?” Would it take a decade more? Or did he have enough evidence already to believe– rational evidence and relational evidence?

By spring, Shail had good news for Byron. “I processed this decision, slept on it, and realized I was ready.” Shail put his faith in Christ! That couldn’t have happened without you. Thank you!

Since then Byron–along with others– shepherded him through growth in Christ. He has forsaken his Hindu gods by throwing away his idols (small statues commonly possessed by Hindu families). Shail has learned to fight Satan’s lies with God’s Word. He has been baptized. Shail is now a witness for Jesus Christ, sharing Jesus with his Hindu grandmother and fellow students alike.

The day of this writing, Byron and Shail were witnessing on campus to a Chinese student. Byron marveled at Shail’s initiative. Ironically this was happening across the room from where he’d only one year prior predicted he’d need a decade to decide what to believe. Just last week Shail led another Chinese student to Christ. Shail is dangerous for God. Your support of Probe was absolutely essential to make that happen. Thank you. You transformed a doubting university skeptic into

a witnessing ambassador for Christ.

Probe Ranked Tops Among Nonprofits

Kerby Anderson

You are a smart investor.

You give to Probe. And Probe is among the most efficient non-profit organizations in America. According to non-profit watchdog organization CharityWatch, the average American non-profit spends 75% of its budget on program costs.

Probe spends 85%. And that makes you a smart investor. Every dollar you give to Probe works hard to accomplish the mission. The national benchmark for fundraising costs is 10%. Probe spends 8%. You not only make a spiritually and eternally significant impact with your gift, your donation is being utilized in a way that's among the most efficient organizations in America today.

You may already know Probe Ministries is a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. That means your dollars invested are hard at work accomplishing the mission you gave to. The vast majority of Probe funds are spent on ministry and very little on fundraising. Your gift directly impacts our mission. That makes you a smart investor!

Just what exactly are you investing in? As 2018 ends, I am excited to share with you some of what your partnership has accomplished. Because of you, classes have been taught in churches. You have ministered overseas, teaching believers and non-believers alike in countries such as South Africa and Hungary, as well as stateside in places like Oregon, Missouri, Arkansas, New York, and Oklahoma, as well as in Texas.

Because of you, the reach of Periscope, Probe's 49-day

experience for churches and small groups, continues to increase. The marketing being done by Grace101.org is first rate. Through you, Periscope has been placed in several different states just this year. You are reaching people in churches who need to be freed from cultural captivity. But you and I know we can reach even more with additional funds provided by you and other interested donors.

Let me also share with you Probe's vision for the future. Probe will continue to minister through speaking, writing, broadcasting, and the Internet. The Probe radio program that began in 1982 still reaches a large audience, thanks to you, and has recently been reformatted with a new host and new music to equip even more with a Christian worldview. And because of you Probe continues working to increase the number of people (Christians and non-Christians) who visit the Probe website.
We also have exciting plans to expand the ministry of Probe through a new podcast format that can reach a different audience than our radio program. I ask you to be in prayer about these new plans that are just now being implemented.

As you can see, the reach of Probe is expanding due to your prayers and financial support. That is why I ask you to consider how you will invest in this ministry before the end of 2018 so we can end the calendar year in the black and be ready to develop new opportunities for 2019. Thank you for you investment, and thank you in advance for your year-end gift.

Measuring Pluralism: A

Difficult Task

Steve Cable examines the data concerning American Christians' beliefs about pluralism, the belief that all religions are true and valid ways to know about God, the world, and salvation.

We are in the process of examining two related Pew Research surveys taken by about 35,000 people, once in 2007[{1} and again in 2014{2}. In today's post we want to consider the question of religious pluralism among American Christians. As there are different views concerning the meaning of "religious pluralism," for this post we will use this definition: *Pluralism is basically the belief that the various world religions are true and equally valid in their communication of the truth about God, the world, and salvation.* I.e., there are multiple religious beliefs and practices which will suffice to get one to heaven. It does not mean that all religions are sufficient, but that more than one distinctly different religious concept will result in eternal salvation.

In their 2007 survey, Pew had one question dealing with pluralism:

> Which of these two statements comes closer to your own views even if neither is exactly right?

