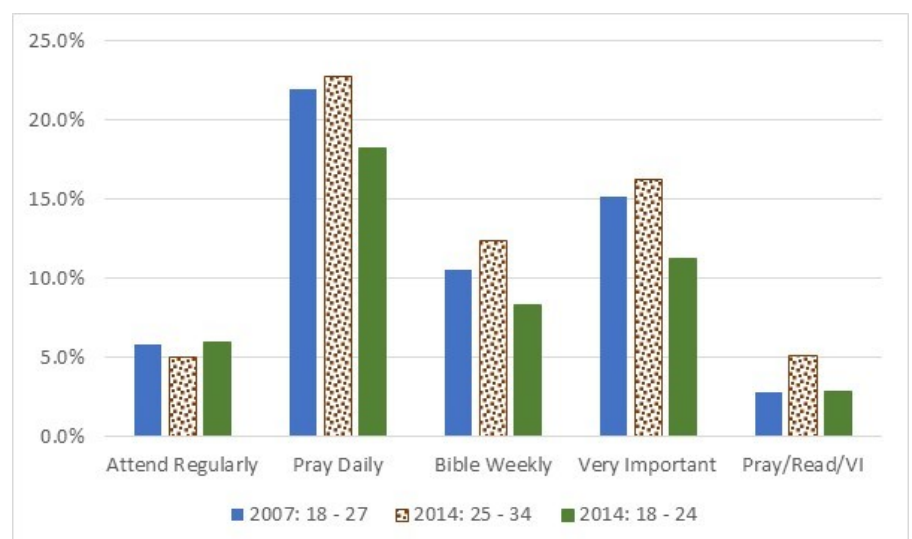


Nones: Are Not Mostly Christians Who Are Unaffiliated

Steve Cable determines that 'Nothing in Particulars' are not actually practicing Christians who just don't want to affiliate with a particular denomination.

[Earlier we examined](#) the significant increase in Nones (those who said their religious affiliation was atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular), which grew from 25% of young adults in 2007 to over 35% of young adults in 2014 according to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey taken by Pew Research.[\[1\]](#) In this post, we will examine the level of involvement in religious practices that these Nones, and particularly the Nothing in Particulars, reported in response to the survey questions. We will try to answer the question: "Are these Nothing in Particulars actually Christians who do not feel comfortable announcing an affiliation with a particular religious group?"

First, let's consider the religious practices of the Nothing in Particulars. In Figure 1, we see their commitment to some common behaviors of nominal and committed



Christians. The actual questions are:

1. Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? [Monthly or more]

2. People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray? [At least once per day]
3. Read scripture outside of religious services [At least weekly]
4. How important is religion in your life? [Very important]
5. Pray daily and read scripture weekly and consider religion very important in your life.

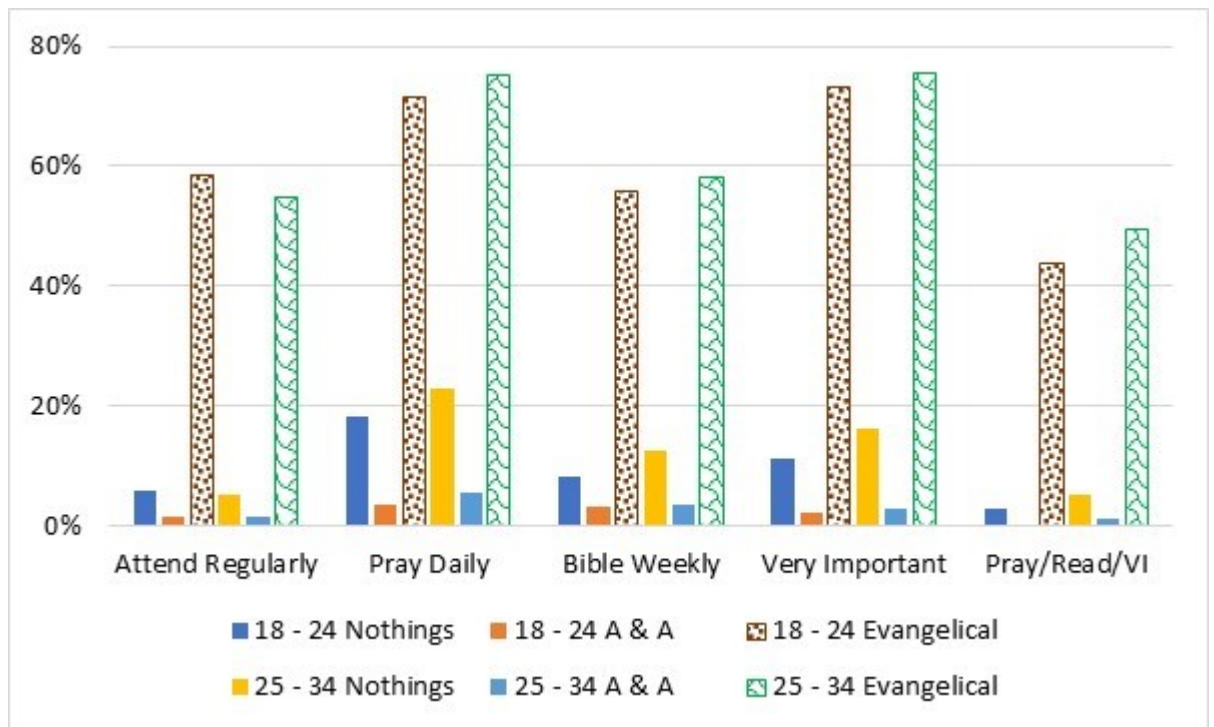
As shown, the figure looks at the answers to these questions for three different groups:

1. Those responding in 2007 who were 18 through 27 years of age
2. Those responding in 2014 who were 25 through 34 years of age (the age range corresponding to those 18 through 27 in 2007)
3. Those responding in 2014 who were 18 through 24 years of age

As you can see, about one in five pray at least daily, about one in ten read the Bible at least once a week, about one in twenty attend church at least once a month. And only about three out of one hundred pray, read the Bible and consider religion to be a very important part of their life.

Note that the corresponding age groups across the two survey dates have roughly the same percentage of respondents who participate in these practices, but the youngest group lags their elders in praying, Bible reading, and attitude toward religion.

How do these levels relate to the responses from Evangelicals on



the one hand and from Atheists and Agnostics on the other hand? Figure 2 gives us the answer to this question.

First let's orient ourselves to the data. The first and fourth column of each group correspond to the second and third column of each group in Figure 1, i.e. 18–24s and 25–34s from 2014. The second and fifth column of each group are the responses from Atheists and Agnostics. As you can see, they are lower than those for the Nothing in Particulars in every category. But more importantly, those results for Evangelical young adults in both age categories (columns three and six) are much, much higher than those for Nothing in Particulars and Atheists and Agnostics.

For example, looking at reading the Bible at least once a week, we find about one in ten Nothing in Particulars, about one in thirty-five Atheists and Agnostics, and almost six out of ten Evangelicals.

Looking at the combination of prayer, Bible reading, and considering religion a very important part of life, we find about one out of twenty-five Nothing in Particulars, about one in one hundred Atheists and Agnostics, and almost five out of ten Evangelicals.

Clearly in this area of religious practice the Nothing in Particulars appear to be much closer in their practice to those who profess Atheism or Agnosticism than those who are Evangelical.

The data clearly does not support the notion that the Nothing in Particulars are actually practicing Christians who just do not want to affiliate with a particular denomination. In fact, the vast majority of Nothing in Particulars have no regular activity associated with worshipping God. Perhaps they believe in Christianity even though they don't attempt to practice it. We will consider that possibility in our next blog post.

