Trends in American Religious Beliefs: An Update

Steve Cable examines the newest data reflecting Americans' religious beliefs. It's not encouraging.

Are Nones Still Increasing Toward a Majority?

One dismaying trend in my book, *Cultural Captives*, was the significant growth of people indicating their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all, referred to collectively as **the nones**. In 2008, the percentage of emerging adults (18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as **nones** was one fourth of the population, a tremendous increase almost two and a half times higher than recorded in 1990.

Now, let's look at some updated data on emerging adults. In 2014, the General Social Survey{1} showed the percentage of **nones** was now up to **one third** of the population. The Pew Religious Landscape{2} survey of over 35,000 Americans tallied **35% identifying as nones.**

When we consider everyone who does not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the **percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population** in both surveys.

If this growth continues at the rate it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. Becoming, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture.

Some distinguished scholars have suggested that a large percentage of "**nones**" are actually Christians who just have an

aversion to identifying with a particular religious tradition. Using the GSS from 2014, we can probe this assertion using three investigative avenues:

How many of the "**nones**" in this survey say they actually attend a church at least once a month? The
answer: less than 7% of them.

How many of these "**nones**" say they believe in a God, believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God,
and believe that there is life after death? The answer: about 12% of them.

3. How many of these "**nones**" attend a church *and* have the three beliefs listed above? The answer:
about one out of every one hundred emerging adults not identifying as a practicing Christian.

What about the "nothing at all" respondents, who are not atheists or agnostics? Perhaps, they simply do not want to identify with a specific Christian tradition. Since the majority of **nones** fall into this "nothing at all" category, if all the positive answers to the three questions above were given by "nothing at alls," their percentages would still be very small.

Clearly, the vast majority of **nones** and "nothing at alls" have broken away from organized religion and basic Christian doctrine. Most are not, as some scholars suggest, young believers keeping their identity options open.

American has long been non-evangelical in thinking, but is now becoming post-Christian as well.

Role of Pluralism and Born-Agains in Our Emerging Adult Population

Pluralists believe there are many ways to eternal life, e.g. Christianity and Islam. Our 2010 book, *Cultural Captives*,

looked at pluralism among American emerging adults (18 – 29), finding nearly 90% of non-evangelicals and 70% of evangelicals were pluralists. So, the vast majority of young Americans believed in multiple ways to heaven.

Is that position changing in this decade? We analyzed two newer survey, Portraits of American Life Survey 2012{3} and Faith Matters 2011{4}. In the first, if a person disagreed strongly with the following, we categorized them as not pluralistic:

1. It doesn't much matter what I believe so long as I am a good person.
2. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was the holy prophet of God.

In the second, if a person agreed strongly that "one religion is true and others are not," they are not pluralistic.

For non-evangelical, emerging adults, the number of pluralists grew to 92%. For evangelicals, the number grew to 76%. For those over thirty the number of evangelical pluralists drops to two out of three; still a disturbing majority of those called to evangelize their fellow citizens.

Under the threat of death, Peter told the Jewish leaders, "This Jesus . . . has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."{5}

God sent His Son because there was no other way to provide redemption. Many evangelicals seem to think this great sacrifice is one of many ways to reconciliation. But Jesus said, "***No one*** *comes to the Father except through me*."{6}

Not only are Protestants more pluralistic, at the same time there are fewer Protestants. From 1976 to 2008, emerging adults identifying as born-again Protestants only dropped from 28% to 25% of the population. Today only 20% are born-again

Protestants while 43% are non-Christian.

Protestants who do not consider themselves to be born-again have dropped further, from around one quarter in 1990 down to around 14% now.

We are heading to a day when over half of emerging adults will be non-Christians and less that one fourth will identify as Protestants. And, the majority of those Protestants will take a pluralistic view, ignoring the call to evangelize—a major change in the religious make up of our country.

Biblical Worldview Beliefs Considered from A Newer Survey

In our book, *Cultural Captives*, we reported that about one in three evangelical emerging adults and about one in ten non-evangelical emerging adults held a biblical worldview.

Today, we consider a newer survey of over 2,600 people called Faith Matters 2011.{7}
The questions used to define a biblical worldview were on: 1) belief in God, 2) belief in life after death, 3) the path to salvation, 4) inspiration of the Bible, 5) the existence of hell, and 6) how to determine right and wrong.

Let's begin by looking at how many have a biblical worldview on all of the questions above except for the correct path to salvation. About half of evangelical emerging adults (those 18 – 29) take a biblical view versus about 15% of non-evangelicals.

Adding the question about the path to salvation moves evangelical emerging adults from 50% down to about 5%. The question causing this massive reduction is: "Some people believe that the path to salvation comes through our actions or deeds and others believe that the path to salvation lies in our beliefs or faith. Which comes closer to your views?" The

vast majority of evangelicals responding were unwilling to say that salvation is by faith alone even though the Bible clearly states this is the case. Many of them responded with both, even though it was not one of the options given.

However, the reason may not be that evangelicals feel that they need to do some good works to become acceptable for heaven. Instead, they want to leave room for a pluralistic view that surmises that others, not really knowing of Jesus' sacrifice, may get by on their righteous activities. Supporting this premise, the Faith Matters survey shows that about 80% of evangelicals believe that there are more ways to heaven other than faith in Jesus Christ.

Another survey the 2012 Portraits in American Life Survey (PALS)[{8}] also included questions similar to the biblical worldview questions above but did not ask how one obtained eternal life. About one in three evangelical[{9}] believers under the age of 30 professed a biblical worldview on those questions.

These new surveys clearly demonstrate a biblical worldview is not rebounding among emerging adults

How Confident are Americans in Those Running Organized Religion?

What do the people of America feel about organized religion? Have those feelings changed since 1976? We can explore these questions using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) which asked this question across the decades from 1976 up to 2014:

As far as the people running organized religion are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?

Not surprisingly, the surveys show our confidence in these

religious leaders has degraded over time. Let’s begin by looking at how these results play out for different age groups.

Across all age groups, the number with “a great deal of confidence” in the leaders of organized religion dropped significantly from 1976 to 2014. The greatest drop from 30% down to 15% was among emerging adults at the time of the survey.

At the same time, those having “hardly any confidence” grew significantly. Both emerging adults and those 45 and over increased the number taking this negative position by about 35% since 1976. For emerging adults, this was an increase from 20% in 1976 to 27% in 2014.

Now let’s look at how these results play out across different faith communities, specifically Protestants who claim to be born again, Mainline Protestants, Catholics, Other Religions and Nones (i.e. atheists, agnostics and nothing at all).