1. My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.
[OR]
2. Many religions can lead to eternal life

The responses to this question for Evangelical Christians and for Non-Evangelical Christians{3} are given in the table below.

Table 1 – Percent of Respondents Who Said "My Religion is the One, True Faith"

Age Range	18 – 27	30 plus

Evangelical	44.6%	36.4%
Non-Evangelical Christian	19.0%	14.2%

Not surprisingly, the percentage of Evangelicals who selected statement #1 far exceed the percentage of Non-Evangelical Christians.

However, it is disappointing that significantly fewer than one half of Evangelicals would select that statement. And it is surprising that the younger cohort is much more likely than the older cohort to make such a statement.

Which brings up the question: When someone says "my religion is the one," are they referring to Christianity vs. other major religions, OR are they referring to their denomination vs. other Christian denominations? One would guess that many Christians, especially from older generations, may be thinking about the latter.

In fact, the Pew Research organization realized this issue almost immediately after releasing the results of the 2007 survey. They did another smaller survey in 2008{4} to get insight into this question and reported:

One of the most frequently asked questions to arise from the 2007 Landscape Survey findings is how the 70% of religiously affiliated respondents who said "many religions can lead to eternal life" interpreted the phrase "many religions." For example, do Christians who express this view have in mind only Christians from denominations other than their own, or are they thinking more broadly of non-Christian religions? To shed light on this issue, the new survey asks those who believe that many religions can lead to eternal life a series of follow-up questions . . . nearly three-quarters (72%) of evangelicals who say many religions can lead to salvation name at least one non-Christian faith that can do so.{5}

Turning this around, they found that 28% of evangelicals who said that many religions can lead to eternal life were only

talking about other Christian religions. Thus, this group of evangelicals would not be considered pluralistic. So, I analyzed the data from this 2008 survey and used those results to calculate data of Christians' views on pluralism as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Results from 2008 Religion and Public Life Survey

Age Range		18 – 27	30 plus
Evangelical	One True Faith	64%	49%
	Only Christians in Heaven{6}	74%	61%
Non-Evangelical Christian	One True Faith	24%	16%
	Only Christians in Heaven	37%	22%

So we can see that adding these people who were pluralistic only among different Christian faiths, we add another ten percent or so to those Christians who are not pluralistic. However, this 2008 data introduces another issue. Those who said their religion was the one, true faith appears to have increased by almost 20 percentage points for Evangelicals under 28 (from 45% to 64%). I don't believe this is possible given the lack of events in 2008 to account for such a significant, sudden change. However, the Pew report comments on it this way, ". . . the number of people saying theirs is the one, true faith that can lead to eternal life increased slightly between 2007 and 2008, from 24% to 29%. The increase is especially pronounced for white evangelical Protestants, among whom the figure rose from 37% to 49%."{7}

In the 2014 Religious Landscape survey, the ambiguity was resolved by asking two questions:

1. The question asked in the 2007 survey listed above, and
2. **ASK IF CHRISTIAN AND SAY "MANY RELIGIONS"** to prior

question: And do you think it's only Christian religions that can lead to eternal life, or can some non-Christian religions also lead to eternal life?

a) Only Christian religions can lead to eternal life
b) Some non-Christian religions can lead to eternal life

We can then compare the results from both Religious Landscape surveys as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3 – Comparing 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Results with Estimates for Shaded Areas

	Evangelical					Non-Evangelical Christian				
Year Surveyed	2007		2014			2007		2014		
Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus	
My religion is one, true faith	45%	36%	52%	42%	39%	19%	14%	23%	19%	15%
Only Christians in heaven	55%{8}	50%	60%	54%	59%	32%	20%	27%	27%	25%

Note: the numbers for 2007 Only Christians in heaven are estimates and could be off significantly.