Note

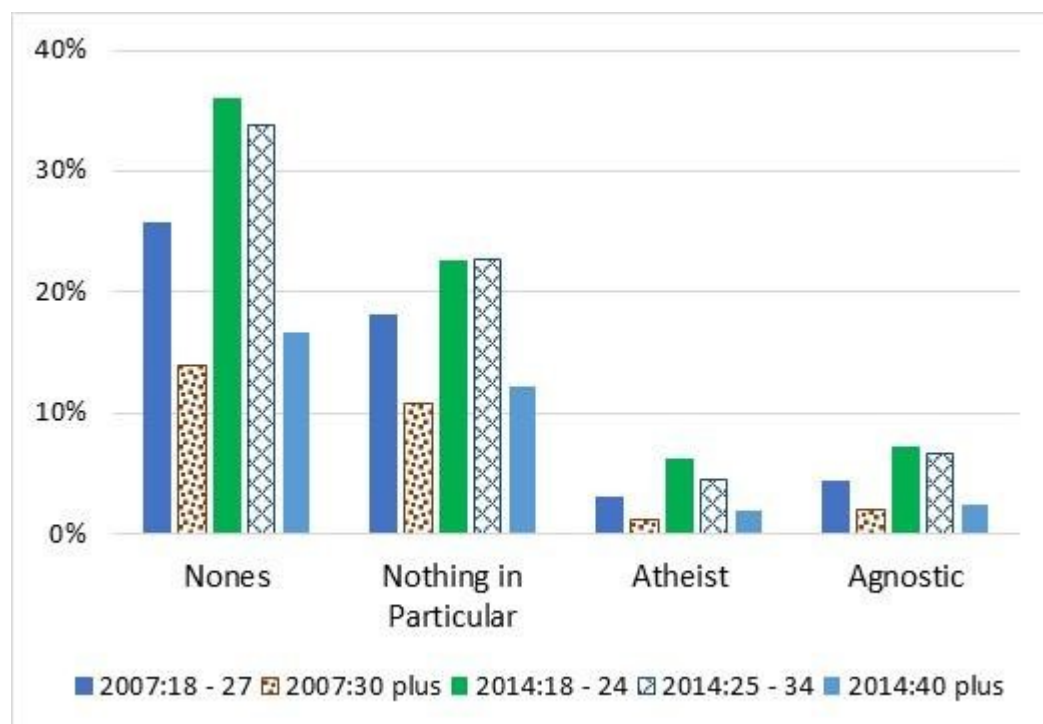
{1} The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2007 and 2014, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (a project of The Pew Research Center). The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by the Pew Research Center.

Update on Nones: Continuing to Dominate the Developing American Religious Scene

Steve Cable provides an update on those with no affiliation with religious traditions. It appears that soon, the majority of American emerging adults will identify as something other than a Christian.

Pew Research has done a great service to those who want to understand the current trends of religious beliefs in America. In 2007, they interviewed about 35,000 Americans to create the 2007 American Religious Landscape Study [{1}](#). Then in 2014, they interviewed a similar size group of Americans using many of the same questions (along with a few new or different questions) to create the 2014 American Religious Landscape Study [{2}](#). Most surveys of this nature include 1,000 to 3,000 respondents which limits their accuracy when considering subsets of the data by age, religious preference, education, ethnicity, etc. By collecting responses from such a large number of people, we can look at these subsets with a much greater level of confidence.

I want to begin by updating our understanding of the dominant religious trend in America this century: the so-called rise of the Nones [{3}](#). The Nones are those people who choose not to affiliate with any religious tradition. In the Pew survey, Nones include atheists, agnostics, and “nothing in particular” respondents. We can understand how this phenomenon is growing by examining the results shown in Figure 1. People were asked “What is your present religion, if any?”



In Figure 1, the first group of bars reflects the percentage of Nones at different times (i.e. 2007 and 2014) and for different age segments. The first two bars show the percentage of Nones in 2007 for those between 18 and 27, and for those 30 years and older. As shown, over 25% of Americans under the age of 28 selected a None category. For those 30 and older, only 14% selected a None category. This was a tremendous growth over the levels up to the early 1990's when the GSS survey^[4] reported 11% of those under 30 and 7% of those 30 and over.

But this amazing growth in Nones is far from over, as shown in the last three bars in the first group summarizing the response in 2014. As shown, the youngest group (ages 18 – 24) showed 36% selecting a None category. The group from 25 to 34 selected None at almost the same rate, 34%. This age group would have been 18 to 27 in 2007 when about 25% of them selected None. Over this seven-year period almost 10% of that age group switched from some other religion to None.

Some people suggest that these young adults will return to church as they begin raising children. What does the data say? Looking at a slightly older group, I compared those 23 to 32 in 2007 with those 30 to 39 in 2014. What I found follows the same trend: 23% of those in 2007 were Nones while 27% of those in 2014 were Nones. Even those over forty increased to 17% from 14%, a significant growth over the level only seven years earlier for those age 30 plus at the time. Thus, we see no trend of emerging adult Nones turning into church attending, Christians as they age in fact just the opposite. More of them are becoming Nones as they move towards middle age

The next three sets of bars break the Nones up into the three constituencies: Nothing in Particular, Atheist and Agnostic. About two thirds of Nones identify as Nothing in Particular with the remainder about evenly split between Atheist and Agnostic.

In my next post, we will see what these Nones believe about

basic Christian doctrine and if they have a somewhat active spiritual life. And in later post, we will also look to see what religions these Nones identified with as children.

For now, our bottom line takeaway is that more than 46% of emerging adults (ages 18 through 29) identify with either another religion (10%) or None (36%), meaning that in a few short years **the majority of American emerging adults will identify as something other than a Christian**. If this trend concerns you, please take a look at our church-wide and small group study called Periscope. Periscope is targeted to address issues taking today's believer captive and blunting their witness to the world around them. For more information, go to www.upPeriscope.com.

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. Stephen Cable, *The Rise of the Nones*, November 6, 2016, probe.org/the-rise-of-the-nones-reaching-the-lost-in-todays-america/

4. General Social Survey 1990, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and

were collected by the James Davis, Tom Smith and Peter Marsden.

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Western Europe: Religious Practice

In my [last post](#), we looked at how many people in the countries of Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, and Cyprus profess a God-focused worldview. Now let's consider some religious practices typically associated with an active faith. This worldwide survey did not ask many questions about religious practice, but the three questions asked highlight some interesting differences.

The three questions asked were:

1. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?
2. Do you have an active membership in a church or religious organization?
3. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

Let's look at the responses based on the country of the respondent, their religious preference, and their age (less than 30 or over 60). The "Pray" columns are those who pray daily or more often. The "Active" columns refer to those who say they have an active membership. The "Attend" columns are those who attend religious services once a month or more often.

Table 1 Those Actively Participating in Religious Practices

Country	Age	All (%)			Protestant {%			Catholic (%)		
		Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend
Germany	All	NA	14	20	NA	14	17	NA	27	35
	Under 30	NA	9	10	NA	13	7	NA	13	19
	Over 60	NA	18	25	NA	16	21	NA	31	48
Netherlands	All	19	11	17	65	46	64	31	18	30
	Under 30	9	6	11	42	42	77	20	5	21
	Over 60	26	16	24	70	48	67	38	22	39
Sweden	All	10	6	9	11	8	11	–	–	–
	Under 30	9	2	6	6	2	2	–	–	–
	Over 60	13	7	12	17	10	15	–	–	–
Spain	All	NA	7	20	–	–	–	NA	8	24
	Under 30	NA	3	6	–	–	–	NA	4	8
	Over 60	NA	14	41	–	–	–	NA	15	47
Cyprus	All	32	10	35	–	–	–	42	12	44
	Under 30	22	6	20	–	–	–	34	7	26
	Over 60	52	12	65	–	–	–	55	13	68

We see some widely varying results between countries and age groups, but none are very encouraging. How many say they pray daily or more often? In the Netherlands, almost 2 out of 3 Protestants and 1 out of 3 Catholics. The large number of Nones in the Netherlands drop the percentage for the country as a whole down to less than 1 out of 5. Sweden, on the other hand, has only about 1 out of 10 saying they pray regularly whether they are Protestant or otherwise. We will see how dismal this level is when we compare it to the United States later in this post.

