

# A Pilgrim's Progress: Suffering in the Life of John Bunyan – A Christian View of Suffering

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn considers the lessons presented by the life and writings of the famous author of The Pilgrim's Progress to give each of us a better understanding of the role of suffering in the lives of followers of Christ.*

## A Suffering Pilgrim

John Bunyan is known to most people today as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a book he began writing in prison. It tells the story of "Christian," who makes his way from the "City of Destruction" (which represents this world) to the "Celestial City" (which represents Heaven). It's been described as "perhaps the world's best-selling book" (after the Bible), and has been "translated into over 200 languages."[\[1\]](#) Written in the form of an allegory, it essentially relates the story of Bunyan's own Christian journey.[\[2\]](#) And just as *his* life was full of trials and suffering, so also "Christian" must face many hardships and difficulties as well.



Bunyan was born in England in 1628 at a time of great political and religious unrest. In 1644, at just fifteen years old, both his mother and sister died within a month of each other. Later that year, "when Bunyan had turned sixteen, he was drafted into the Parliamentary Army and for about two years was taken from his home for military service."[\[3\]](#) He married in 1648, at about the age of twenty, but his wife died just ten years later, leaving him with four children, the

oldest of whom was blind. He married again the following year, in 1659, but incredibly, just one year after this, “Bunyan was arrested and put in prison.”[\[4\]](#) His wife, who was pregnant at the time, suffered a miscarriage, probably because of the added stress which this ordeal created. She was then left to care for Bunyan’s four children while he spent the next twelve years in jail.[\[5\]](#)

As you can see, Bunyan was no stranger to suffering. Indeed, he had an intimate, firsthand acquaintance with heartache, trials, and difficulties. But what crimes had he committed to be cast into prison? Essentially, the charges against him were two: first, “he refused to attend the services of the Established church” of England; and second, he “preached to unlawful assemblies.”[\[6\]](#) You see, Bunyan had converted to Christianity during his first marriage and had become a powerful and respected preacher. But in the volatile political and religious climate of that day, the freedom of Nonconformist preachers like Bunyan eventually came to an end. And when it did, he was arrested and put in prison.

In the remainder of this article we’ll look at some of the trials this man endured, how he responded to them, and what they might teach us as we each make our own spiritual journey.

## **The Pilgrim’s Conversion**

*The Pilgrim’s Progress* is one of the best-selling Christian books of all time. But as Bunyan tells us in another of his books, the autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, before becoming a Christian he had few equals in “cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God.” Indeed, prior to his marriage, he says he was “the very ring-leader of all the youth . . . into all manner of vice and ungodliness.”[\[7\]](#)

Bunyan’s young wife had a very godly father. When he died, he

left her two books which she brought into her marriage: *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. According to Bunyan, although these books did not awaken him to his "sad and sinful state," they nevertheless did arouse within him "some desires to religion."[{8}](#) One of the practical effects of these new desires was Bunyan's regular attendance at a local church.

Soon Bunyan also began to read the Bible. He then came under such powerful conviction of sin that he scarcely knew what to do. "Sin and corruption," he wrote, "would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. . . I thought none but the devil himself could equalize me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind."[{9}](#) Bunyan was plunged into a state of despair over the greatness of his sin which, he tell us, "continued a long while, even for some years together."[{10}](#)

Eventually, after years of spiritual and emotional agony, Bunyan described "what seemed to be the decisive moment."[{11}](#) He was heading into the field one day when suddenly this sentence broke in upon his mind: "Thy righteousness is in heaven." At this, he says, "I . . . saw . . . that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse: for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, and today, and for ever* (Heb. 13:8)." "Now," he said, "did my chains fall off my legs indeed . . . my temptations also fled away . . . now went I . . . home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God."[{12}](#)

After years of spiritual anguish, Bunyan had been set free by the grace of God from some of his worst fears and torments. But as we'll see, this was not to be the end of his experience with suffering. As one set of trials was ending, another was soon to begin.

## The Pilgrim's Imprisonment

According to Bunyan, five or six years after his conversion, in about the year 1655, some of the believers in his local congregation began entreating him "to speak a word of exhortation unto them."[{13}](#) Although initially hesitant, Bunyan agreed to their request "and suddenly a great preacher was discovered."[{14}](#) Apparently, word spread quickly through the English countryside. According to one author, "In the days of toleration, a day's notice would get a crowd of 1,200 to hear him preach at 7 o'clock in the morning on a weekday."[{15}](#)

Unfortunately, it was not to last. In 1660, the same year in which Charles II was brought home as king in the Restoration of the Monarchy, John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned "for preaching without state approval."[{16}](#) Officially, he was charged with being in violation of the Elizabethan Conventicle Act of 1593. According to this Act, anyone found guilty of "abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and . . . being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings . . . could be held without bail until he or she submitted to the authority of the Anglican church."[{17}](#) As a Nonconformist preacher, this Act applied to men like Bunyan.