And the results from the 2008 Religion and Public Life with the 2014 Religious Landscape survey as shown in table 4:

Table 4 – Comparing 2008 Religion and Public Life Survey with 2014 Religious Landscape Survey

	Evangelical		Non-Evangelical Christian	
Year Surveyed	2008	2014	2008	2014

Age Range	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus	18-27	30 plus	18-24	25-34	35 plus
My religion is one, true faith	64%	49%	52%	42%	39%	24%	16%	23%	19%	15%
Only Christians in heaven	74%	61%	60%	54%	59%	37%	22%	27%	27%	25%

I think the important things to note from the two tables are:

1) Adding those who said “Many religions can lead to eternal life but non-Christian religions cannot” to those who said “My religion is the one, true faith leading to eternal life.” we see an increase of between 8 and 20 percentage points;

2) The increased percentages in 2014 also even out the results from across age groups. For example, for Evangelicals you can see a swing of 13 percentage points from the 18 to 24 age group compared to the 35 plus age group on the “one, true faith” response. But, when you look at “only Christians in heaven,” you see the swing across age groups has dropped to 1 percentage point. Apparently, the youngest adults are less likely to be thinking only of their denomination when they answered the first question with “My religion . . .”

3) Finally, there is a slight drop off in Evangelicals who are not pluralists between 2007 and 2014.

As this somewhat tortuous journey through the subject of pluralism exploring three different surveys clearly shows, it is hard to nail down what people are thinking when asked about pluralism. The primary takeaway is that slightly less than one out of two Evangelicals (~40%) have a pluralistic view, while three out of four Non-evangelical Christians have such a view. An Evangelical with a pluralistic viewpoint has no reason to

be concerned with evangelism and technically is not an Evangelical. In a subsequent post, we will examine the difference in worldview beliefs between non-pluralist Evangelicals and pluralist Evangelicals

Notes

1. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
2. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
3. Consists of Mainline Protestant Denominations, Catholics, and some Historically Black Denominations.
4. **Pew Research, Religion and Public Life Survey 2008**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.
5. Pew Research, **Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life**, December 18, 2008
6. This factor was determined by looking at the people who answered the first question: “Many religions can lead to eternal life” but in answering subsequent questions said Islam, Hinduism, Atheism and No Religious Faith cannot achieve eternal life. When they answered the first question with “many

religions", they obviously were referring to many Christian religions (or possibly Christian and Jewish religions). I did not include the subsequent question about the "Jewish religion" because the Bible is clear that many OT Jews will be in heaven.
7. Perhaps the candidacy of Barack Obama triggered this decrease in pluralism for white evangelical Protestants. If it did, its effect had dissipated by the 2014 survey with results much closer to the 2007 survey than the 2008 survey. I think it was probably the result of surveying cell phone users as well as landlines in 2008.
8. This number is estimated by taking the number for One, True Faith and adding the percentage of those Christians in the 2008 survey who said that many religions could lead to eternal life but not Islam, Hinduism, atheism, and No Religious Faith.

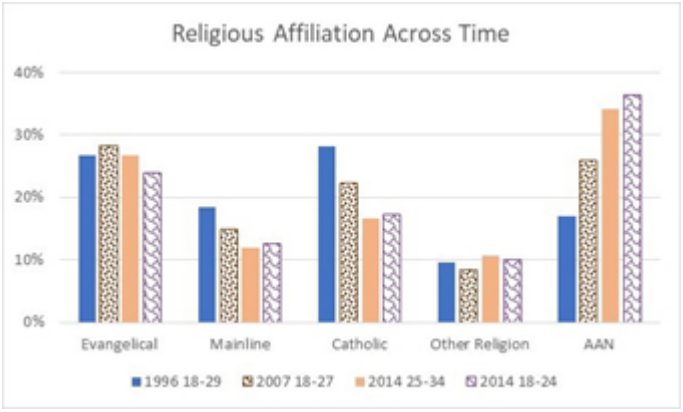
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Religious Affiliation of American Emerging Adults: 1996 to 2014

In my past few posts, I have been focusing on data from the monumental surveys taken by Pew Research in 2007{1} and 2014(2}. These surveys of about 35,000 Americans allow us to get more accurate data on American beliefs and drill down with greater confidence into specific subsets of Americans (e.g. emerging adults, Asian-Americans, those with advanced degrees). The earlier posts focused on the Nones and their increased role in American society. In this post, we will consider the general religious makeup of American emerging

adults. In subsequent posts, we will look at their religious beliefs, religious practice and their cultural beliefs.