Also, you can see that those under 30 are less likely to pray daily than older adults. However, the small number of adults of all ages praying daily is the dominant factor.

Being an active member of a church is a definite minority in all categories shown. Roughly one out of ten adults claim to be an active church member across all countries and age groups. Once again, the relatively smaller number of young adults who claim to be active is overwhelmed by the small number across the board.

Those who attend church at least once a month reflect percentages almost equal with those who pray daily or more.

What does it look like when we consider those who combine all three of these characteristics as shown below?

Table 2 Those Who Pray at Least Daily, Are Members, and Attend Monthly or More

Country	Age	All (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Germany	All	9	7	19
	Under 30	3	1	7
	Over 60	13	10	25
Netherlands	All	8	39	10
	Under 30	4	35	5
	Over 60	12	43	12
Sweden	All	3	4	—
	Under 30	1	1	—
	Over 60	4	6	—
Spain	All	5	—	6
	Under 30	1	—	2
	Over 60	12	—	14

Cyprus	All	4	–	5
	Under 30	2	–	3
	Over 60	9	–	10

Note: For Germany and Spain this does not include “Pray at least daily”

Clearly none of these countries have a significant number of people who report a minimal amount of regular religious involvement. Only among Protestants in the Netherlands do we see more than 1 in 10. The percent of Protestants in the Netherlands is small enough that only 8% of all people in that country report a minimal religious involvement.

Just looking at these three very simple practices, we see that the vast majority of people in all these countries do not actively practice their faith. And, those under the age of 30 are much less likely than their seniors to practice these characteristics.

Now let’s compare the results for Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands with those from the United States as shown in table 3.

Table 3 United States Results Compared to Germany, Sweden and Netherlands (GSN)

Activity	Age	All (%)		Protestant (%)		Catholic (%)	
		U.S.	GSN	U.S.	GSN	U.S.	GSN
Pray daily	All	45	10	64	16	51	11
	Under 30	34	5	55	6	30	4
	Over 60	55	14	65	25	64	18
Active church member	All	35	11	54	17	40	23
	Under 30	26	6	40	10	34	11
	Over 60	42	15	58	22	48	27

Attend monthly or more	All	44	16	65	22	10	33
	Under 30	36	1	58	10	53	20
	Over 60	50	22	67	30	58	43
All three	All	26	4	45	9	27	4
	Under 30	15	1	32	3	14	1
	Over 60	35	6	48	13	41	6

As shown, the religious activities of Western Europeans lag significantly behind the level of activity practiced in the United States. When it comes to daily prayer, over 4 times as many Americans practice this activity across the general population, the Protestant population and the Catholic population. Looking at only those under thirty, we find that over 7 times as many Americans practice daily prayer as do Western Europeans. This increase is not due to an increase in prayer among under 30's in the United States, but rather due to a significant drop in daily prayer among young adult, Western Europeans.

The table shows similar levels of differences between people in the United States and those in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. Consider the young adults who practice all three of these religious activities. The Americans practice these activities from 10 to 15 times as often as their Western European counterparts. Once again, these huge differences are not due to high levels of faithfulness among Americans. Americans claim only 15% of those under 30 practice all three activities. But rather by the lack of faithfulness among Western Europeans; where only 1% claim to practice all three.

This look at the data on three questions, which describe a very nominal degree of commitment to one's religious life, clearly shows that Western Europe has a very small remnant of active Christ followers. Without looking at this data, you probably would have agreed with the statement above. But now, you know how significant the problem really is. If they represent the rest of Western Europe, we see that the places

where Protestantism was born and initially flourished have become places where Christian religious practice is relegated to a few and ignored by the many.

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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar and expert on ancient New Testament documents, Dr. Daniel Wallace, spoke on the work being done to ensure we have the most accurate version of the Greek New Testament. He also mentioned several documents presenting a false view of this level of accuracy. One of these documents, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald, appeared in *Newsweek* in December 2014.[\[1\]](#) His article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.

The article contains at least 125 errors and/or half-truths in 14 pages. Of course, I am not the first to respond to this article. Dr. Wallace and Dr. Darrel Bock both wrote responses shortly after the document was published addressing specific areas of interest to them. I commend their posts to you as excellent resources.[\[2\]](#) I will address some areas that are not addressed or only partially addressed by these seminary professors.

Using Survey Data Without Understanding It

Eichenwald begins his article by parroting the negative stereotypes put forth by those who cannot be bothered with trying to understand the vast majority of evangelicals. Attempting to add some rigor to his rant, he refers to two surveys on religious beliefs. Unfortunately for Eichenwald, rather than adding rigor, his comments showed that he did not take the time to examine the survey results he was spouting.

He first states, “[Evangelicals’] lack of knowledge about the Bible is well established. A Pew Research poll in 2010^{3} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with the New Testament and Jesus’s teachings.”^{4} He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve that each faith group answered correctly. However, only two of the twelve questions had anything to do with the New Testament and none of them related to Jesus’s teachings. The remaining questions were divided equally between the Old Testament and on latter day religious figures/beliefs. ^{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone’s knowledge of the New Testament. But, for the record, the questions were “Name the four gospels” and “Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?” Fifty three percent of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus twenty percent of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a “smidgen higher” must mean almost three times as many. Perhaps, *Newsweek* cannot afford a fact checker?

The second poll he referenced was a 2012 effort by the Barna Group^{6}. He said, “[It found] that evangelicals accepted the attitudes and beliefs of the Pharisees . . . more than they accepted the teachings of Jesus.” The study actually showed that 63% of evangelicals accepted the attitudes and actions of Jesus at least as much, if not more, than the attitudes and actions the Barna Group associated with the Pharisees.

Accuracy of English Translations Not Effectively Addressed

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Wallace and Bock, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today's translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today's popular translations and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling at the end of Mark).

He goes on to say, "The same is true for other critical portions of the Bible, such as . . ."[\[7\]](#) and then lists three short passages which he claims did not appear in earlier Greek copies. One passage is 1 John 5:7 which was expanded in the original King James Version but (as Eichenwald is apparently unaware of) was removed in modern translations, e.g. NASU, NET, ESV, NIV. Another passage is Luke 22:20 which does appear in almost all modern translations as well as the KJV. As Metzger[\[8\]](#) points out, the longer version with Luke 22:20 appears in "all Greek manuscripts except for D and in most of the ancient versions and Fathers." So this passage does appear in most earlier Greek copies, contrary to what Eichenwald claims. He finally refers to Luke 24:51 as a passage not found in the earlier Greek versions. Once again, he is wrong. This passage appears in many older manuscripts[\[9\]](#) including the Bodmer Papyrii written in about 200 AD.

When Eichenwald attempts to strengthen his argument, he draws from limited sources that contain questionable data. Even if they were correct, they and all the other areas where ancient manuscripts vary do not change the message of the New Testament in any significant way. As Wallace points out, "The reality is that we are getting closer and closer to the text of the original New Testament as more and more manuscripts are being discovered and catalogued. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world too. If

we must be skeptical about what the original New Testament said, that skepticism, on average, should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”[{10}](#)

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

After attacking the accuracy of the New Testaments available to most American Christians, Eichenwald attacks the consistency of the biblical record to undermine our confidence in what we read and the message we take from it. He presents nine different topics where he sees obvious contradictions in the text. We will examine four of them here, two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament.