Once again consider those who said they had “a great deal of confidence” in the leaders of organized religion. All Christian groups show a significant downward trend in their confidence in faith leaders. Not surprisingly, the Nones fell by well over 60%, probably reflecting the general negative trend. If the mainstream population has problems with their religious leaders, the AAN’s are more than happy to jump on the bandwagon, expressing disdain toward those leaders. Mainline Protestants experienced the largest drop among any Christian religious group, dropping almost half from 32% down to 18% across the period.

Do we see a similar uptick across all religions in the percentage of respondents having “hardly any confidence” in the leaders of organized religion? Actually, we do not. We had significant decreases among born-again Protestants and those of other non-Christian religions. At the same time, we saw

increases among Mainline Protestants and Catholics and a very significant increase among the AAN's.

The trends shown here leads one to ask, Can religion have a positive impact on our society when four out of five people do not express a great deal of confidence in its leaders? Make it a point to contribute to our society by promoting a positive view of the religious leaders in your church and denomination.

The Hispanic Religious Landscape

Since 1980, our Hispanic population has grown from 6.5% to 17.4%, almost tripling their percentage of our total population.

Many assume the Hispanic population would be primarily Catholic from the 1980's to today. Looking at General Social Surveys from 1976 through 2014, we can see what the actual situation is. Not surprisingly, in 1976 approximately 80% of Hispanics in American self-identified as Catholics. But, the 1980's saw a downward trend in this number, so that through the 1990's up until 2006, approximately 68% of Hispanics identified as Catholics. From 2006 to 2014, this percentage has dropped significantly down to about 55%.

At the same time, the percentage of Hispanics identifying as "nones," i.e., one having no religious affiliation, has grown from about 6% in the 1990's to 16% in 2014 (and to a high of 22% for emerging adult, Hispanics) according to GSS data.

The median age of Hispanics is America is much lower than that of other ethnicities. Many Hispanics in American are emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29. How do their beliefs stack up? The GSS data shows that about 45% of Hispanic emerging adults indicate a Catholic affiliation while the Pew survey shows only 35%. Both surveys show that significantly less than half of emerging adult Hispanics are Catholic. So have they become mainline, evangelical, "nones" or some

Eastern religion?

Both surveys show a significant increase in the percentage of Hispanic "nones" for emerging adults compared to those over 30. As with other ethnic groups, Hispanic emerging adults are much more likely to select a religious affiliation of "none" than are older adults. According to extensive data in the Pew Research survey, among emerging adults, the 31% of Hispanics who identify as "nones" is coming very close to surpassing the 35% who identify as Catholic.

A majority of Hispanics still identify at Catholics. How closely are they associated with their local Catholic church through regular attendance? Among emerging adult Hispanics affiliated with a Catholic church, about two out of three state that they attend church once a month or less. So, the vast majority are not frequent attenders, but are still more likely to attend than their white counterparts. Among emerging adult whites affiliated with a Catholic church, about four out of five state that they attend church once a month or less.

Soon more Hispanics will be "nones," evangelicals and mainline Protestants than are Catholic, portending dramatic shifts in the worldview of American Hispanics.

The religious makeup of young Americans is changing dramatically in the early part of this century. We need to proclaim the good news of Christ to our emerging generation.

Notes

1. General Social Survey 2014, National Opinion Research Center, 2014, The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith.
2. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, "America's Changing Religious Landscape", page 11, source: 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study.
3. Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. *Portraits of*

American Life Study, 2nd Wave 2012.
4. Data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected on behalf of Harvard University and the University of Notre Dame, principal investigators: Robert Putnam, Thomas Sander, and David E. Campbell.
5. Acts 4:11-12.
6. John 14:6.
7. Data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected on behalf of Harvard University and the University of Notre Dame, principal investigators: Robert Putnam, Thomas Sander, and David E. Campbell.
8. Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012.
9. Evangelical includes those who associate with a Historically Black Protestant Church as well as those who associate with an evangelical church.

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Muslim Beliefs on Sexuality

Islamic teaching on sexual issues varies significantly from a Christian biblical position in several areas. But, as we have seen in other areas, the beliefs of average Muslims do not necessarily follow the teachings of Islam.

Over the last several months, we have been looking at the religious beliefs and practices as expressed by a worldwide, Muslim population in an extensive Pew Research Center survey{1} taken in 2012. We have compared those beliefs and practices with those of Americans toward the Christian faith as documented in several recent surveys.

Now, I would like to turn our attention to some cultural beliefs and behaviors. In particular, we will begin by looking at beliefs concerning sexual behavior. Once again the survey data on Muslims will be divided into five regions: North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Russia, and Turkey), the 'Stans (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this evaluation, we will use questions asked in the Pew survey. The questions are worded, "I personally believe that _____ is morally acceptable, morally wrong, or it is not a moral issue." The five topics considered (as they are worded in the survey) are:

1. Sex between people who are not married
2. Homosexual behavior
3. Having an abortion
4. Polygamy (having more than one wife)
5. Divorce

A person following the Qur'an and the Hadith would say that the first two items above are morally wrong while the last two items would be considered morally acceptable with some constraints. The question about abortion is not directly addressed in the Qur'an or Hadith. The way in which Muslims actually responded is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Muslims Believing a Behavior is Morally Wrong

	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	'Stans	South Asia
Sex outside marriage & Homosexuality	84.7%	88.7%	68.9%	77.2%	84.1%
Abortion	73.2%	64.4%	72.0%	52.6%	83.6%
All of the above	67.5%	66.9%	56.5%	44.3%	77.3%
Polygamy	25.2%	30.1%	73.0%	57.7%	39.8%
Divorce	17.0%	34.2%	20.2%	30.4%	27.8%

All behaviors	7.2%	13.6%	11.6%	13.5%	13.9%

As shown, they are fairly consistent on fornication and homosexuality, with strong majorities stating that they are both morally wrong. However, Eastern European Muslims appear to have been influenced by the culture around them, falling about 16 percentage points lower than the average for other areas in the world.
On the question of abortion, we find a greater variation across geographic areas. Those Muslims in South Asia are most united in their views, with well over 80% of them saying that abortion is morally wrong. In contrast, the Muslims of the 'Stans are about evenly split with just over half saying it is morally wrong. The Middle East is not as strong as one might expect, with about two out of three people agreeing that abortion is morally wrong.

Polygamy, seen as acceptable in the Qur'an with a man allowed to have up to four wives, is seen quite differently in different geographic areas. In North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the majority of Muslims **do not** consider it to be morally wrong. In contrast, in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans, a strong majority of Muslims consider it **to be** morally wrong. Of course most of the Muslims in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans grew up in the Soviet Union or Soviet bloc countries where polygamy was presumably illegal.

Finally, we see that most Muslims across all geographic locations do not believe that divorce is morally wrong.