The Pew surveys parse religious affiliation down to specific denominations. In this post, I have combined those into five categories: Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Other Religions, and Atheists/Agnostics/Nothing in Particular (the Nones). The Pew surveys list Historically Black Churches as a separate group. I used the technique described in the footnote below{3} to assign the different historically black denominations to Evangelical or
Mainline Protestant.



In the figure to the right, I have shown how the denominational categories split up the population in 1996, 2007 and 2014. Data from the 1996 survey by Pew on Religion and Politics{4} was added to provide a better understanding of the trends in religious affiliation among young adults.

As shown, both Mainline and Catholic denominations have decreased significantly over this period. Mainline denominations have decreased from 18.5% down to 12.0%, or by almost a third. During the same time period, Catholics have reduced from 28% to about 17%, a reduction of almost 40%. By 2014, almost half (46%) of young adult Catholics were Hispanic. At the same time, only about 37% of emerging adult Hispanics (18–29) reported being affiliated with a Catholic church as compared to over 55% of those Hispanics over 40. Seven years earlier, in 2007, well over half (55%) of emerging

adult Hispanics reported being affiliated with the Catholic Church, highlighting a dramatic drop by 2014. So, we find this interesting mix of trends:

• the percentage of Catholics is greatly reduced,
• young Hispanics are significantly less likely to be Catholics than in the past,
• but still almost half of young Catholics are Hispanic.

In contrast, the Atheists, Agnostics and Nothing in Particulars (Nones) have more than doubled, going from 17% of the young adult population up to about 36% in 2014, as discussed in an earlier post.

Over the same period, those selecting to affiliate with an Evangelical denomination and those affiliating with another religion (e.g. Mormon, Muslim, Hindu) have remained relatively constant.

The data from these surveys shows that the results reported in my book, *Cultural Captives*, from 2010 are continuing at an alarming pace. Those results indicate that the Nones will soon constitute the majority of emerging adults in America largely at the expense of Mainline Protestants and Catholics. Although declining at a slower pace than other Christian denominations, Evangelicals are showing a steady decline as well.

Notes

1. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

2. The **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center).

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3. **Historically Black denominations affiliated with Evangelicals**: All Baptists except for Progressive Baptists, Nondenominational blacks, Pentecostals, and Holiness Family

Historically Black denominations affiliated with Mainline Protestants: Progressive Baptists, Methodists, non-specific Protestants

4. **Religion and Politics Survey 1996**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

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Religious Beliefs and Advanced Degrees

Steve Cable examines how people with advanced degrees match up to the populations as a whole in their denominational affiliation and basic religious beliefs.

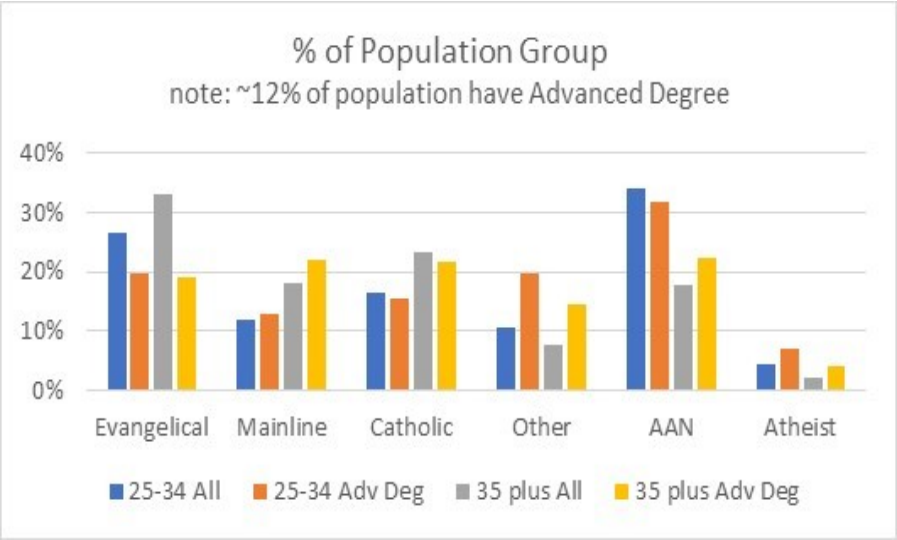
Religious Beliefs and Advanced Degrees

A colleague asked me, “Do you have any recent research—insights—into the religious beliefs of professors?” After some deep digging, I was surprised to see that advanced degrees may not change basic religious views like many believe they do.