Number One: Creation

First, he claims there are three different creation models in the Bible, one in Genesis chapter 1, one in Genesis chapter 2, and “one referenced in the Books of Isaiah, Psalms and Job”[{11}](#) in which “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”[{12}](#)

Liberal theologians claim that chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis describe different accounts. If they were describing the same events in the same way, that might be so. However, whether Exodus was written by Moses or whether it was put together later, a human author would not contradict himself on the same page. A clear-headed look at the two passages shows that chapter 1 describes the overall creation as observed from earth while chapter 2 talks about what God did on the sixth day in creating Adam and Eve. As pointed out in the NET Bible, “for what follows (verse 2:4) is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment (the section extends from 2:4 through 4:26.”[{13}](#)

Eichenwald adds in the so-called third creation story of God

and Rahab stating, "In fact, the Bible has three creation models" [{14}](#) as if this were a clear and well-known fact. If you read all the verses in Isaiah, Psalms and Job that reference Rahab, you will scratch your head and wonder how could anyone relate those few verses to a creation story. Rahab is a Hebrew word meaning "strong one and it is not necessarily a name. It is clear in Isaiah and Psalms that Rahab is a reference to Egypt, not some mythical dragon. In Job, it could be referring to the forces of chaos. He probably gets his idea from some articles that suggest that since Job 9:13 says "God does not restrain His anger; under Him the helpers of Rahab lie crushed" that the helpers of Rahab could refer to the helpers of Tiamat from the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this verse tells us

1. God destroys all idols and false gods raised up by others, and
2. This is what Job said and Job was forced to retract what he said when he was confronted by Yahweh as seen in Job 42:1-6.

Eichenwald's claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

Number Two: The Flood

Eichenwald reports another set of clear contradictions in the Genesis story of Noah and the flood. He points to three areas of supposed contradiction.

The first one has to do with how many animals are on the ark. In Genesis 6:19, God tells Noah that he shall "bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you." Years later after Noah has completed the ark, God tells him in Genesis 7:2 to take seven pairs of every clean animal and two of every unclean animal. Eichenwald claims this is a contradiction that the author/editor was so incompetent as to

include only five verses apart. He does not consider the option that after completing the ark, God gave Noah more complete instructions because more clean animals would be needed to provide for the sacrifices to the Lord in Genesis 8:20. Noah did not need this detail before starting to build the ark.

The second contradiction is that the Bible has Noah and his family boarding the ark and the flood beginning in two different sections. What Eichenwald sees as a contradiction, most readers take as a common literary technique, i.e. summarize the situation and then describe it again with more details. This was a seminal event in human history and deserved repeating.

The third contradiction according to Eichenwald is, "The water flooded the earth for 40 days (Genesis 7:17), or 150 days (Genesis 7:24). But Noah and his family stayed on the ark for a year (Genesis 8:13)." Upon reading the account, it is clear that Noah was on the ark for 12 months and 11 days during which it rained for forty days, the earth was totally inundated for 150 days as the waters slowly receded, but Noah waited to leave the ark until the land had become dry. You may choose not to believe in a universal flood, but to say the Bible has contradictions in its description is ludicrous.

Number Three: The Trial and Crucifixion

In this claim, he states that John was written "at a time when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus's death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews."[\[15\]](#) Thus, he implies that the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans. Let us see if this is true.

Luke is very clear that the instigators of the death of Jesus were the Jewish leaders and those who followed them. In Luke

22:2 we read, "The chief priests and the experts in the law were trying to find some way to execute Jesus." When Pilate is brought in to the process, Luke records that Pilate did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death and stated so three different times{16}. At least five times in the book of Acts, Luke records Paul as squarely placing the responsibility for Jesus' death onto the Jewish leaders and nation.{17} We find similar verses in Matthew{18} and Mark.{19}

All of the gospels squarely place the blame on the Jewish leaders and those that followed them. Either Eichenwald has never read the gospels and just assumed the other gospels blamed the Romans, or he assumes his readers have never read the gospels.

Number Four: Ascension of Jesus

The fourth supposed contradiction deals with the ascension of Jesus. Eichenwald writes, "As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there." {20}

As most of you know, the gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus meeting his disciples in Galilee and giving them the Great Commission. Matthew says **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven in Galilee or anywhere else. Because the Gospel of Luke does not discuss the time intervals, one might interpret it as saying that Jesus ascended into heaven on the day He was resurrected. But in Acts, Luke tells us that the resurrected Lord was with His disciples over a 40-day period. During which time, it would have been easy to travel to Galilee, as recorded in Matthew and John, and then travel back to Jerusalem.

Not surprisingly, his other five so-called "contradictions" all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation of Scripture Passages on Homosexuality

Eichenwald wants to convince us that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended.

He begins by pointing out, “The word homosexual didn’t even exist until more than 1,800 years after the New Testament was written. . . . The editors of these modern Bibles just made it up.”[{21}](#) But this could be said of many English words we use today. The ancient Greek word used in the text is a compound word clearly meaning male-with-male sexual activity. A respected dictionary of New Testament words defines it this way, “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite.”[{22}](#)

He then tells us, “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy”[{23}](#) and, presumably, should not be trusted when addressing behaviors we should avoid, such as homosexuality. The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars[{24}](#) do not agree it is a forgery. Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”[{25}](#)

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood. Romans talks about not resisting government authority. It says nothing about criticizing people in the government. In fact, that expression is protected by the laws of our land. In other words, to obey those laws you should feel free to criticize the government.

He then claims that people engage in other sins such as adultery, greed, drunkenness and lying and are not banished for those behaviors. But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.{26} Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, "Plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus." {27} Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew "by memory" the details of Leviticus.

Christianity and the Law

Eichenwald claims homosexuality is not a sin or if it is, it is the same as all the other sins that he believes we ignore so that we can throw all our venom at homosexuals. To strengthen his position, he brings out "a fundamental conflict in the New Testament—arguably the most important one in the Bible." {28} This conflict is whether as Christians we are to obey the Mosaic Law or whether we are to ignore it.

He claims, "The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, in order to achieve salvation." {29}

Wow, what a mistaken understanding of the message. In Matthew, Jesus explains if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven "our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (the most religious Jews)." {30} We must not get angry, call people names, or lust after others in our minds. He caps it off by saying, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." {31} He is clearly not teaching them to be like

Orthodox Jews and they will be okay. He is teaching they cannot be good enough. It is only through His sacrifice that we can be made righteous.

In Acts 15, we see that some believers who were Pharisees by background brought this question up to the apostles and elders. Peter responded by telling them, "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our father nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they (the Gentiles) also are."[\[32\]](#) And the apostles, the elders, and the whole church agreed to send directions to the Gentiles that they were not required to follow the Mosaic Law.

So as Gentiles, we are not required to follow the Law of Moses as laid out in Leviticus. But the New Testament is very careful to identify those actions and attitudes which are sin so that we Gentiles know to avoid them. Which is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.[\[33\]](#) Even in Acts 15 where the church in Jerusalem is deciding what to tell Gentile Christians about the Law, they decide to tell them to abstain from fornication, a term generally covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.[\[34\]](#)

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Obeying the Law vs. Criticizing the Government

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the New Testament

teaching about government. He says Romans has “eight verses condemning those who criticize the government. . . . In other words, all fundamentalist Christians who decry Obama have sinned as much as they believe gay people have.”[\[35\]](#) He points to Pat Robertson as sinning when Pat stated, “We need to do something, to pray to be delivered from this president.” Does Romans condemn those who criticize the government?

Actually, Romans says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God.”[\[36\]](#) It doesn’t say that we are required to say good things about the government, but rather that we should obey the laws of our government. Our Bill

of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”[\[37\]](#) So, if we do not voice our opinions about those running our government, we are in fact, not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Judging Our Motives for Prayer

Eichenwald casts aspersion on people of faith for gathering together to pray. He begins by castigating a prayer rally in Houston in 2011. He says, “[Then-governor Rick] Perry stepped to a podium, his face projected on a giant screen . . . and boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He further claimed that Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”

In reality, during the daylong event, Rick Perry spoke about 12 minutes and prayed for slightly more than **two minutes**. In his short prayer, Perry prayed in a cogent manner, praying for among others our president and his family.

Eichenwald explains that Perry is just an example of our misguided ways. The problem is that most Christians in

Americans are disobeying the teaching of Jesus by praying in front of people and praying words other than the Lord's Prayer. As Jesus told us, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others."

Yes, Jesus is very clear that we are not to be hypocrites, but it is possible for someone to speak a prayer in the presence of others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our heavenly Father. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of his disciples, and before over 5,000 people. But clearly those times, although numerous, were much less than the time He spent communing with His Father alone. That ratio should be true of our lives as well.