What's interesting, however, is that Bunyan could have gone free at any time, so long as he agreed to give up preaching. But as he was firmly persuaded that he had been called by God to this ministry, he was completely unwilling to abandon his calling. He thus spent the next twelve years in prison, largely cut off from his wife, children, friends, and church.

I say "largely cut off" for, strange as it may seem, it appears that Bunyan was occasionally let out "to see his family or make brief trips."[{18}](#) Of course, this was the exception and not the rule. Nevertheless, by "the standards of the seventeenth century the conditions in which he was held were not particularly brutal."[{19}](#) On the other hand, Bunyan was largely fortunate in this respect: "hundreds of Dissenters

died in prison, and many more came out with their health broken by foul, over-crowded conditions.”{20}

Although these qualifications must be admitted, we must never lose sight of the fact that Bunyan was willing to endure twelve long years of this suffering, rather than agree to give up preaching. And thankfully, as we’ll see, God brought a great deal of good out of His faithful servant’s suffering.

## The Pilgrim’s Writings

Most people today know John Bunyan as the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but this is just one of many works written by the metal-worker turned minister. His first book was written in 1656, when he was twenty-eight years old. But by the time of his death, some thirty-two years later, he had authored fifty-seven more!{21} John Piper notes:

*The variety in these books was remarkable: books dealing with controversies (like those concerning the Quakers . . . justification and baptism), collections of poems, children’s literature, and allegory (like *The Holy War* and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*). But the vast majority were practical . . . expositions of Scripture built from sermons for the sake of . . . helping Christian pilgrims make their way successfully to heaven.*{22}

What’s especially astonishing about the size and variety of Bunyan’s literary legacy is that it came from a man with almost no formal education. As a child Bunyan had been taught to read and write, but nothing more. He had no university or seminary degrees in which to boast. And yet his diligent study of the Bible, born mainly out of a burning desire to find peace with God, made Bunyan mighty in the Scriptures. Indeed the Bible, more than any other book, would be the primary influence upon his many writings. So evident was this to Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth century Baptist

preacher, that he once wrote of Bunyan:

*He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and though his writings are . . . full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.* {23}

Not even his suffering in prison could dampen Bunyan's enthusiasm for the Word of God or for writing. Indeed, if anything, it increased it. Some of his best-known works were written from the confines of a prison cell. These include *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, written during his first imprisonment, as well as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, apparently completed during a second, briefer period of imprisonment in 1677. {24} Bunyan's writings are surely one of his greatest gifts to the church.

## **Lessons from a Suffering Pilgrim**

A thoughtful examination of John Bunyan's reflections on the purpose and value of suffering can give us much wisdom in how best to deal with it in our own lives. Near the end of his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he appended a brief account of his imprisonment in the Bedford jail. In it, he tells of how he tried to prepare himself for imprisonment, and possibly even death, when he realized that he might soon be called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ. Naturally, as one might well expect, one of the things he did was pray. He was particularly concerned to ask God for the strength to patiently endure his imprisonment, even with an attitude of joy (Col. 1:11). {25}

However, it's the second thing he says that I find especially interesting and helpful. He reflects on the words of the

apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:9: “[W]e had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (NASB). Commenting on this verse, he then makes the following two observations:

*By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. . . . The second was, to live upon God that is invisible; as Paul said in another place, the way not to faint, is to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen, they are eternal*[{26}](#).

Bunyan realized that, like it or not, suffering, pain, loss and death would all come to him in one way or another. Indeed, sooner or later every single one of us must ultimately face these terrifying realities. How, then, can we best prepare to meet them? As Bunyan reminds us, if we only prepare for prison, say, then we will be unprepared for beatings. But if we stop our preparation with beatings, then we will be unprepared for death. But we cannot evade or cheat death forever. And thus, concludes Bunyan, “the best way to go through sufferings, is to trust in God through Christ, as touching the world to come; and as touching this world.”[{27}](#) This was how Bunyan lived, and with God’s help it was also how he died. May the eternal and unseen God grant each of us the grace to follow his example.