If we consider that the Christian Bible teaches us that all of these actions are morally wrong (with some exceptions for divorce), we realize (looking at the bottom row of the table) that nine out of ten Muslims do not agree with that perspective.

Looking at data on similar topics from residents of the United States, we find the following:

Table 2: American Christians Believing a Behavior is Not Right

	All	Born Again Christian	All Others	Source
Sex before marriage & Homosexual relations	16.9%	32.8%	7.0%	GSS 2014{2}
Abortion	44.9%	62.0%	34.5%	GSS 2014
All of the above	13.2%	25.6%	5.4%	
Homosexual relations	23.3%	41.7%	13.4%	Baylor 2010{3}
Divorce with children	29.2%	47.1%	19.4%	Baylor 2010

Comparing the two tables and focusing on the Born Again Christian column, we observe that worldwide Muslims are much more likely to see sex outside of marriage and homosexual relations as morally wrong. On abortion, born again Christians have a similar response as Muslims. But born again Christians are more likely to oppose divorce when children are involved than Muslims.

On the whole, it appears that Muslims are more likely to agree with the teachings of the Qur'an than born again, American Christians are to agree with the teachings of the Bible. However, Muslims do not agree with the full set of biblical stances on sexual issues.

Notes

1. The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. 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 James Bell, Director of International Survey Research.
2. General Social Survey 2014 conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The data were downloaded from

the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith of the NORC.
3. Baylor University. 2010. The Baylor Religion Survey, Wave III. Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Kevin D. Dougherty, Paul Froese, Andrew L. Whitehead, Jerry Z. Park, Mitchell J. Neubert.

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Basic Religious Beliefs of Worldwide Muslims – Part 2

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

As we will see below, most Muslims do not believe and understand the religion of Islam but they self-identify as Muslims. Earlier I reported on the stated religious beliefs of worldwide Muslims using a set of survey questions which could be considered to reflect a Qur'anic worldview. We saw that across the Eastern hemisphere less than 25% of professed Muslims held to a Qur'anic worldview. The percentage was much less in Eastern European countries (12%) and in the 'Stans (5%).

In this post, we will look at a less stringent criterion than a full Qur'anic worldview to see the differences in viewpoint across different geographic regions and different levels of educational achievement.

Once again, we are using a 2012 Pew Research Center survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in

26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In looking at the data, we will consider educational achievement and geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Russia, and Turkey), the 'Stans (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this evaluation, we will use the following three questions.

> *1. I believe in one God, **Allah**, and his prophet Muhammad.*
>
> *2. I believe Islam is the **one, true faith** leading to eternal life in heaven.*
>
> *3. I **know a great deal about the Muslim religion** and its practices.*

The data looks like this:

	North Africa	Middle East	Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia	Total
Allah plus True Faith	85.8%	89.5%	57.0%	63.3%	88.0%	78.3%
Add Knowledge	45.7%	47.7%	24.3%	20.4%	43.2%	38.0%

As you can see, Muslims in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans are much less likely to believe that Islam is the one true faith, with only about six out of ten versus almost nine out of ten for the other geographic regions. When we add in those who believe they know a great deal about their religion, the number drops to around two out of ten as compared to about five out of ten for the other
geographic regions.

Let this sink in a minute. Two out of three Muslims

worldwide{1} do not believe that Islam in the one, true faith and that they know a great deal about it. Even in the Middle East and North Africa, less that 50% fall into this category of I
believe and I know what I believe. If you don't know a great deal about your religion, for most it must mean that your religious beliefs are not very important to you. After all, you are not even sure what they are. Note that this does not mean that your religious culture is not important to you.

Now let's consider the impact of education on the beliefs held in Eastern Europe and the 'Stans. In these two geographic regions, we see a significant difference based on the level of education completed.

	Eastern Europe			The 'Stans		
	Limited Education {2}	High School and Beyond	All	Limited Education	High School and Beyond	All
Allah plus True Faith	65.4%	44.9%	57.0%	75.9%	48.8%	63.3%
Add Knowledge	30.1%	19.8%	24.3%	30.3%	16.2%	20.4%

Those with only a limited education are 50% more likely than those with at least a high school diploma to indicate a belief in Islam as the one true faith and know a great deal about their religion. Thus in these two regions, people with at least a high school education are very unlikely to have a basic belief in Islam and know what Islam teaches. One would suspect that the high school education is at least somewhat secular in nature (following the example set when under the Soviet Union) and thus does not promote the teachings of Islam.

In conclusion, the survey data is very clear. Most people who

self-identify as Muslims do not fully understand the teachings of Islam and believe that it is the one true faith leading to eternal life.

Notes

1. Even though the survey only covers the Eastern Hemisphere, we can relate the data to Muslims worldwide
since over 98% of the Muslims in the world live in the Eastern Hemisphere.

2. Middle school education or less.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. 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 James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

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Comparing Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims and American Christians

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In a prior blog post, we looked at how Muslims in the Eastern Hemisphere reported their adherence to the five pillars of

Islamic religious practice. We saw that the percentage who reported faithfully applying four of the five pillars was low, especially given the importance of these pillars in enhancing one's chance of entering paradise.

In this post, let us consider some basic practices that someone who is concerned about following the teaching of any religion should follow.

Once again, for Muslims we are using a 2012 Pew Research Center survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In looking at the data, we will consider age and geographic regions of North Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

For this comparison of faiths and regions, we selected the following questions used in the Pew survey:

> *1. How important is religion in your life? Very important*
> *2. On average, how often do you attend the mosque for Salah and Jum'ah Prayer? Once a month or more*
> *3. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray? Once a day or more*
> *4. How often do you read or listen to the Qur'an? At least once a week*
> *5. Do you give zakat, that is, give a set percentage of your wealth to charity or the mosque? Yes*
> *6. How much does the way you live your life reflect the Hadith and Sunna, that is, the sayings and actions of the Prophet? A lot {1}*

For someone serious about practicing their faith, this list should be critical to understanding and applying one's faith and also fairly easy to apply. The results from the survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The ‘Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	9%	14%	3%	1%	19%
30 plus	15%	20%	6%	2%	27%

The most obvious result is that the percentages are very low. Across all the respondents, only 12% of them practice these six activities. So, the vast majority of Muslims are at best nominal practitioners of a religious life. We also see a significant difference between geographic regions. In Eastern Europe and the ‘Stans, we see that virtually no one is committed to these six practices. Those surveyed in South Asia, i.e. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, are most likely to be serious about these basic religious practices, where one in four report following all six of the practices above.

We also see a difference based on age in all geographic regions. Across all five geographic regions, those who are 30 years old and beyond report levels of religious practice from 40% to over 100% greater than for those 18 to 29 years old.