Even stranger is Eichenwald's belief that we should only pray the Lord's Prayer just as Jesus stated it. But, the passage in Matthew 6 tells us that Jesus was giving us a model, an example, of how to pray, not giving us a set of words to repeat in a meaningless fashion. In the gospels and the other New Testaments books, we are privy to many of the prayers offered by the apostles. None of them use the words from the Lord's prayer. If only Eichenwald had been there to instruct them, they would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could be praying in front of a large crowd, or on television, or by extension in a small congregation is "to be seen." This claim does not make sense. The people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace sums up Eichenwald's arguments this way:

"Time and time again the author presents his arguments as though they were facts. Any serious disagreements with his reasoning are quietly ignored as though they did not exist. The most charitable thing I can say is that Eichenwald is in need of a healthy dose of epistemic humility as well as a good research assistant who can do some fact-checking before the author embarrasses himself further in print. . . . But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for and lack of interaction with genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald's grasp of conservative Christianity in America as well as his grasp of genuine biblical scholarship are, at best, subpar. And this article is an embarrassment to Newsweek—or should be!" [\[38\]](#)

If Eichenwald's article represents the best scholarship discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. On the other hand, realizing how many readers of such pieces don't know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin," *Newsweek Magazine*, December 2014.
2. Daniel B. Wallace, "[Predictable Christmas Fare: Newsweek's Tirade against the Bible](#)," blogpost December 2014 and Bock, Darrell, "[Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek Article on the Bible](#)," blogpost December 2014.
3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.
4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:

1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)

2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . ., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. The Barna Group, *Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?*, 2012.

7. Eichenwald, paragraph 19.

8. Metzger, Bruce, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition, German Bible Society, Stuttgart, pages 148-150.

9. Ibid, pages 162-163.

10. Wallace.

11. Eichenwald, paragraph 66.

12. Ibid, paragraph 66.

13. New English Translation, Genesis Chapter 2 Notes 9 and 11.

14. Eichenwald, paragraph 66.

15. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
16. See Luke 23:4,14,22.
17. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.
18. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.
19. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.
21. Ibid, paragraph 68.
22. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.
23. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
24. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
26. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement
27. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
28. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.
29. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
30. Matthew 5:20.
31. Matthew 5:48.
32. Acts 15:10-11.
33. For example in Mt 5:27-28, Romans 13:13-14, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, Ephesians 4:19, Col 3:5, 1 Peter 4:3.
34. Acts 15:20,29.
35. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
36. Romans 13:1,2.
37. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.
38. Wallace.

Lifting the Spell

Steve Cable critically considers atheist Daniel Dennett's book Breaking the Spell to gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective.

Blinded by the "Bright"

Is your belief in God purely the result of natural evolutionary forces? Has Christianity evolved over the centuries to dupe you into belief for its own survival? This proposition may insult your faith, your intelligence, and your self worth. However, it is the central theme of a recent book by Daniel Dennett entitled *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.[\[1\]](#)

Philosopher Daniel Dennett is best known for his 1995 book, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, and his July 2003 op-ed entitled "The Bright Stuff." Dennett is a self proclaimed "bright." According to him,



A bright is a person with a naturalist as opposed to a supernaturalist worldview. We brights don't believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny—or God. . . . Don't confuse the noun with the adjective: "I'm a bright" is not a boast but a proud avowal of an inquisitive worldview.[\[2\]](#)

I am relieved he is not boasting, but my English teacher would say that "a proud avowal" is a good definition of a boast. In any case, Dennett is a proud proponent of a naturalist worldview.

The book's premise is that religion is a powerful, dangerous force in need of rigorous study, using the tools of modern evolutionary science. By understanding the natural forces that imbue religion with so much power, perhaps an enlightened

world can neutralize religion while retaining the positive benefits, if any. Our hero, Dennett, has ventured into the sorcerer's den of theologians, ministers, and philosophers to break the spell holding us prisoner. He states, "The spell that I say must be broken is the taboo against a forthright, scientific, no-holds-barred investigation of religion as one natural phenomenon among many."[\[3\]](#)

Dennett lobbies for a truly scientific (meaning atheistic) study of the origins and mechanisms of religion. According to Dennett, we had better understand religion before it destroys us. In today's dangerous world, that may not seem to be such a bad sentiment. Romans chapter 1 tells us that religions not based on God's revealed truth are natural phenomenon because they "worship the creature rather than the creator."[\[4\]](#) However, we should examine the implications of his so-called scientific study before biting into the apple with him.

Critically considering some themes from Dennett's book may help us gain a better understanding of the contrast between the "bright" perspective and a biblical perspective. By examining an atheist's misconceptions, we may discover areas where we have unintentionally adopted a "bright" perspective rather than a biblical worldview. Thoughtfully considering the relationship between Christianity and other religions can better prepare us to defend the hope that is in us.

A Bright's View of Religion

What is religion? Dennett begins by defining religion as "social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought."[\[5\]](#) Later he adds that "religion . . . invokes gods who are effective agents in real time and who play a central role in the way participants think about what they ought to do."[\[6\]](#)

Defined in this way, religion is all about groups of people seeking approval of supernatural agents to obtain real time benefits. He also detects an appearance of design, calling religion “a finely tuned amalgam of brilliant plays and strategies capable of holding people enthralled and loyal for their entire lives.”[\[7\]](#)

You and I are probably not yearning for a social system or an “amalgam of brilliant strategies.” We want an eternal relationship with a real, living God. These definitions are why we sometimes say, “Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship.”

Dennett wants to completely knock the wind out of your sails by stating “that religion is natural as opposed to supernatural, that it is a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, . . . and the like that all obey the laws of physics or biology, and hence do not involve miracles.”[\[8\]](#) Elsewhere he says that “I feel a moral imperative to spread . . . evolution, but evolution is not my religion. I don’t have a religion.”[\[9\]](#)

For a bright, science does not follow the evidence wherever it leads, but assumes natural explanations exist for every experience. Thus, he proposes that we should study religion by assuming that its foundation is false. That is like playing tennis with your feet tied together—you can never get to where you need to be to return the ball.

Let’s consider a different definition that better captures the role of religion:

My religion is what I believe about the origin, nature, and future of man and our relationship to the supernatural. My beliefs about eternity form the foundation for how I view my life on earth.

Using this definition, Dennett’s naturalism is his religion. And, your relationship with Jesus Christ resulted from your

religion, your belief that Jesus is God.

To be fair, *organized religion* is a social system for practicing and propagating a common set of religious beliefs. Organized religion may result in some of my beliefs being ingrained rather than chosen, but they are still my belief system. Determining which, if any, of these organized religions is teaching the truth about eternity should be of utmost importance to every person.

The Purpose of Religion

What is the purpose of religion? Throughout his book, Dennett suggests that religions are evolutionary artifacts. Thus, any benefits of religion must be realized here and now to be favored by natural selection. From Dennett's perspective, what religious people say they want from religion is "a world at peace, with as little suffering as we can manage, with freedom and justice and well-being and meaning for all."[\[10\]](#)

He also surmises that

The three favorite purposes . . . for religion are:

- To comfort us in our suffering and allay our fear of death.
- To explain things we can't otherwise explain.
- To encourage group cooperation in the face of trials and enemies.[\[11\]](#)

At first blush, these sound like good purposes, things we all desire (except perhaps the last one for those of us who have been burned by group projects). Some churches even promote these goals as the primary message of Christianity. But how can these purposes explain Jesus saying, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"?[\[12\]](#) Or, Paul saying, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory"?[\[13\]](#) Dennett's purposes cannot explain these statements because they are

based on a naturalistic worldview where death is the end.

Ultimately, religion is not about this life. It is about the next life. One of my wife's favorite sayings to help in dieting is, "A moment on the lips means a lifetime on the hips." It is this perspective of lasting consequences for our actions that gives religion such power. Whether it is a Buddhist seeking karma, a Muslim seeking paradise, or a Christian seeking crowns in glory, an eternal perspective is a common trait of the devoted.