The simple answer is no. I have not found any survey data that I can access that focuses on college professors. However, since the question was asked, I wanted to look at the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study which surveyed 35,072 Americans to see if I could extract any data that would provide any insight into the religious beliefs of professors. Unfortunately, there are no employment questions in the survey and the level of education question does not separate Ph.D.s from master’s degrees.

However, I did get some interesting information about the highest level of education asked about in the survey: *What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received? Postgraduate or professional degree, including master’s, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., M.A,, M.S., Ph.D., M.D., J.D., graduate school).* I wanted to see how religious affiliation and religious beliefs compared with the population as a whole; i.e., did having a graduate degree make one more or less likely to be religious?

First let’s look at their self-proclaimed religious affiliation as shown in the figure below. The color key shows age range and cohort (i.e., representing all survey takers or only ones with advanced degrees or “Adv Deg”).



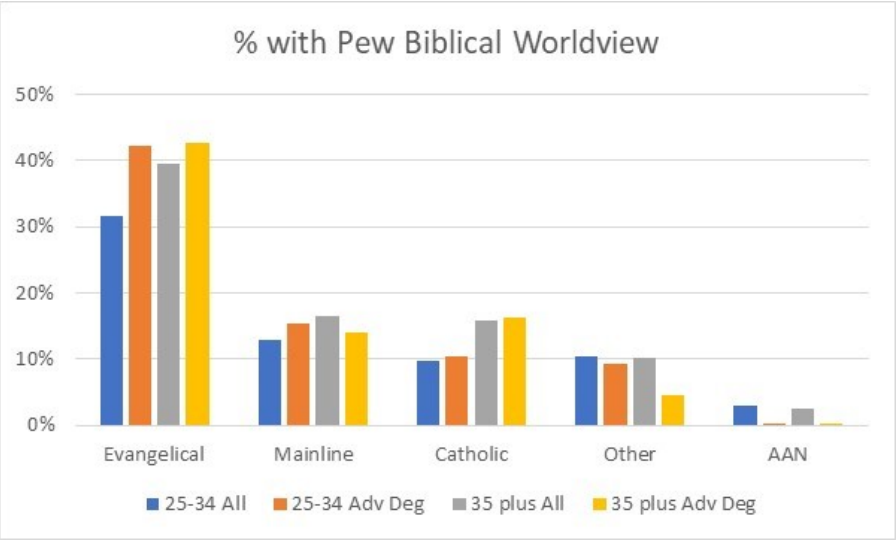
We find (somewhat surprisingly, I think) that an advanced degree does not significantly change the distribution of religious affiliations. To read the figure, compare the blue bars with the red bars and the gray bars with the yellow bars. Some things to note:

- Since there are very few people under the age of 25 with doctoral degrees, I looked at those 25 to 34 and those 35 and above
- AAN stands for Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing at All
- The sum across each color for the first five categories adds up to 100%, i.e. for all 25 to 34 year olds, 27% are evangelicals, 12% are mainline, 16% are Catholic, etc. adding up to 100% of the population.
- Atheists are a subset of AAN and were added for their relevance to the question.

First, note that for Mainline Protestants, Catholics and AAN's, those with advanced degrees are essentially identical in percentage as the age group as a whole. Only for Evangelicals and Other Religions is there a significant difference. Those respondents with advanced degrees are a significantly smaller segment of the population for Evangelicals and a significantly larger segment for Other Religions. It is not surprising to find that a greater percentage of those with advanced degrees are followers of a non-Christian religion than for the population of non-Christians as a whole. This result is because a great portion of immigrants to the U.S. with a Hindu or Muslim background are professionals with advanced degrees brought in to fill engineering and computer science positions.

It is interesting that for AAN's, those with advanced degrees are about the same percentage of the population as those without advanced degrees.

What about their religious beliefs? These are compared in the figure shown here.