## Notes

1. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 375, cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of*

- Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 60.
2. W. R. Owens, "Introduction," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (New York: Penguin, 1987), xxiii.
  3. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 49.
  4. *Ibid.*, 54.
  5. *Ibid.*
  6. Owens, "Introduction," xv.
  7. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (New York: Penguin, 1987), 8.
  8. *Ibid.*, 10.
  9. *Ibid.*, 24.
  10. *Ibid.*
  11. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 52.
  12. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 59.
  13. *Ibid.*, 67-68.
  14. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 53.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. *Ibid.*, 47.
  17. Owens, "Notes," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 127, n. 137.
  18. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 48.
  19. Owens, "Introduction," xvi.
  20. *Ibid.*
  21. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 60.
  22. *Ibid.*, 60-61.
  23. Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 159; cited in Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 77.
  24. Owens, "Introduction," xvi-xvii.
  25. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 79.
  26. *Ibid.*
  27. *Ibid.*





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# Probe Responses to “The Shack”

Probe staff members are not unanimous in their responses to *The Shack*. Sue Bohlin enjoyed it as “a good book with problems,” and former staffer Pat Zukeran sees value in the book but is concerned enough about the theological problems to give it a “thumbs down.” Those of us who have read the book have a difference of opinion with each other, but we remain friendly and mutually respectful even as we disagree.

The movie is faithful enough to the book that our takeaways still stand.

	<a href="#">Sue Bohlin's Response to <i>The Shack</i></a>
	<a href="#">Patrick Zukeran's Critique of <i>The Shack</i></a>

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## What is Probe?

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# Japan's Unknown Christian History: A Review of 'Silence'

*Former Probe staffer Dr. Patrick Zukeran reviews Silence, the book by Shusaku Endo and the movie directed by Martin Scorsese, which look at the little-known Christian history of Japan.*

## **Introduction: Historical Background**

The novel *Silence*, written by Shusaku Endo, has been made into a movie directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Liam Neeson and Andrew Garfield. This historical fiction provides a glimpse into the little known Christian history of Japan. Few are aware that Japan has a rich Christian history that dates back over four centuries.

The first Christian missionary from Europe was Francis Xavier, who arrived in Japan in 1549. The Japanese embraced the message of Christ and for half a century Christianity flourished in Japan. By 1587, it is estimated that there were nearly 200,000 Christians in Japan. In 1597, it is estimated that approximately 300,000 Japanese had become Christian, 1.6% of the population.[\[1\]](#)

The situation changed dramatically in 1587 under the rule of the Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He grew concerned about the growing influence of Christianity and viewed it as a threat to his power. He gave an edict outlawing Christianity in Japan. In 1597 the first 26 Christians were arrested in Kyoto and marched 600 miles to Nagasaki, the center of Christianity in Japan. There they were tortured and later crucified. This began the Christian persecution in Japan.

Following Hideyoshi came the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867), which lasted over 250 years. Under the Tokugawa rule one of the fiercest Christian persecutions occurred in Church history. Church historians estimate that between 300,000 and 500,000 Christians died during this time.

The Tokugawa Shoguns realized that killing the Christians did not diminish the growth of Christianity in Japan. The Shogun eventually devised a more sinister and effective way of thwarting the spread of Christianity. Instead of quickly executing Christians, it was more effective to torture the Christians and coerce them to renounce their faith. After committing apostasy, the apostate would be paraded throughout Japan and have them persuade fellow Christians to abandon their faith. This proved more effective in discouraging people from becoming Christians. Christians who apostatized were known as "korobi" or fallen Christians. Priests who apostatized were the most valuable in this endeavor.

To induce Christians to renounce their faith, the Shogun

devised some of the most heinous forms of torture that he unleashed on the Christians. Christian men, women, and children were slowly burned at the stake, boiled in hot springs, thrown into frozen lakes and brutalized in various ways. One of the most feared methods was the pit. In this technique, people were hung upside down and their head was placed in a covered pit filled with sewage. The torturers would cut a slit behind the ears or across the forehead so the blood rush would not kill the person but prolong the agony for days.

The persecution proved to be very effective. In 1612 there were an estimated 300,000 Christians. In 1625 it is estimated that there were less than half that number. For the next 250 years the Japanese Christians were forced to worship secretly and were known as the "kakure" or hidden Christians.

This is the historical setting for the movie *Silence* which takes place in 1639 during the height of the Christian persecution in Japan. Two Jesuit priests from Portugal, Father Sebastião Rodrigues and Father Francisco Garrpe, secretly enter Japan in search of their mentor Father Cristóvão Ferreira (Neeson) who is purported to have apostatized. Their goal is to find Ferreira and minister to the Japanese Christians who are without priests and thus without true spiritual guidance.