The essential contrast between religions is not over which can offer the best temporal benefits or produce moral behavior. It is about which one offers the truth about the nature of God, life, and eternity. Salvation occurs when you believe that Jesus is *the way, the truth and the life*,[{14}](#) and you confess Him as Lord.[{15}](#) In contrast, eternal separation is the result of rejecting the truth. As Paul tells us, "[they] perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."[{16}](#)

The purpose of religion is to propagate the truth about the important questions that determine our eternal destiny. The most important topic to study is not "How can we get the temporal benefits from religion, while really assuming that there is no eternity?" but instead "How can I determine which religion has the truth about eternity?"

Defending the Bright Religion

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett proposes evolutionary science can explain religious beliefs as natural phenomenon. He believes his religion, Darwinism, can make the world better by neutralizing the power of theistic religion. One problem; his religion is not accepted by most Americans. Dennett laments:

[O]nly about a quarter [of America] understands that evolution is about as well established as the fact that

water is H₂O. . . . how, in the face of. . . massive scientific evidence, could so many Americans disbelieve in evolution? It is simple: they have been . . . told that the theory of evolution is false (or at least unproven) by people they trust more than . . . scientists.{17}

Naturally, Dennett argues for his point of view. His argument exhibits three flaws common in many arguments for Darwinism:

1. *Bait and switch definitions.* The Darwinist says, "Fact: Evolution defined as change over time through natural selection occurs. Fact: Darwinism is based on evolution. Conclusion: Darwinism is proven as the explanation for life in this universe." Claiming that Darwinism is proven because evolution occurs is like the over eager detective stating, "Fact: You were in the city on the day of the murder. Fact: The murderer had to be in the city on that day. Conclusion: You are proven to be the murderer." The two facts are correct, but the reasoning is flawed.

2. *Attack the skeptics, not the evidence.* Dennett states that "there are no reputable scientists who claim (that Darwinism is unproven). Not a one. There are plenty of frauds and charlatans, though." {18} So, anyone who doubts is a fraud regardless of their credentials. His assertion is laughable when one realizes over seven hundred scientists with impressive credentials have signed a statement expressing their skepticism of Darwinism. {19} When you don't have an answer for the evidence, your only recourse is to attack the witness.

3. *Declare yourself the winner.* Assume Darwinism is true and use that assumption to refute other theories. Dennett states, "Intelligent Design proponents . . . have all been carefully and patiently rebutted by conscientious scientists who have taken the trouble to penetrate their smoke screens of propaganda and expose both their shoddy arguments and their apparently deliberate misrepresentations." {20}

Since defenders of Darwinism attempt to create smoke screens of propaganda, shoddy arguments, and apparently deliberate misrepresentations, it is not surprising that most Americans have not signed up for his religion. However, they control the media and educational systems, so the battle is far from over. Equip yourself to use this conflict to share the truth by checking out Probe's material, [on evolution and Darwinism](#), at [Probe.org](#).

Toxic Tolerance

In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett assures us that atheism is the best course, but he may be willing to tolerate other religions if it can be shown they produce some benefits. He lists three main options among those who call themselves religious but vigorously advocate tolerance:

1. *False humility*. "The time is not ripe for candid declarations of religious superiority, . . . let sleeping dogs lie in hopes that those of other faiths can gently be brought around over the centuries."[{21}](#)

2. *Religious equality*. "It really doesn't matter which religion you swear allegiance to, as long as you have some religion."[{22}](#)

3. *Benign neglect*. "Religion . . . really doesn't do any good and is simply an empty historical legacy we can afford to maintain until it quietly extinguishes itself (in) the future."[{23}](#)

How does your faith fit into his list of viable options? If you believe your religion is true, none of these options makes sense. How can you "let sleeping dogs lie" or say "it doesn't really matter" when you have good news of eternal significance? Moreover, if your religion is "simply an empty historical legacy," don't put up with it any longer. Join with Paul in saying, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only,

we are of all men most to be pitied.”{24}

Dennett’s tolerance options assume that religions claiming revealed truth cannot coexist without leading to conflict and suffering. To the contrary, religious wars are the result of the selfish ambition of men rather than the conflict between competing truth claims. Jesus gave us the model of authentic religious tolerance when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting.”{25} Christianity is not about physical or political conquest. It is about redeeming people from slavery to freedom, from death to eternal life.

Truth is not threatened when competing worldviews are able to enthusiastically promote their beliefs. When each person is free to seek the truth and make truth choices without fear of reprisals or coercion, the gospel can flourish. Eternity, not religious wars or religious leaders, will eventually be the judge of what is truth. In the end, truth is not determined by the majority, but by reality.

One thing we know to be true is that “God does not desire any to perish.”{26} Consequently, we should not accept any version of tolerance which mutes proclaiming the good news.

Dennett wants to “break the spell” against studying religion as a natural phenomenon. Instead, let’s join together in lifting the spell of naturalism by proclaiming the truth that Jesus Christ is indeed our Creator and Lord.

Notes

1. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking Press, 2006.
2. Daniel Dennett, “The Bright Stuff,” *The New York Times*, July, 2003.
3. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 17.
4. Romans 1:25. (All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, update version.)

5. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 9.
6. Ibid., 11.
7. Ibid., 154.
8. Ibid., 25.
9. Ibid., 268.
10. Ibid., 17.
11. Ibid., 103.
12. John 16:33.
13. 2 Cor. 4:17.
14. John 14:6.
15. Romans 10:9-10.
16. 2 Thess 2:10-12.
17. Ibid., 59.
18. Ibid., 61.
19. www.dissentfromdarwin.org.
20. Ibid., 61.
21. Ibid., 290.
22. Ibid., 290.
23. Ibid., 290.
24. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
25. John 18:36.
26. 1 Timothy 2:3.

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Western European Religious Makeup

This is the fifth of a series of posts reporting on our analysis of the survey data collected by the World Values Survey project. Surveys were conducted in 57 countries between 2010 and 2014. In all, over 85,000 people were interviewed for

these surveys. The survey had fifteen questions directly concerning religious beliefs and practices. But it also had questions in a number of areas that related to how people applied their religious beliefs to cultural and political issues.

The first four blogs dealt with the North American countries, the United States and Mexico. With this post, I begin a series on the beliefs across the five European countries included in the survey process: Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Cyprus.

As you probably know, Germany and Sweden were at the heart of the Protestant revolution, with the Netherlands following in their footsteps. Spain and Cyprus retained a much stronger connection to Roman Catholicism. Let's see how their self-declared religious affiliations line up today.

Table 1 Religious Denomination					
Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)	None (%)	Other (%)
Germany	All	29	33	31	6
	Under 30	29	34	30	7
	60 plus	33	38	28	1
Sweden	All	2	61	34	3
	Under 30	1	49	43	7
	60 plus	2	69	29	0
Netherlands	All	18	16	64	3
	Under 30	11	10	75	4
	60 plus	25	21	54	1
Spain	All	73	2	24	1
	Under 30	63	2	33	2
	60 plus	86	1	13	0

Cyprus	All	68	1	7	25
	Under 30	53	1	9	36
	60 plus	90	0	4	5

As shown the countries vary widely in their self-professed religious makeup. All of them, except Cyprus, have a significant percentage of Nones ranging from 24% in Spain to 64% in the Netherlands. Sweden, Netherlands and Spain have a significant increase in Nones among those under the age of 30 as we also observed in the United States and Mexico.

Apart from the Nones, each nation is somewhat unique in its distribution. Germany is almost equally split between Catholics, Protestants and Nones. Sweden has Protestants as a strong majority at the level of Protestants plus Catholics in Germany. The Netherlands has a strong majority of Nones with the remainder evenly split between Catholics and Protestants. Spain, of course, has a strong majority of Catholics and almost no Protestants. Cyprus also shows a strong majority of Catholics with a strong minority of Muslims among the younger generations.

As we will see in the following blogs, many of those who selected Protestant or Catholic denominations are not involved with the church in any significant way.