For a similar look at Christians in the United States, we are using the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) from 2012. From that study, we utilize a similar set of questions to define a basic religious practice:

> *1. How important is religion or religious faith to you personally? Extremely important*
> *2. How often do you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals? At least twice a month*
> *3. How often have you typically prayed, not including before meals and at religious services? At least once a day*
> *4. How often have you typically read the Bible in the past 12 months? At least once a week*
> *5. During the year 2011, what was the total dollar value of all donation made to your local congregation? Age 30+ value >*

$999, Age 20 – 29 value > $399
6. I try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.

As you can see, these questions are very similar to those asked in the Pew survey of Muslims. The results from this survey are as follows:

Serious About Basic Religious Practice			
Age	Evangelical	All Christian	
20 – 29	7.3%	4.8%	
30 plus	16.7%	10.1%	

These results are very close to the results for Muslims—somewhat less than North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, and somewhat more than the 'Stans. Similar to the results for the Muslims, emerging adults are significantly less likely than those over 30 to be serious about their religious practice. Nine out of ten Christians in America are not serious enough about their walk with God to practice the basics needed for an active Christian life.

It is safe to say that most American Christians and Muslims in the Eastern hemisphere are identified with a religion which they don't really understand and don't spend the time and effort necessary to gain understanding and live according to its principles.

Note

1. The next possible answer was "a little" which seems way too weak to reflect a serious practice of Islam.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. 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 James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

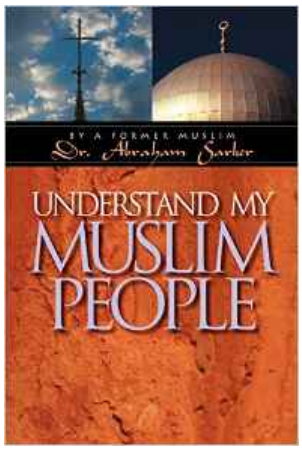
Acknowledgement: Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com.

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Basic Religious Practices of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries across North Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Since Probe has been evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs and practices of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs and practices varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.



To evaluate the religious practices of Muslims, a reasonable place to start would be the Five Pillars of Islam. "Muslims hope that by completing these duties of Islam, Allah will favor them and grant them entrance into heaven."{1} In other words, performing these duties are necessary but not sufficient to gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. These five pillars are:

1. Declaring "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet."
2. Praying five times each day in Arabic quoting from the Qur'an
3. Fasting during daylight hours of the month of Ramadan
4. Giving 2.5% of their income for the poor and for the cause of Islam
5. Completing the hajj, a ritual pilgrimage to Mecca

Because the hajj is a once in a lifetime event and according to the survey data is most likely to occur after the age of 60 (if at all), only the first four pillars are considered in our analysis. The results divided into age groups and regions of the world are as follows:

% Practicing Four of the Pillars of Islam					
Age	North Africa	Middle East	Eastern Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	49%	41%	10%	11%	49%
30 plus	58%	57%	16%	17%	60%

As shown, the geographical groups vary significantly. The composite of all those surveyed is 40% of the respondents claim to practice these four pillars. While not miniscule, this does indicate that the vast majority of those who claim to be Muslim are not seriously attempting to gain favor with

Allah by adhering to these four key pillars of the faith.

One startling thing we note from this table is that the Eastern European (e.g. Russia, Bosnia, Turkey) Muslims and those from the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars to the same degree as other areas surveyed. In those areas, less than 1 in 7 practice the four pillars, while in the other areas it is more than half of the people. In general, Eastern European Muslims and those in the 'Stans do not practice the four pillars, much less the five pillars, of Islam. Given this, one may argue that the Islam practiced in these parts of the world is not Islam at all, but rather another religion with a historical name, Islam, which may at some point in the past been the dominant religion.

The second fact that stands out in the table is the difference in practice versus age. From our earlier blog post on religious beliefs, the results showed very little difference between those ages 18 – 29 and the rest of the respondents, but this is not the case for religious practice. In Eastern Europe and the 'Stans those over the age of 30 are more than 50% more likely to practice the four pillars than are those aged 18 to 29. In the other areas of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the older adults are 18% to 37% more likely to practice the key pillars of Islam. In fact, if we compare those ages 18 to 29 with those 60 and older these ratios grow to more than 150% and 31% to 50% respectively.

It appears that the younger adults are not as committed to carrying out these practices as their elders. We can only speculate on whether this difference will diminish as they get older. This difference may in fact shrink over time because, as noted earlier, there is virtually no difference in the percent of young adults and the percent of older adults who profess a Muslim worldview.

The results found for this aspect of religious practice are generally consistent with those reported for religious beliefs

(i.e., a Muslim worldview). We find the majority of those who claim to be Muslim to NOT hold a Muslim worldview and do not practice the five pillars of Islam. In our next post, we will compare Muslim religious practice with Christian religious practice in the United States.

Note

1. Dr. Abraham Sarkar, *Understand My Muslim People*, page 169, Barclay Press, 2004.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. 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 James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

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Basic Religious Beliefs of Worldwide Muslims

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

Between October 2011 and November 2012, Pew Research Center conducted a major survey of Muslims involving more than 30,000 face-to-face interviews in 26 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The survey asked people to describe their religious beliefs and practices, and sought to gauge respondents' knowledge of and attitudes toward other faiths, as well as some of their attitudes concerning cultural issues.

Since Probe has been commissioning and evaluating similar surveys about the beliefs and practices of Christians and other faiths in America, we wanted to analyze the data in this large survey to see how the beliefs of Muslims in the eastern hemisphere relate to Christians in America. We also wanted to see how Muslim beliefs varied across different regions. To do this, we divided the data into five geographic regions: North Africa, Middle East, Europe, the 'Stans (e.g. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and South Asia.

If you have read *Cultural Captives* or been following my blog posts, you know that one of the metrics we have been following is the percentage of Americans with a Christian worldview. One survey we analyzed recently is the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS) 2012. That survey shows that American Christians holding a biblical worldview were 33% of 18- to 29-year-old self-professed evangelicals,{1} and 46% of those over 30. When we consider all professing Christians (i.e. evangelical, mainline and Catholic), we find 20% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 32% of those over 30 hold a biblical worldview. For the PALS, the definition used for a biblical worldview is:

1. *I definitely believe in God*
2. *Jesus is the Son of God and physically rose from the dead*
3. *The Bible is fully inspired by God*
4. *Heaven exists where people live with God forever*
5. *There is a Hell where people experience pain as punishment for their sin*
6. *The Devil, demons, or evil spirits exist*
7. *What is morally right or wrong should be determined by God's law*

For Muslims, using questions asked in the Pew survey, we defined a Qur'anic worldview to include the following responses:

1. *I believe in one God, Allah, and his prophet Muhammad*

2. I know a great deal about the Muslim religion and its practices
3. In Heaven, people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded
4. In Hell, people who have led bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished
5. I believe in angels and in jinns (spirit beings similar to demons)
6. I believe Islam is the one, true faith leading to eternal life in heaven

The results of the survey showing those Muslims who agreed to all the above points are as shown in the table below.