A Biblical Worldview as defined by Pew Research questions is one that holds the following positions[1]:

- God is a personal being with whom people can have a relationship
- Our holy book is the word of God
- There is a heaven, where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded
- There is a hell, where people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished
- When it comes to questions of right and wrong, I look to religious teachings and beliefs most for guidance

The primary take-away from the chart is once again the striking similarity between the religious group as a whole and the religious group comprised of those holding advanced degrees.

It is interesting to note that Evangelicals with advanced degrees are somewhat more likely than Evangelicals as a whole to ascribe to the Pew version of a Biblical Worldview. Remembering that the first chart shows a drop-off in the percentage of Evangelicals with advanced degrees relative to the overall percentage of Evangelicals in the population gives us a reasonable clue as to the cause: perhaps those people who completed their advanced degree and still considered themselves Evangelicals were more conscious of what that means

than the population at large.

I thought you might be interested in this data. However, it really sheds little light on the questions about college professors because college professors are a small percentage of the pool of people with advanced degrees in America. One study that does provide data on this question was done in 2006 by two professors.[2] It appears to be a well-done attempt to look specifically at college professors. It supports the view that many college professors (particularly at top-tier universities) are not supporters of and in many case actively ridicule evangelical religious thought. Note: "many college professors" does not mean a majority but rather a significant minority large enough that one could not spend four years at a university without spending semesters in several of their classes. It would be nice if there were a similar study from 2016 so we could see the trends between 2006 and 2016.

In summary, looking at recent survey results, we do not find a significant difference in the percentage of people who self-identify as Atheist, Agnostic, or Nothing at All who have an advanced degree relative to those without an advanced degree. However, there is a significant fall off in the percentage of Americans with advanced degrees who identify as Evangelicals. At the same time, those with advanced degrees who affiliate themselves with an Evangelical denomination are more likely to hold a biblical worldview than those without advanced degrees.

[1] These five positions have some wording issues from an evangelical perspective, but Pew selected the possible answers and these five come as close as possible within their question structure to reflecting a partial biblical worldview.

[2] Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, *How Religious are America's College and University Professors*?, SSRC, Feb. 6, 2007

Changing Religious Affiliations from Childhood to Young Adulthood

As we have seen in previous blogs, the percentage of young adults who identify as Nones has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades. During the same time, Christian groups have seen a decline in the percentage of young adults who identify with them. But looking back at their childhood affiliations, we want to know 1) Where did these Nones come from and 2) Did any who grew up in a None household become Christians.

Looking at the Pew Research, **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**{1}, we can answer these questions and others about the transition from childhood faith to adult faith.

In the first part of this post, we will consider Americans who were 25 to 34 years old in 2014. This age group is of interest because they represent those from post-college through the beginning of child rearing and because we can compare them with 18 to 24-year-olds from the 2007 Pew Research survey.

The two tables below look at the change from two different perspectives. The first looks at where young adults with a particular religious affiliation came from as children. The second looks at where children of a particular religious affiliation ended up as young adults.

Let's consider a simple example to understand the difference between these two tables. Assume that there were 200 Evangelicals and 200 Nones in 2014 and there were 100 Evangelicals and 300 Nones among the same group as children.

Finally, assume that there were 25 people who were Nones as children who became Evangelical as an adult. That tells us that 125 Evangelical children became Nones as an adult.

Given this data, the first table would be:

	Evangelical Adult	None Adult
Evangelical as Children	75%(75/100)	41.7% (125/300)
None as Children	25% (25/100)	58.3% (175/300)
Total	100%	100%

And the second table would be:

Example 2: Religion Children Became as Adults

	Evangelical Adult	None Adult	Total
Evangelical as Children	37.5% (75/200)	62.5% (125/200)	100%
None as Children	12.5% (25/200)	87.5% (175/200)	100%

With that as background, let's look at our two tables.