Pluralism

In the [first blog](#) of this series on the religious preferences of the United States and Mexico, we looked at how many agreed with this statement, “The only acceptable religion is my religion.” Let’s look at how this question was answered in Western Europe.

Table 2 | Agree or Strongly Agree: The Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion

Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Germany	All	33	30
	Under 30	22	23
	60 plus	49	30
Sweden	All	16	8
	Under 30	0	4
	60 plus	30	12
Netherlands	All	10	25
	Under 30	19	36
	Under 60 plus	12	23
Spain	All	28	32
	Under 30	26	39
	60 plus	35	25
Cyprus	All	54	71
	Under 30	40	67
	60 plus	69	100

Note: Shaded areas did not have enough respondents to make the data useful

As shown, in Germany only about one in three Catholics and Protestants would say their religion is right and others are wrong. Those under thirty are much less likely to make that assertion. In any case, the vast majority of Germans take a pluralistic view.

Swedes are much less likely than Germans to agree with this statement, with fewer than one in ten taking a non-pluralistic position. Protestants in the Netherlands are similar to Germans, but Catholics are significantly more pluralistic. Catholics in Spain are also similar to those in Germany.

Except for Cyprus, all the countries had the vast majority of those affiliated with a Christian church taking a pluralistic

view.

It is interesting to note that on this question Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands combined were generally consistent with the United States. Mexico and Spain were also fairly consistent, with 49% of Mexicans and 32% of Spaniards taking a non-pluralistic view.

Clearly for Western Europeans, whether they claim to be Catholic or Protestant, most reject the teachings of the Bible in favor of a pluralistic doctrine. They change John 14:4 from “I am **the** way, the truth and the life” to “I am **a** way, **a** truth and **a** life.”

USA and Mexico: Cultural and Ethical Belief

The survey we are using asks an interesting question: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between? This question is asked for fifteen different possible actions.

Let's begin by looking at four actions which can be roughly grouped under the title “white collar crime.” The four actions are:

- Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled
- Avoiding a fare on public transport
- Cheating on taxes if you have a chance
- Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties

We can summarize the salient results as shown in Tables 1 and

2.

Table 1 Accepting false benefits / avoiding fares is almost never justifiable									
Country	Age	All (%)		Protestant (%)		Catholic (%)		None (%)	
		False benefit	Avoid fare	False benefit	Avoid fare	False benefit	Avoid fare	False benefit	Avoid fare
Mexico	All	40	44	40	46	40	43	40	45
	Under 30	35	38	43	48	32	37	38	38
	Over 44	47	49	44	48	46	48	54	56
United States	All	74	64	81	71	71	62	68	57
	Under 30	60	45	68	54	62	41	54	41
	Over 44	81	74	85	77	77	73	79	70

Those who selected 1 or 2 against a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was “never justifiable” and 10 was “always justifiable”

Table 2 Cheating on taxes / accepting a bribe is almost never justifiable									
Country	Age	All (%)		Protestant (%)		Catholic (%)		None (%)	
		Tax cheat	Accept bribe	Tax cheat	Accept bribe	Tax cheat	Accept bribe	Tax cheat	Accept bribe
Mexico	All	78	79	85	83	76	78	79	79
	Under 30	75	76	85	82	72	76	77	75
	Over 44	82	82	81	86	81	81	85	87

United States	All	80	83	88	90	80	84	74	75
	Under 30	69	66	76	76	77	70	63	60
	Over 44	86	90	91	94	83	88	81	85

Those who selected 1 or 2 against a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was 'never justifiable' and 10 was 'always justifiable'

First of all, one would like to see numbers in every space exceeding 90% of the population who declared that white collar crime is almost never justifiable. But the truth is, you see very few results reported in the 90's and some of them are less than half (50%) of the population.

Notice that the biggest variations are on the first two questions: claiming Tax cheats and avoiding fares. In Mexico, less than 50% of the population in most of the categories believe these two behaviors are almost never justifiable. For Mexicans under the age of 30, those who believe these behaviors are almost never justified drops to about 35% of the population, or over 10% less than those 45 and older.

Those in the United States are almost twice as likely to believe these behaviors are almost never justified. Similar to Mexico, those who are under 30 are 15-20% less likely to agree that these behaviors are almost never justified. Interestingly, the percentage of Protestants who agree is over 10% higher than Catholics and Nones.

As shown in Table 2, the answers for tax cheating and accepting bribes are more oriented toward the belief they are almost never justified. The responses from Mexico are consistent in that about three quarters of the population believes they are almost never justified. In the United States, we see some variation. First, those under thirty are from 15 to 25% less likely to state they are almost never justified. We also see that Protestants are 15% more likely

than are Nones (those with no religious affiliation) to say that these actions are almost never justified. But even with these differences all categories are 60% and above.

Why do we see that those under thirty are less likely to say these forms of white collar crime are almost never justified? In fact, we also see that in the case of claiming Tax cheats over 50% of young, Mexican adults selected a number between 5 and 10, meaning they thought that the action was almost always or at least more often than not justifiable. We can't tell from the data the reason for this difference based on age. In this case it could be the well known "It can't happen to me" attitude held by many young adults; i.e., "I will never be caught." Or it could be that benefiting from the public dime may seem more attractive to young adults than to older adults who are more likely to be contributing most of that "public dime" through their taxes.

Perhaps the most interesting result is the difference between the answers from Mexico on claiming Tax cheats vs. cheating on taxes. As shown, only 40% of Mexican respondents said that claiming Tax cheats was almost never justified, while 78% said that cheating on taxes was almost never justified. This result is very odd because both situations have the same root effect: taking money from the government. I suspect the huge difference is a result of how the government deals with these two transgressions. Perhaps those who claim Tax cheats are almost never caught or receive a light punishment, while those who cheat on their taxes are often prosecuted and punished.

In summary, a significant number of people in both countries believe that these illegal behaviors may be justifiable in many situations AND those under the age of 30 are more likely than their elders to hold a situational ethics view toward these illegal behaviors. It would be interesting to know how many of these respondents have actually done these illegal actions, but they were not asked the question.

United States and Mexico: Religious Practice

In my [prior post](#), we looked at how many people in Mexico and the United States profess a God-focused worldview. Now let’s consider some religious practices typically associated with an active faith. This worldwide survey did not ask many questions about religious practice, but the three that it did ask unveil some interesting differences.

The three questions asked were:

- 1. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?
- 2. Do you have an active membership in a church or religious organization?
- 3. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

Let’s look at the responses based on the country of the respondent, their religious preference, and their age (less than 30 or over 60). The “Pray” columns are those who pray daily or more often. The “Active” columns refer to those who say they have an active membership. The “Attend” columns are those who attend religious services once a month or more often.

Table 1: Those Actively Participating in Religious Practices

Country	Age	All (%)			Protestant (%)			Catholic (%)		
		Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend

Mexico	All	60	38	62	72	60	81	64	40	69
	Under 30	48	33	55	66	61	74	53	35	63
	Over 60	78	46	79	88	56	88	81	49	84
United States	All	46	35	44	64	54	65	52	40	54
	Under 30	34	25	36	55	40	58	30	34	53
	Over 60	55	42	50	65	58	67	64	48	58

How many say they pray daily or more often? Overall 60% of Mexicans and only about 45% of people from the United States said they prayed that often. But of those under the age of 30, the numbers were only 48% for Mexico and 34% for the United States. In both locations, those over 60 were over 50% more likely to have an active prayer life than those under 30. In both countries, Protestants were more likely to say they prayed at least once a day than Catholics. Almost nine out of ten Protestants from Mexico over the age of 60 pray at least once a day. At the other end of the spectrum, only three out of ten Catholics from the United States pray at least once a day.

Active memberships are fairly close in number between Mexico and the United States. But like prayer, those from Mexico are more likely to profess an active membership. Typically, those over 60 are at least 50% more likely to be active members. Interestingly, Mexican Protestants are essentially the same percentage (60%) regardless of age.