The priests arrive in Japan to find that the Christians live a very arduous life. The movie does an excellent job in revealing the poverty of the Christian communities who are forced to retreat to remote areas. The audience also feels the anxiety and fear that constantly looms over the Christian villages. The priests spend their days in hiding and in the evenings they minister to the community. However, the priests are discovered and eventually captured.

*Silence* vividly portrays graphically the brutal torture the Japanese Christians suffered at the hands of the daimyos.

There are heart-wrenching scenes that depict the way fathers, mothers, and children were inhumanely tortured before they were executed. In many church history books we read of the glorious death of the Christian martyrs. However, this is not the case in the novel or the movie. In the book *Silence*, Susaku Endo wrote,

I had long read about the martyrdom in the lives of the saints – how the souls of the martyrs had gone home to Heaven, how they had been filled with glory in Paradise, how the angels had blown trumpets. This was the splendid martyrdom I had often seen in my dreams. But the martyrdom of the Japanese Christians I now describe to you was no such glorious thing. What a miserable and painful business it was. {2}

Indeed, the horror of martyrdom is captured in the movie. The agonizing deaths of the Christians are not inspiring or glorious but dreadful to watch.

The priests are coerced to apostatize while in prison. The priests do not fear their own death but they cannot bear to watch the suffering of others. Father Garrpe dies attempting to rescue Christians tossed into the ocean. Rodrigues is now the last missionary in Japan. Finally, the dreaded but sought-for meeting occurs. He meets his mentor Father Ferreira who has apostatized and now goes by his Japanese name Sawano Chuan. He is married and spends his days translating European writings for the Japanese and persuading Christians to abandon their faith in Christ. He encourages Rodrigues to save his life and his fellow believers by apostatizing. Rodrigues refuses and expresses his heartfelt disappointment at Ferreira. Rodrigues courageously resists but eventually he is unable to endure the suffering of his fellow Christians hanging in the pit. Worn down by the cruelty, he eventually steps on the portrait of Jesus, renouncing his faith in Christ. Knowing the Catholic Church cannot forgive him, Rodrigues wonders if Jesus will forgive him for what he

has done. This becomes his agonizing struggle for the rest of his life.

## **The Silence of God**

The main question that is asked throughout the movie is, Where is God? How can He let His people suffer and die like this? Why does He remain silent and not answer the cries of His people? The priests Garrpe and Rodrigues wrestle with that question throughout the movie and we are drawn into their struggle. This is the question people in every age ask in the midst of their suffering.

Each year I lead the Japan Christian Martyrs Tour where I take the group along the path of the Martyrs. We see the sites and hear the stories where thousands of Japanese Christians were brutally tortured and executed. At those times, even four centuries later, we still ask, "Where was God? Why was He silent? How could He allow the violent massacre of His people in Japan?"

In the final moments of the movie, Rodrigues, now known as the Apostate Paul wrestles with God on this lifelong struggle. He reflects on his act of apostasy, stepping on the image of Christ but instead of anger in the eyes of Christ, he saw eyes of understanding, grace and love. He states,

Even now that face is looking at me with eyes of pity from the plaque rubbed by many feet. "Trample!" said those compassionate eyes. "Trample! Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on this plaque. But that pain alone is enough. I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason I am here."

"Lord, I resented your silence," states Rodrigues. Jesus replies, "I was not silent. I suffered beside you."

Despite his act of apostasy, Rodrigues in the end finds forgiveness from a Christ who understands his situation

and extends grace to him. He realizes Christ was not silent but with him though his suffering and remained with him even in his final days. He seems to realize the love of Christ is more powerful and faithful than he has ever known.

This is one of the unique aspects of *Silence*. Endo and Scorsese want us to see through the eyes of the "korobe" Christian. We applaud those who died never renouncing their faith in Christ and quickly condemn those who publicly renounced their faith in Christ. However, I believe Shusaku Endo through his novel tells us, "Not so fast!"

Those who apostatized struggled and suffered greatly too. I believe Endo wants us to see through the eyes of Rodrigues and ask ourselves the question, "Could we endure watching our wives, children and loved ones receiving such vicious treatment for days without end?" "Would we remain steadfast or would we renounce Christ to save our loved ones from such an unbearable fate?" "Would Christ condemn us for renouncing Him to save our loved ones or would he understand and extend grace in such a situation as the Japanese and other persecuted Christian face?"