	North Africa	Middle East	Europe	The 'Stans	South Asia
18 – 29	33.2%	24.1%	12.3%	4.0%	28.2%
30 plus	35.3%	30.4%	11.8%	4.8%	27.5%

What do we see in this data? First, the vast majority of Muslims living in the Eastern Hemisphere do not hold to a strong Qur'anic worldview. North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia all show about one third with a Qur'anic worldview. These numbers are much like those for a Christian worldview in the U.S. In Europe and the 'Stans, we see only about one in ten and one in twenty, respectively, hold a strong Qur'anic worldview. One might speculate that the European downturn is due to the general decline in religious interest in Europe, and the low percentage in the 'Stans is due to a lack of teaching in their heart language.{2}

In understanding these low responses, one should consider that on the whole, only about 40% of Muslims claim to know a great deal about their religion and its practices. This lack of knowledge is probably a major factor in why only about 20% of them hold a strong Qur'anic worldview. This view is consistent with my personal experience in South Asia where I found that

most of the people in a Muslim
country were born into their faith culture and had never considered in any depth what it really meant.

One other interesting note is that in all areas other than the Middle East, the percentage of those aged 18 to 29 with a strong Qur'anic worldview is almost identical to those over 30 years of age. In contrast, among Christians in America, only one in five of those aged 18 to 29 have a biblical worldview while one in three of those age 30 and over have a biblical worldview.

It should also be noted that among Muslims, over three out of four of them believe that Islam is the one true faith leading to eternal life. But among American Christians, only one out of five believe Jesus is the only way to receive eternal life. Even though a minority of Muslims claim to know what their religion teaches, the vast majority believe that what it teaches is the only way to eternal life. Even though they believe it is the only way, only about one in five believe that members of their religion "have a duty to try and convert others to their religious faith."

I imagine that many Americans think that Muslims hold to a common set of beliefs throughout the world. As we have seen from this survey, that is not the case. The majority of Muslims do not understand the basic tenets of Islam as taught in the Qur'an. Surprisingly, most of them admit it, saying that they do not know a great deal about the Muslim religion. Next week, we will look at their religious practices which tend to be more consistent than their religious beliefs.

Notes

1. Evangelicals include those associated with an evangelical denomination including historically Black Protestant churches.

2. Please note that this is only speculation on my part; there

is no information in the Pew survey to enlighten us on this question.

Acknowledgement: The World's Muslims Data Set, 2012, Pew Research Center – Religion & Public Life. 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 James Bell, Director of International Survey Research, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Acknowledgement: Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012.
The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com.

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Crossing the Worldview Divide: Sharing Christ with Other Faiths

Christians need to introduce the gospel differently to people with different worldviews. Steve Cable provides ways to talk to Muslims, Hindus, Mormons and postmoderns.

Changing Worldview Landscape

Growing up in the sixties and seventies, I had very limited exposure to other worldviews significantly different from my own. Raised in a small town in New Mexico, I was exposed to a number of Hispanic Catholics, and I knew at least two families

that were Mormons. Frankly, I never had either of those groups share their worldview with me. But, by and large, most people appeared to have a pretty conventional Christian worldview, answering the basic worldview questions as follows:

- *What about God? God is the creator and sustainer of this universe.*
- *What about man? Mankind is separated from God's provision by our sin nature.*
- *What about salvation? Jesus Christ is God's answer to our desperate need, offering redemption through faith in Him. When people die, those who have put their faith in Jesus will go to heaven while those who refuse will be relegated to hell.*
- *What about history? History is a linear progression culminating in the creation of a new heavens and new earth.*



Since leaving the college campus in 1977, I have lived in suburbs of major metropolitan cities. Over the last thirty-five years, the makeup of those suburbs has changed significantly. I worked as an electrical engineer with several Indian Hindus and Jains. I teach English as a Second Language to a group of Muslims, Hindus, Baha'is, atheists and Latin American Catholics. From 2000 to 2010, the Muslim population of my area grew by 220%. All of these groups have a worldview significantly different from my own. In sharing Christ with them, I cannot appeal to the Bible stories they learned in vacation Bible school as a child. I need to be aware that what I say is being processed through their worldview filter. So that what they hear may not be what I meant to say.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of the issue of worldview filters. While on his missionary journeys, he preached the gospel

- *in synagogues established by Jews living away from Israel,{1}*
- *in market places containing Gentiles with a common Greek worldview,{2} and*
- *in front of Greek philosophers at the forefront of creating new worldviews.{3}*

In each of these environments, he preached the same truth: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead for our sins. But he entered that subject from a verbal starting point that made sense to the audience he was speaking to. For example, in Athens he began by drawing their attention to an idol dedicated to the unknown god and he quoted some of their poets. Was he doing this because the idol was really a Christian idol or because their poets were speaking a Christian message? Of course not. He was bridging the worldview divide between their thought patterns and those of Judaism. Having done that, he finished by saying, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."{4}

In the same way, if we want to share effectively with those from different worldviews, we need to make the effort to know how to share in a way that makes sense from their worldview perspective. We want to shake up their worldview, but we have to be able to communicate first. In the remainder of this article, we will consider the differences with and ways to share the gospel with people from four different worldview perspectives: Islam, Hindu, Mormon, and popular postmodernism.

Bridging Across to a Muslim Worldview

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with about

1.5 billion adherents or over 20% of the world population. In America, there are over 2.6 million Muslims with most of them located in major metropolitan areas accounting for 3-4% of the population in those areas. If you live in a metropolitan area, you are probably aware of several mosques in your area.

How can I share Christ with my Muslim acquaintances in a way they can understand? To answer this question, we need to understand how their worldview differs from our own and what communication issues may come into play. Let's begin by considering the four worldview questions introduced earlier:

- *What about God? Christians believe that a transcendent, loving God created the universe and mankind. Muslims believe that a transcendent, unknowable Allah created the universe and mankind.*

- *What about man? A Christian believes man is created in the image of God, but mankind is now fallen and separated from God by our sin nature. Muslims believe that, although weak and prone to error, man is basically good and is fully capable of obeying Allah.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian, the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to reunite with God through grace. Muslims must focus on good works to earn their way into heaven. They have no instruction as to what level of goodness is required. Certainly, they must pay attention to the five pillars of Islam: reciting the creed (the shahada), daily prayers, giving 2.5% of one's income to the poor or to the spread of Islam, a pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during Ramadan.*

- *What about history? For a Christian, the world is moving through time, not repeating itself, to reach the end God has prepared for it. For a Muslim time is a linear progression as well and it is moving forward exactly as Allah has willed.*

The key difference between our worldviews lies in the way to redemption: by faith through God's grace *or* as a reward for our good works.