As with prayer, regular church attendance is much more common in Mexico among both Protestants and Catholics. Looking at all respondents, we see 62% of Mexicans versus only 44% of those from the United States attend church at least monthly. Although not as pronounced as for prayer frequency, we see that those under 30 are less likely to attend regularly than those over 60.

What does it look like when we consider those who combine all three of these characteristics as shown below?

Table 2: Those Who Pray At Least Daily, Are Members, and Attend Monthly or More

Country	Age	All (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Mexico	All	23	44	24
	Under 30	17	39	18
	Over 60	37	50	30
United States	All	26	45	27
	Under 30	15	32	14
	Over 60	35	48	41

Very interestingly, when we combine these three, the significant difference between Mexico and the United States on the individual questions disappears for both Protestants and Catholics. Apparently, about one quarter of people are serious enough about their religion to pray and to attend regularly regardless of whether they reside in Mexico or the United States.

However, the difference between those under the age of 30 and older ages remains for the combination. For Catholics, those over 60 are at least twice as likely to do all three as those under 30. For Protestants, they are about 50% more likely if they are over 60 than those who are under 30. So in both countries, emerging adults are less likely (i.e., only about 15% of the group) to pray, belong and attend.

Just looking at these three very simple practices, we see that the vast majority of people in both countries do not actively practice their faith. And, those under the age of 30 are much less likely than their seniors to practice these characteristics.

U.S. and Mexico: Biblical Worldview Lite or God-focused Worldview

A biblical worldview is a common topic in my book, *Cultural Captives*, and in some my other recent [postings](#). What does this multi-national survey tell us about worldviews in Mexico as compared to the United States?

First of all, the surveys given do not have as complete a set of spiritual worldview questions as other surveys we have analyzed. For this discussion, we look at the answers to the following questions to constitute a God-focused worldview but not necessarily a full biblical worldview.

Question	Response
How important is religion in your life?	Very
How important is God in your life?	Very
Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are a religious person?	Yes
Do you believe in God?	Yes
Do you believe in hell?	Yes

For purposes of this discussion, we will say a person who answer the questions above as shown has a God-focused Worldview (or GFW).

The only acceptable religion is my religion?	Yes
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If they also state their religion is the only acceptable religion, we will call them “GFW Plus.”

The table below summarizes the status of a God-focused worldview in both cultures.

Table 1 God-focused Worldview

Country	Age	Catholic (%)		Protestant (%)		Atheist, Agnostic, None (%)	
		GFW	GFW Plus	GFW	GFW Plus	GFW	GFW Plus
Mexico	All	35	16	38	19	13	6
	Under 30	26	9	25	7	10	2
	60 plus	42	26	38	25	22	22
United States	All	27	6	51	22	10	3
	Under 30	8	5	44	28	6	2
	60 plus	37	5	5	12	8	2

Let's begin by looking at Catholics since they are the dominant religious group in Mexico. Only a minority of Catholics of any age profess to having a God-focused worldview. In both countries, there is a significant difference between those under 30 and those 60 and over: 26% vs. 42% in Mexico and 8% vs. 37% in the United States. The percentage of Catholic emerging adults with a GFW in Mexico is small (26%) but completely dwarfs the United States percentage (8%).

Adding the question regarding pluralism (GFW Plus), only about 16% of Mexican Catholics answer all the questions as indicated above. There is a wide discrepancy based on age, with only 9% of those under 30 and over 26% of those over 60 professing a GFW Plus view. In the United States, we see a much different story, with only about 5% of self-identified Catholics professing to hold a GFW Plus view across all age groups.

We see a similar set of distributions for those who self-

identify as an atheist, agnostic or none (AAN). In both countries, only a small percentage of AAN people hold to this abbreviated God-focused worldview.

Protestants in Mexico have a similar distribution of GFW and GFW Plus adherents, as do the Catholics. In the United States, the picture is significantly different between Catholics and Protestants. First, almost twice as many Protestants hold to a GFW view as do Catholics. Similarly, for a GFW Plus view, three to four times as many Protestants as Catholics hold that view (about 20% to 5%).

One odd result is that 29% of Protestant, emerging adults profess to hold a GFW Plus view, while only 12% of Protestants age 60 and above hold to that view. Although we cannot know for sure, this result may be an artifact of the question “The only acceptable religion is my religion?” Perhaps the older adults interpreted “my religion” to be my denomination and certainly other Christian denominations could be acceptable. Those below age 45 interpreted “my religion” to be Christianity, and other religions were other major world faiths. This interpretation is plausible because the emerging adults have grown up in a society where they know people of other religions at work and at school, much more so than their elders.

In summary, most self-identified Christians in both countries do not hold to a God-focused worldview. Among that minority, Catholics in Mexico are much more likely than Catholics in the United States to hold such a worldview, while the inverse is true among Protestants. In all instances except one, emerging adults are significantly less likely to hold a GFW or GFW Plus view than are older adults.

World Values Survey: U.S. and Mexico Religious Makeup

This is the first of a series of posts reporting on our analysis of the survey data collected by the World Values Survey project. Surveys were conducted in 57 countries between 2010 and 2014. In all, over 85,000 people were interviewed for these surveys. The survey had fifteen questions directly concerning religious beliefs and practices. But it also had questions in a number of areas that related to how people applied their religious beliefs to cultural and political issues.

I will begin by considering the beliefs and practice of two neighboring countries, Mexico and the United States. The surveys taken in these two countries do not allow us to distinguish between different types of Protestants. There is also no distinction between atheists, agnostics and “nothing at all”; they only have one choice, “None.” In the table below, the data for Catholics, Protestants, and Nones is presented for each country, for all ages, for those under 30 and for those 60 and older.

Table 1: Religious Denomination

Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)	None (%)
Mexico	All	70	10	18
	Under 30	64	11	23
	60+	82	8	9
United States	All	22	41	34
	Under 30	20	32	43
	60+	26	50	22

As shown, Catholicism is dominant in Mexico, accounting for 70% of the population with the Nones edging out Protestants across all age groups for a weak second place. But we also see significant differences based on age. For those under 30, the percentage of Catholics drops to 64% while the percentage of Nones grows to 23%. For those over 60, we see the opposite, with Catholics garnering 82% while the Nones drop down to only 9%.

In the United States, Protestants make up the largest percentage of the total population with 41%. For those 60 and over, that group increases to 50% of the population. Consistent with our posts on other surveys, the under 30 group is very different, showing 32% Protestant and 43% Nones.

Over 60% of the Nones in Mexico state that “God is very important to me,” indicating that they are theistic Nones. In the United States, less than 30% of the Nones would be considered theistic.

Pluralism

One of the questions in the surveys asks if they agree with the following statement: “The only acceptable religion is my religion.” The responses among Protestants and Catholics are as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Agree or Strongly Agree: The only acceptable religion is my religion

Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Mexico	All	45	43
	Under 30	34	37
	60+	65	63

United States	All	17	29
	Under 30	22	39
	60+	11	15

A much higher percentage of Mexican Christians (but still less than 50%) as compared to American Christians believe that their religion is the only acceptable one. In Mexico, we see that older adults are much more likely to believe this than are those under 30. Also, there is almost no difference between Protestants and Catholics.

In the United States, we see a very different picture. First the percentage of people across the board professing a non-pluralistic position is much smaller than in Mexico. Protestants are significantly more likely than Catholics to take this position. Interestingly, those under the age of 30 are much more likely to take this position than those over the age of 60. If you take into account the number of people who profess Christianity across the two age groups, you find the number of individuals are about the same. But also, we can speculate that Americans under the age of 30 who choose to be affiliated with a Christian denomination rather than the Nones are more likely to do so because they believe that religion is correct. In other words, many emerging adults with a pluralistic view are choosing to identify themselves as Nones. Just over 80% of Nones under the age of 30 take a pluralistic position.

Although there are significant differences between the views in Mexico and those in the United States, they both show that an increasing percentage of the populations (particularly the emerging adult population) are choosing to identify as Nones rather than as Catholics or Protestants.