I believe Endo wants us to understand the struggle of persecuted Christians and wants us to understand they wrestle with their guilt for the rest of their lives. If God's grace is indeed "greater than all my sin," should we consider extending grace to our "fallen brethren" as well?

I believe another lesson Endo wants us to learn is that God is not silent but remains with His people in their suffering, never abandoning His people. Throughout church history, Christians have faced brutal persecutions. Even Christ the Son of God suffered the most dreadful death on the cross. Therefore, God understands the pain we experience, He grieves at the wickedness of men, and He promises to be with us always.

I agree with Endo that God is with us in our suffering. However, I feel his answer is incomplete. In a Christian's suffering, often a disciple feels the presence of Christ in an even greater way. In the writings of the persecuted saints and in the many interviews I have had with Christians who are suffering, many state they feel the presence of God in greater ways than they have ever known. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 3:10-11, ". . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." So many times in suffering Christians identify with the sufferings of Christ and sense His presence in greater ways.

What I found troubling about the novel and movie is the gloomy mood of the story. The movie emphasizes the brutal deaths of Christians, the struggles of a fallen priest, and what appears to be the demise and bleak future of Christianity in Japan. Indeed, the Christian history of Japan is sorrowful and the movie ends in the midst of Japan's persecution so I can understand Endo's ending. On this earth, life will not always have a happy ending. What I find missing in Endo's story is the message of hope that is found in Christ even in suffering. What compels Christians to surrender their life for Christ is the assured hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:2 states, ". . . looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

There is little joy when focusing primarily on the affairs and outcomes in this fallen world. If this is where the story ends, it is indeed dark and disheartening. However, through the darkness shines the hope that allowed Christ to have joy even when facing the agony of the cross. Believers can also have joy and hope if they look forward to the glory that awaits every believer in Christ. Despite the suffering



believers face, it pales in comparison to the eternal glory that is to come. Persecution teaches Christians we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. Christians can endure and remain joyful even in their suffering when focused on Christ and the glory of our true home. The end is not the cross of death, but the resurrection of Jesus and every disciple of Christ. This is important in any story of persecuted Christians. It is emphasized in the New Testament and is the story of Christ's and the believer's ultimate triumph. The New Testament prophesies the future persecution of all believers but ends with the triumphant resurrection and return of Christ. Through Christ's victory, the Christian story ends ultimately in triumph. The end is not the death of the Christians in Japan but the glory they received from Christ in heaven. Their courageous commitment should be an inspiration to believers around the world and an example of what it means to live not for this world, but the kingdom of heaven. Hebrews 11:35-40 states,

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The Japanese Christians were living for another kingdom and looking forward to the eternal glory of heaven. This message was not present in the novel or the film, which I believe made it a dark and gloomy story. Although Japan Christian history is discouraging, the end has not been written for the Christ's Church in Japan.

## Can A Tree Grow in a Swamp?

One of the most significant dialogues in the movie occurs between Rodrigues and the Samurai Lord Inoue, also known as the Inquisitor. Inoue states,

A tree which flourishes in one kind of soil, may wither if the soil is changed. As for the tree of Christianity, in a foreign country its leaves may grow thick and the buds may be rich, while in Japan the leaves wither and no bud appears. Father, have you never thought of the difference in the soil, the difference in the water?

Inoue tells Rodrigues that a tree cannot grow in a swamp. Therefore, Christianity will not take root in Japan.

There is a famous saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." In other words, persecution strengthens the faith of Christians and the church grows when persecuted. This was not the case in Japan. The genocide that took place from 1600-1800 was devastating and Christianity has never regained a strong foothold in Japan. Another question Christians struggle with is, "Why has Christianity not taken root in Japan?" Today the largest growth of Christianity is occurring throughout Asia. Despite this, Christianity continues to struggle in Japan.

When Christianity first arrived in Japan in 1549, the Japanese embraced the gospel of Christ. Xavier was so impressed with Japan that he called for only the missionaries of highest quality to be sent.<sup>{3}</sup> Xavier wrote, "Japan is the only country yet discovered in these regions where there is hope of Christianity permanently taking root. . . . These are the best people so far discovered, and it seems to me that among the unbelievers, no people can be found to excel them."<sup>{4}</sup> Father Organto, who followed Xavier, wrote that Japan would be Christianized in 30 years, expressing the optimism of missionaries that Christianity would thrive

in Japan.[{5}](#) The situation quickly changed and the two centuries of persecution that followed nearly eradicated Christianity in Japan.