Table 1: Religion 25 to 34-year-old Adults Came From as Children

Religion as a Child	Evangelical	Mainline	Black	Catholic	Other	None	Change	% Leaving
Evangelical-C	62.7%	19.2%	6.2%	1.5%	5.4%	16.0%	98.1%	38.4%
Mainline-C	10.5%	53.0%	2.4%	1.9%	8.2%	17.7%	69.1%	63.4%
Black-C	3.8%	2.1%	73.5%	1.0%	3.4%	5.4%	77.3%	43.2%
Catholic-C	13.5%	13.7%	6.5%	92.6%	10.3%	27.1%	54.6%	49.4%
Other-C	1.7%	2.9%	3.1%	0.5%	65.4%	11.1%	91.3%	40.3%
None-C	7.7%	9.1%	8.4%	2.5%	7.4%	22.7%	280.8%	36.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		
Evangelical-C stands for "Evangelical as a child" and so on								

Table 2: Religion Children Ended Up Affiliating with as 25 to 34-year-old Adults

Religion as a child	Evangelical	Mainline	Black	Catholic	Other	None	Total
Evangelical-C	61.6%	9.0%	1.7%	1.1%	2.6%	24.1%	100%
Mainline-C	15.2%	36.6%	0.9%	2.2%	5.7%	39.4%	100%
Black-C	10.6%	2.8%	56.8%	2.1%	4.5%	23.2%	100%
Catholic-C	9.8%	4.7%	1.3%	50.6%	3.6%	30.1%	100%
Other-C	3.2%	2.6%	1.6%	0.7%	59.7%	32.3%	100%
None-C	14.2%	8.0%	4.2%	3.5%	6.5%	63.7%	100%
Evangelical-C stands for “Evangelical as a child” and so on							

First, let’s consider the Nones.

Looking at Table 1, we see that the greatest percentage of Nones were affiliated with the Catholic church as children (27.1%) while a smaller percentage were actually Nones as children (22.7%). But lest we think this is only a Catholic issue, we find almost 34% (16.0% + 17.7%) of them were affiliated with a Protestant church as children.

From Table 2, we see that almost 40% of Mainline Protestant children became Nones by the time they were 25 to 34-year-olds. Shockingly, more Mainline Protestant children became Nones than stayed affiliated with a Mainline denomination (39.4% to 36.6%). Strikingly, every other religious grouping lost at least one in four of their childhood affiliates to the Nones; with Catholics and Other Religions losing about one out of three. It is important to highlight that one out of four children raised as Evangelicals chose to be characterized as a None as young adults. Even though that percentage is smaller than other religious groups, one of four is still a significant percentage.

Now let’s look at the columns in Table 1 labeled Change and % Leaving. For this age group, there are almost three times as

many Nones as adults as there were as children (i.e. 280.8%). Comparing it with other religious groups, we see that all other groups fell in size. Interestingly, over one third of those who were Nones as children are now affiliated with another religious group. But that group is overwhelmed by the number becoming Nones from other groups.

What about Evangelicals, Mainlines and Catholics?

From Table 1, we see that two-thirds of adult evangelicals age 25 to 34 were evangelical as children. Most of the remaining one third came from either Catholic (13.5%) or Mainline (10.5%) backgrounds. However, looking at Table 2, we note that 14% of those who selected None as children were affiliated with an Evangelical church as young adults. This group makes up only 8% of the Evangelical young adults because the Evangelicals are a larger group than the Nones were as children.

The group that **lost almost two-thirds of childhood affiliates is Mainline** Christian churches. From Table 2, we see that almost 40% of them became Nones and another 15% became Evangelical. Looking at the Change column for Table 1, we note that the number of Mainlines is down to less than two-thirds of the number who affiliated with Mainline churches as children.

However, the Catholics do even worse. The Change column shows that the **number of young adult Catholics is barely one half** of the number who said they were affiliated with a Catholic church as children. The Mainlines do a little better because they picked up a significant number of Evangelical and Catholic children while the Catholic faith picks up very few from any other religion (compare Table 1 the column labeled Mainline with the column labeled Catholic to see this difference).

Conclusion

The vast majority of young adult Nones are not raised in households directly promoting that viewpoint. In fact, only 23% of young adult Nones said they were Nones as children. Clearly, the teaching of the culture at large and the lack of a compelling argument from their families is causing the other 77% of young adult Nones to leave their childhood faith to embrace nothing at all.

Relative to their childhood affiliation, the number of Nones is exploding among American young adults. If we, as Evangelicals in America, want to change this trend we need to be equipping our teenagers and emerging adults with a deep understanding of why we know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and worth giving your life in service to. I encourage you to check out Probe's Periscope material at upPeriscope.com as a good place to start the process

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Note

1. **The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2014**, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.