How can you share effectively with Muslim friends and acquaintances? First, there are some important issues and confusing terms that will sidetrack your discussion in their minds. These include:

- ***The high cost****: in most Muslim families and societies, converting from Islam is a terrible offense, resulting in expulsion and sometimes death. Most Muslims will not enter into a conversation if they know the intent of it is to convert them to another faith.*

- ***The Trinity,*** *including Jesus as God's Son: Muslims are told that Christians worship three gods when there is only one. This area is especially problematic in thinking that God could be born to a woman and be crucified.*

- ***Belittling Mohammed*** *will offend most Muslims, causing them to cease listening to you.*

- ***Using corrupt Scripture*** *by quoting from the New Testament which they have been taught has been changed and corrupted. An interesting note on this argument for Islam and against Christianity: a study of recently discovered early copies of the Quran show that current Aramaic copies of the Quran are only consistent with the early copies 88% of the time; while similar studies of the New Testament show a 98% reliability between current translations and the earliest documents.*

Let's be clear. We are not saying that you don't need at some time to address the Trinity, the role of Mohammed as a false prophet, and veracity of Scripture. But first, you need to be able to communicate the gospel to them in a way that they will hear it.

To share with a Muslim, you must begin with prayer for your Muslim acquaintances who are captive to powerful social ties and equally powerful demonic lies. Pray that God will work to prepare their hearts. God has been working in powerful ways preparing Muslims to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ.{5}

Start your conversation with their most important need. Ask them, "How can you be sure that you have done enough to get into heaven?" Listen to their thoughts on this important question. Point out that the gospels say, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."{6} Are they that good? God loves us and knows that we cannot do it on our own. For this reason Jesus came to pay our penalty through His death and bring us into God's household through His resurrection.

In some Islamic countries, a good way to begin the discussion is to look at what the Koran says about Jesus to draw their attention to the specialness of Jesus. If they show an interest, you move quickly to the Bible as the true source of information on Jesus and eternal life. For more information on this approach, check out *The Camel Training Manual* by Kevin Greeson.

Bridging Across to a Hindu Worldview

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with about 900 million adherents. However, there are only about 1.2 million Hindus in the United States, about 0.4% of the population. Since they are mostly located in high tech, urban and suburban areas, the percentages are much higher in those areas, closer to 2% and growing. If you live in a major metropolitan area, you have probably seen one or more temples in your area.

How does the Hindu worldview compare with a Christian worldview on the four worldview questions introduced earlier?

- *What about God? The Hindu believes that the universe is*

eternal and the concept of an impersonal god is contained in the universe.

- *What about man? Hindus believe that our current state is a temporary illusion and our goal is to merge into the Brahman, the god nature of the universe.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to become reunited with God. This salvation can begin now and will be fully realized in heaven. For a Hindu, the answer to our problem is to live a life in such a way as to merge with Brahman at death. Unfortunately, the vast majority will be reincarnated to suffer again as another living creature.*

- *What about history? For a Hindu, the universe is eternal and history repeats itself cyclically.*

As you can see, the worldview of a Hindu varies significantly from that of a Christian on almost every point. Salvation for a Hindu is to reach a state where they no longer exist. They are integrated into the universal god. Both Hindus and Christians believe that mankind faces the problem of being born into a world full of suffering and hardship. For Hindus, there are three paths that could lead one out of this situation into oneness: 1) performing appropriate good works, 2) reaching a state of knowledge that pierces through the deception of this existence, and 3) devoting oneself to service of one of the many gods.

Being aware of these worldview differences can sensitize us to some of the communication problems in sharing with a Hindu. First, when you share with them that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth in the flesh, they will probably agree with you wholeheartedly. This is exactly the response I received when sharing with a Hindu couple at a Starbucks in an exclusive shopping area. After all, there are many forms of

god in the Hindu pantheon. Just because someone is a god, doesn't mean I should leave off worshipping my current gods to worship this new god exclusively.

How can I share with a Hindu in a way that helps be clearly explain the gospel in the context of their worldview? I would suggest two important aspects.

First, you can begin by asking this question: What if there were only one God who transcended His creation? We are not created to be subsumed back into God, but rather we were created in His image to be able to exist with and to worship our Creator. Our Creator does not want us to worship other gods which we have made up to satisfy our desire to understand our world. If you cannot get a Hindu to understand this basic premise, then other things you tell them about the gospel will be misinterpreted because of their existing worldview filter.

Second, you can tell them that you agree that the problems of this world can be seen in the pain and suffering of life on this planet. Man has tried for thousands of years and yet the pain and suffering continue. This state of despair is the direct result of man's rejection of the love of God. We can never do enough in this life through good works, special knowledge, or serving false gods to bridge the gap back to God. God was the only one who could fix this problem and it cost Him great anguish to achieve it through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.{7}

Bridging Across to a Mormon Worldview

There are only about 15 million Mormons worldwide, but almost 45% of them live in the United States. They make up about 2% of the population of the United States. Compared to Muslims and Hindus, their U.S. population has remained fairly constant as a percentage basis over the last few decades. Because of their young adult missionary teams, many Americans have had

some exposure to the evangelistic message of Mormonism.

How do Mormons compare with Christians in answering the four worldview questions introduced on day one? First, we need to understand that not all Mormons believe the same things. The president of the Mormons can introduce new doctrine which may contradict prior doctrine. One prominent example is the Mormon doctrine on blacks which was changed in 1978. The statements below represent my understanding as to the current orthodox Mormon position:

- *What about God? Where a Christian believes that God is eternal and transcendent, Mormons believe God was once a man like us and ascended to godhood*

- *What about man? Where a Christian believes that man is born in sin and separated from God, Mormons believe men are born in sin, but have the potential to become gods in their own right*

- *What about salvation? Where Christians believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, Mormons believe salvation comes from putting our faith in Jesus and performing good works. The good works are intended to pay back Jesus for the price He paid for us. In addition, Jesus is not eternal but was born to God and one of His spirit wives.*

- *What about history? Both Christians and Mormons believe that history is linear, but Mormons believe it is leading to a day when they could be gods ruling their own planets.*

Even though some would like to consider Mormonism as a branch of Christianity, one can see there are significant differences between the beliefs of Mormons and Christians.