Today there is a famous saying among missionaries: "Japan is where Christian missionaries go to die." Indeed, many return after years of labor discouraged and disillusioned by the little fruit they see in their years of labor in Japan. There are many reasons given why the gospel has not thrived in this country. Can the seed of the gospel penetrate the hard soil of Japanese culture?

As unbelievable as this may seem, I believe a spiritual revival for Japan. As the gospel flourished 400 years ago, spiritual awakening will come to this nation again. How it will come about only God knows. I believe the Japanese are realizing the emptiness of their secular outlook and lifestyle of materialism and consumerism. Their high suicide rate reflects the emptiness of these ideologies. Japanese Buddhism and Shinto fail to answer the great questions of life or fill the void in the heart of all people. These religions are also largely built on myths and so they are not based on reality.

Xavier realized the Japanese religions did not answer the big questions of life such as the origin of life and the universe, the nature of God, the origin of evil, the answer to the problem of evil, and what happens after death.[{6}](#) The ideologies that dominate Japan still fail to adequately answer these questions today. As Xavier demonstrated that Christianity provides the best answer to these questions, so the Church in Japan must do the same. Christianity has the evidence to uphold its claims to truth and life everlasting in Jesus. I believe that Christian apologetics would do well in this country that is very rational and well educated. The message of the gospel provides the true message of hope for this nation. I hope that the message and lives of the Japan Christian martyrs will one day be recognized and remembered by the people of Japan.

## Conclusion

Scorsese's film is one of the few films about the little known Christian history of Japan. Even the Japanese are not aware of the tremendous Christian history of their nation. We should be thankful to Scorsese for showing the brutal persecution and the suffering endured by the Christians of Japan. Endo and Scorsese reveal to us the heinous tortures but they also take us into the mental torture that those suffering persecution go through. The struggles of the priests and the questions they ask are the same questions we all struggle with in our journey of faith. Endo and Scorsese present a unique perspective looking through the eyes of one who apostatizes and yet finds God's grace through it all.

It is my hope that Christians throughout the world gain a greater awareness of one of the greatest massacre of Christians that took place in Church history. I also hope that people will appreciate and admire the courage and commitment of the Japanese Christians who gave their lives for Christ. The Japanese unfortunately hide this part of their history. However, the Japanese and the world should recognize this facet of their history. The story of the men, women and children who gave their lives for Christ is moving and inspirational. They truly lived out the call of discipleship as Jesus commanded. In Matthew 10:37-39 Jesus said,

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Few have lived out the commands of Christ so faithfully and courageously as the Christians of Japan. I hope that more will recognize and remember the Christians of Japan who gave their lives for the Gospel.

## Notes

1. Keith Webb, *Overcoming Spiritual Barriers in Japan*, (Nextchurch Resources, 2010), 15.
2. Shusaku Endo, *Silence* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969), 60.
3. John Dougill, *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 34.
4. Webb, 15.
5. Dougill, 51.
6. Henry Coleridge, *The Life and Letters of Francis Xavier* (London: Burns and Oates, 1881), 572.

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Addendum 1/3/2022:

We received this inquiry to our website:

**I was fascinated by this article on your site <https://probe.org/japans-unknown-christian-history-a-review-of-silence/> about unspeakable torture that rulers of Japan did. But it is said there is many reasons why Japanese people do not come to Christ in large numbers. So what are these reasons? Help me to understand, please. Also, I believe that the tortures that rulers of Japan performed could only take place because God granted them freedom, and there should be sufficient moral reason why He permitted it. It is known that the blood of martyrs brings salvation to the land; maybe we just need to wait more and we'll see how their sacrifice will bring God's grace and Christ' salvation to people of Japan, especially now in the era of info technology.**

Dr. Pat Zukeran, now leading his ministry Evidence and Answers from his Hawaii home, responded:

Aloha,

Thank you for reading the article on the movie *Silence* and your questions.

First, we do not know why God allows evil and suffering on some people and nations. God is in control of all things and has a plan for all that happens. Sometimes, only He knows the reason for the suffering of the Japanese Christians.

Today, less than 1% of Japanese are Christian. There are numerous reasons the nation of Japan is resistant to the Gospel message but no one really knows for sure. Here are some factors that contribute to their resistance to Christ.

First, the Japanese culture is a “group think” culture. Before a person makes a decision, he or she must consider how it will affect the family, clan and ancestors. Often they must consider how it affects their business partners, friends, etc.... The group pressure is very high in Japan.

Second, Japan is a very materialistic culture and it places little importance on the spiritual life. As a result, there really is no Sabbath day or rest. Most people from students to business people work 6 to 7 days a week. This makes time for church or Bible study very difficult.

Third, Christianity is seen as a western religion. The Christian history of Japan is not usually portrayed in a positive way.

Fourth, the concept of sin is unclear in Japanese thinking. There is no accurate word for sin. The term used now, *shimi*, actually means “criminal.” They view human nature as good and most would not see themselves as criminal. So it is hard to receive the gospel if you do not understand sin and the need for a savior.

Ultimately, there is a dark spiritual stronghold on Japan. We hope one day, a spiritual awakening will occur in that land.

Thank you for your question, I hope this was helpful.

Blessings,

Patrick Zukeran

Evidence and Answers

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## **Gay Men to Lead Boy Scouts: Gates' Failure to Render Genuine Leadership**

*This week the Boy Scouts of America have announced they will welcome transgendered youth into the program. This culture-following trend began when the BSA allowed gay scouts, then gay leaders. This shows a serious leadership gap, according to Eagle Scout, former Scout employee, and volunteer Byron Barlowe.*

Boy Scouts will now be subject to gay adult leadership if BSA (Boy Scouts of America) president Robert Gates' advice is taken. Gates, who once held our military's top position as Secretary of Defense, declared the inevitability of ending the ban on openly gay Scout leaders while [addressing the BSA national annual meeting](#) in Atlanta Thursday, May 21, 2015.

Does anyone really doubt that Gates' position will be made official, especially given recent advances for gay rights at the states' level, with the Girl Scouts, in Ireland's national referendum vote three days later and most likely via the United States Supreme Court this June? I wager it'll be only a few months before it's official BSA policy.

The question for Mr. Gates: How does bowing to the rapidly

changing poll numbers on this issue constitute leadership? Don't heroes often have to stand alone? Even if Gates holds convictions that would dictate openness in his personal dealings, his stated premise for lifting the long-time ban on gay Scout leaders that stands to affect tens of thousands of youth is flawed: that the proverbial train has left the station and the organization needs to cover its rear guard, to go with the inevitable flow of gay rights, to kowtow to pressure from within and without. Pure pragmatism on parade. And entirely inappropriate and unrespectable.

## **Brave New World vs. "A Scout is Brave"**

Part of the Scout Law every Boy Scout for 105 years has memorized and recited reads, "A Scout is trustworthy . . . brave . . . reverent. . . ." But the BSA has done a 180-degree flip on the topic of homosexuality, having won a Supreme Court case against a gay membership push as recently as 2000. [The Opinion of the Court in Dale v. Boy Scouts of America](#), written by Chief Justice Rehnquist, reads, "The Boy Scouts asserts that it 'teach[es] that homosexual conduct is not morally straight'" in its defense of denying avowed homosexual and gay activist James Dale leadership privileges with a Scout troop.

***Oh, what a difference fifteen years makes when one bases decisions on the swiveling wind vane of a degrading culture.***

To his credit, Dr. Gates called for individual chartering organizations—representing 70 percent of Boy Scout Troops and Cub Packs—to decide for themselves how to implement such a policy. Yet, in the same speech, Gates cites the refusal of a New York Council to abide by current BSA policy in hiring gay leaders as a realistic reason to change the national policy. Which is it? Gay men get the right to lead, or troops and packs get to say no? We see where that is going in the courts and in culture with Christian photographers, bakers and T-shirt makers: inescapable pressure to succumb.



## **Live Up to High Standards of Scouting**

I'm holding President Gates to a high standard here. Sure, he's been pressured by his own big business (read: big donor) board members like Randall Stephenson of AT&T and James Turley of Ernst & Young to eradicate the BSA's longstanding policies against gay participation at every level. Though it may not compare to high stakes, national level non-profit boardroom politics, I lost my job as a BSA District Executive by holding to the principles of Scouting (and my biblical faith). When asked to misrepresent the number of Cub Scout Packs in local schools at a BSA Council in North Carolina, I refused. Threats didn't move me despite my 23-year-old, first-job fears. Call me naïve. Then explain that to a boy. It would be refreshing to see Mr. Gates stand up to power himself.

Even if I agreed with gay rights claims concerning the private youth training organization, I'd object to the hypocrisy of its leader. Gates' recent declaration, as with the BSA's 2013 decision to enroll openly gay Scouts, is modeling another dereliction of duty. Yet "duty to God," others and self has always formed the three-legged stool of values on which Scouting stood. God is not confused on this issue, nor was the Scouting program for a full century.