In sharing your faith with a Mormon, there are terms and concepts you need to watch out for as they will be

misinterpreted. First, you are relying on the Bible as the complete and only direct revelation from God. When you do that, you need to be aware that they will assume anything you say that they don't agree with is countered in the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price. Point out to them that the clear meanings of the Bible don't need reinterpretation. Also, you can tell them that the Bible written between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago has been consistently supported by archaeological findings while the Book of Mormon written 175 years ago has no historical or archaeological support.

When talking about God the Father, Jesus, Satan, and man, be sure to make it clear that God and Jesus are one kind of being, the transcendent God of the universe, that Satan is a created angelic being, and that men are created different from the angels. A Mormon will use those terms, but will normally group all four of those beings as made basically the same.

Be leery of expecting to win over Mormon missionaries on mission. If they are sharing with you, of course, you should try to share with them. However, normally they are too focused on fulfilling their mission to really listen to someone else. It is best to share with them when you introduce the topic.

In sharing with a Mormon, you may want to consider how good one would have to be to earn their way to eternal life. After all, Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." If you can admit you are not perfect, then the only way to redemption is through God's grace.

Some of them may feel that in the matters of the church, they are keeping the faith in a sinless manner. What if a future president changes some criteria of behavior and you find out that you have now been sinning for years? Does it make sense to you that God's criteria for righteousness should change?{8}

Bridging Across to a Postmodern Worldview

Postmoderns may not seem as exotic as some of the world religions we have considered to this point. But they have a distinctly different worldview than do Christians and are the largest segment of non-Christians in today's America. An actual postmodern believes that absolute truth, if it does exist at all, is impossible to find. A Christian believes that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" and that "truth comes through Jesus Christ."{9} Jesus is truth applicable to every man in every situation. What do we need to understand about postmodernism to be better equipped to share the truth with them?

Popular postmodernity has a broadly defined identity, but they should resonate with this definition: postmodernity is "incredulity toward metanarratives."{10} In other words, they reject the possibility of anyone knowing truth about the basic questions of life; e.g., our worldview questions.

As before, we will begin with our four worldview questions. Keep in mind that we just said they don't think anyone can know the truth about these types of questions.

• *What about God?* Postmoderns believe that we can't really know where we came from but we probably evolved from nothing over millions of years.

• *What about man?* Postmoderns believe that humans are neither good nor bad and are shaped by the society around them which defines what is good and bad for them.

• *What about salvation?* For a Christian, the answer to our dilemma and hope for eternal life is the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son. For a postmodern, each group has their own answer that helps them get through the hard times of life, but none of the answers can be counted on as true. What is important is not their truth, but their

helpfulness in coping with life's challenges.

• *What about history?* For a postmodern, history is linear moving forward to whatever happens next. Hopefully, the future will be better than the past, but there is not grand plan or purpose for mankind. In any case, if there is a grand plan, we can't know it with any certainty.

It is hard to present Jesus Christ as the source of all grace and truth to someone who denies the existence of truth or at least our ability to know it. As Dave Kinnaman writes in his book *UnChristian*, "Even if you are able to weave a compelling logical argument, young people will nod, smile, and ignore you."{11} Constructing a rational argument for Christ may not be the place to start. As Drew Dyck reported hearing from one postmodern, "I don't really believe in all that rationality. Reason and logic come from the Western philosophical tradition. I don't think that's the only way to find truth." Dyck concluded, "They're not interested in philosophical proofs for God's existence or in the case for the resurrection."{12}

To begin the process, we need to develop their trust; be their friend. Possibly, invite them to serve alongside you in ministering to the needs of others, exposing them to the ministry of Christ to the world around them.

The postmodern should be interested in your personal story, the things you have found that work for you. But don't fall into the traditional testimony rut (i.e., I was bad, I was saved, now I am wonderful); make it real by sharing real issues you have dealt with. Then convey the gospel story in a winsome way, emphasizing Jesus concern for the marginalized around Him, realizing the gospel is a metanarrative providing a universal answer to a universal problem.

Share with them why you are compelled to commit to a universal truth. I cannot live my life without making a commitment to

what I believe to be the Truth. Saying "it doesn't matter" is basically giving up on eternity. Admit that claiming to know the truth about God, creation, and eternity is crazy from man's perspective. It can only be true if it is truly revealed by God. From my perspective, Jesus is the Truth.{13}

We've taken a very brief look at four distinct worldviews, different from a Christian worldview and different from each other. A simple understanding of those worldviews helps us avoid confusing terminology. We can focus on bridging the gap from their fundamental misunderstanding to faith in Christ. Only God working through the Holy Spirit can bring them to true faith, but we can play an important role in making the gospel understandable when filtered through their worldview.{14}

Notes

1. Acts 17:1-2, 17 for example
2. Acts 17:17, 19:9ff for example.
3. Acts 17:18-32
4. Acts 17:30-31
5. See the web articles "Breaching the Barriers to Islam" by Steve Cable and "Islam in the Modern World" by Kerby Anderson. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
6. Matthew 5:48
7. For more information on Hinduism, you can access the article "Hinduism" by Rick Rood at www.probe.org.
8. For more information on Mormonism, please access "Understanding Our Mormon Neighbors" by Don Closson and "Examining the Book of Mormon" by Patrick Zukeran. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
9. John 1:17
10. Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans., Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
11. Dave Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Baker

Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan), 2007.
12. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2010
13. See the article "The Answer is the Resurrection" by Steve Cable at www.probe.org
14. For more information on postmodernism, you can access "Truth Decay" by Kerby Anderson and "Worldviews Part 2" by Rick Wade at www.probe.org.

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Biblical Worldview Beliefs from PALS Survey of 2012: No Rebound Seen

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In my previous blog post, we looked at the *Faith Matters* survey taken in 2011 to see if the trend was continuing toward fewer people holding a biblical worldview. In this post, we ask a similar question looking at the *Portraits in American Life Survey* (PALS) taken in 2012{1}. The PALS is an extensive, national-level panel study focused on religion in the U.S., with a particular focus on capturing ethnic and racial diversity. In this survey of over 1400 people across America, a set of questions was asked which
are very similar to the biblical worldview questions asked in the Probe and Barna surveys.

The questions used to establish a basic biblical worldview are as follows:

1. I definitely believe in God
2. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and physically rose from the dead
3. The bible was fully inspired by God
4. I believe in Heaven where people live with God forever
5. I believe there is a Hell where people experience pain as punishment for their sin
6. The devil, demons or evil spirits exist
7. Moral right or wrong should be determined by God's law

Let's begin by looking at how many have a biblical worldview; i.e., agreeing with all the statements above. The results look like this (where Evan/BP stands for Evangelical or Historically Black Protestant):

Biblical Worldview					
Evan/BP		Not Evan/BP		All	
20-29	30+	20-29	30+	20-29	30+
32.5%	46.2%	5.4%	11.4%	14.7%	22.9%

Note that the youngest respondents in this survey are 20 years old rather than 18 as in the other surveys. As you can see, about one in three evangelical or black Protestant believers under the age of 30 profess to holding a biblical worldview and only about one in 20 of those who do not affiliate with an evangelical or black Protestant denomination. These results are very similar to those reported in my book, *Cultural Captives*, one area of focus was the number of people possessing a biblical worldview. The worldview questions formulated by the Barna Group were used in the *Probe Ministries Culturally Captive Christian* survey of 2010. For the other surveys used in the book, I selected a similar set of questions to define a biblical worldview for each survey. Looking across those surveys, we saw that about one in three evangelical emerging adults and about one in ten non-

evangelical emerging adults held a biblical worldview.

In this post, we want to look at a newer survey to see what light it sheds on the worldviews of Americans. The survey is called *Faith Matters 2011*{1}, conducted on behalf of Harvard University and the University of Notre Dame. They surveyed over 2,600 people, asking them about their religion (beliefs, belonging and behavior) and their social and political engagement. The questions we used to define a biblical worldview were on: 1) belief in God, 2) belief in life after death, 3) the path to salvation, 4) inspiration of the Bible, 5) existence of hell, and 6) how one determines what is right or wrong in a particular situation.

Let's begin by looking at how many have a biblical worldview on all of the questions above except for the question about the correct path to salvation. The results look like this (where Evan/BP stands for Evangelical or Historically Black Protestant):

Biblical Worldview w/o Salvation Question					
Evan/BP		Not Evan/BP		All	
18-29	30+	18-29	30+	18-29	30+
50.0%	54.8%	15.1%	21.8%	25.6%	32.7%

So we see that about half of those with an Evangelical or Historically Black church affiliation take a stand on these questions consistent with biblical teaching. And, about a quarter of all emerging adults (those 18-29) take a biblical view.

Now let's see what happens when we add the question about the path to salvation.

Biblical Worldview w/ Salvation by Faith Alone		
Evan/BP	Not Evan/BP	All

18-29	30+	18-29	30+	18-29	30+
5.1%	2.7%	1.4%	2.4%	2.5%	2.5%

Wow, we observe a massive reduction among the Evan/BP group from 50% down to around 5%. The question that caused this reduction was worded as follows: “Some people believe that the path to salvation comes through our actions or deeds and others believe that the path to salvation lies in our beliefs or faith. Which comes closer to your views?” The vast majority of evangelicals responding to this survey were unwilling to say that salvation is by faith alone even though the Bible clearly states this is the case (see for example Ephesians 2:8-9).

Interestingly enough, many of the respondents volunteered another answer, saying that salvation comes through a mixture of faith and actions. If we allow this answer as well as the faith alone answer, the results for a biblical worldview look like this:

Biblical Worldview w/ Salvation by Faith & Actions					
Evan/BP		Not Evan/BP		All	
18-29	30+	18-29	30+	18-29	30+
40.9%	46.6%	9.7%	13.5%	13.3%	24.4%

Note that in all of the cases, there is only a small difference between emerging adults and those 30 years old and older. It appears that evangelicals across the board are unwilling to fully accept the position that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and no set of good works is going to change that.

However, the reason may not be that evangelicals feel that they need to do some good works to become acceptable for heaven. It may be instead that they want to leave room for a pluralistic view that surmises that others, not really knowing

of Jesus' sacrifice, may be able to enter heaven because of their righteous activities on this earth. Supporting this possibility, the *Faith Matters* survey shows that about 80% of evangelicals believe that there are more ways to heaven other than faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Probe survey of 2010, we asked a similar question worded as follows: "Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement: if a person is generally good enough, or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in Heaven." We found that around half of emerging adults disagreed strongly with this statement. This result correlates very well with the result from *Faith Matters* when we allow the answer "salvation comes through a mixture of faith and actions." If you think about it, someone who answered that salvation comes through faith and actions could also be a person who would disagree strongly with the Probe survey statement. So perhaps the Probe survey was overestimating the number of people who correctly believed that salvation
came through faith alone.

Note

1. Data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected on behalf of Harvard University and the University of Notre Dame, principal investigators: Robert Putnam, Thomas Sander, and David E. Campbell.

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An Update on Pluralism in America

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In my book, *Cultural Captives,* I talk about the state of pluralistic beliefs among American young adults. Pluralism is the belief that there are multiple ways by which one can obtain eternal life, e.g. Christianity and Islam both provide valid paths to eternal life. Looking across multiple surveys taken from 2005 through 2010, I found that approximately 90% of young adults who were not evangelical ascribed to pluralistic beliefs. Among those young adults who were evangelical (or born again depending upon the survey), the percentage dropped to about 70%. So, in the first decade of this century, the vast majority of young American adults believed that there are multiple ways to reach heaven.

Has that position changed over the last six years? To answer this question, I analyzed data from two newer surveys: the *Portraits of American Life Survey 2012*{1} and the *Faith Matters Survey 2011*{2}. In the PALS survey, if a person disagreed strongly with the following two statements, we categorized them as not pluralistic:

> *1. It doesn't much matter what I believe so long as I am a good person.*
>
> *2. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was the holy prophet of God.*

In the *Faith Matters* survey, if a person agreed strongly with the following statement, we categorized them as not pluralistic:

> *1. One religion is true and others are not.*

Using these survey questions, we found the following:

For 18- to 29-year-olds, emerging adults who were not evangelical, we found that 93% were pluralistic according to the PALS and 91% were pluralistic according to the Faith Matters survey. For those who are evangelical, the numbers were 76% and 77% respectively. These numbers are slightly higher than the numbers I reported in 2010. But, the number were
already so high in 2010, these new numbers just continue a trend. The PALS survey indicates that for those thirty and over the number of evangelicals who are pluralists drops to 64%, which is still a disturbing majority of those who are called to evangelize their fellow citizens.

The apostle Peter told the Jewish Sanhedrin under the threat of imprisonment or death, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:11-12)

God chose to send His Son to die for our sins because there was no other way to provide forgiveness for our sins. Many Americans claiming to be evangelical Christians do not seem to appreciate that the great sacrifice God made for us is not one of many ways to reconciliation. As Jesus told us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one** comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Notes

1. Data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected on behalf of Emerson, Michael O., and David Sikkink. Portraits of American Life Study, 2nd Wave, 2012.
2. Data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected on behalf of

Harvard University and the University of Notre Dame, principal investigators: Robert Putnam, Thomas Sander, and David E. Campbell.

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