## **If This Goes, Scouting Will Forever Be Altered**

I write "values on which Scouting stood" in past tense advisedly. As I was quoted via the *Los Angeles Times* syndicate while demonstrating against the policy change to allow openly gay Scouts in 2013, this is the end of Scouting as we have known it. Another prediction: A sharp decrease in numbers following that decision will be surpassed if the BSA allows admittedly gay leaders. As an Eagle Scout, father of an Eagle Scout, former volunteer Scouting leader and BSA local executive, I can no longer support in any way the Boy Scouts

of America. I'll support other youth programs.

This conviction grieves me, but borrowing from the Christian reformer Martin Luther, here I stand and I can do no other. No, this episode does not rise to the level of religious reformation; however, the gravity of such social slides will change the cultural landscape for as long as our Republic stands. The gay advocacy heavyweight Human Rights Campaign is right when it celebrates Gates' announcement as a huge victory in its drive for full acceptance of homosexuals across the culture, given that the BSA is "one of America's most storied institutions."

As SecDef, Gates ended the ambiguous "Don't ask, don't tell" doctrine, a decision that opened doors for openly gay service men and women to serve freely despite fears of sexual chaos. Our former CIA Director and, again, Secretary of Defense Gates now holds the top leadership post among a younger group of Americans. On this issue he has led neither members of the armed forces nor impressionable and sexually vulnerable adolescent Scouts.

Once again, Gates' ethics reek of pure pragmatism: "We must deal with the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be. The status quo in our movement's membership standards cannot be sustained," he said to the assembled Scouting leaders.

Never mind high ideals. The wind has blown, the ship has sailed and we must get on board or be left behind (or at least sued heavily). Oh, such bravery.

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# The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese says that our addiction to technology is heading toward the opposite of the life we want.*

## What Saccharine is to Sugar, or The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

“Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word.”[\[1\]](#) – Jacques Ellul

### Simulacra

Aerosmith sings a familiar tune:

*“There’s something wrong with the world today,  
I don’t know what it is,  
there’s something wrong with our eyes,  
we’re seeing things in a different way  
and God knows it ain’t [isn’t] his;  
there’s melt down in the sky. We’re living on the edge.”*[\[2\]](#)

What saccharine is to sugar, so the technological simulacra is to nature or reality—a technological replacement, purporting itself to be better than the original, more real than reality, sweeter than sugar: hypersugar.



This  
article  
without  
footnotes

*Simulacra*, (*Simulacrum*, Latin, pl., *likeness, image, to simulate*): or simulation, the term, was adapted by French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to express his critical interpretation of the technological transformation of reality into hyperreality. Baudrillard's social critique provided the premise for the movie *The Matrix* (1999). However, he was made famous for declaring that the Gulf War never happened; TV wars are not a reflection of reality but projections (recreations) of the TV medium.[\[3\]](#)

Simulacra reduces reality to its lowest point or one-dimension and then recreates reality through attributing the highest qualities to it, like snapshots from family vacation. When primitive people refuse to have their picture taken because they are afraid that the camera steals their souls, they are resisting simulacra. The camera snaps a picture and recreates the image on paper or a digital medium; it then goes to a photo album or a profile page. Video highlights amount to the same thing in moving images; from three dimensions, the camera reduces its object to soulless one-dimensional fabrication.[\[4\]](#)

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage.[\[5\]](#) Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false "second nature"[\[6\]](#) superimposed over the natural world, replacing it with a hyperreal one, marvelously illustrated in the movie *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). As liquid metal conforms itself to everything it touches, it destroys the original.[\[7\]](#)

Humanity gradually replaces itself through recreation of human nature by technological enhancements, making the human race more adaptable to machine existence, ultimately for the purpose of space exploration. Transhumanists believe that through the advancements in genetic engineering, neuropharmaceuticals (experimental drugs), bionics, and

artificial intelligence it will redesign the human condition in order to achieve immortality. "Humanity+," as Transhumanists say, will usher humanity into a higher state of being, a technological stairway to heaven, "glorification," "divinization" or "ascendency" in theological terms.{8}

God made man in his own image and now mankind remakes himself in the image of his greatest creation (image), the computer. If God's perfection is represented by the number seven and man's imperfection by the number six, then the Cyborg will be a five according to the descending order of being; the creature is never equal or greater than the creator but always a little lower.{9}

Glorious Reduction!{10}

[www.probe.org/machinehead-from-1984-to-the-brave-new-world-order-and-beyond/](http://www.probe.org/machinehead-from-1984-to-the-brave-new-world-order-and-beyond/)

## Hyperreality

An old tape recording commercial used to say, "Is it real or is it Memorex?" By championing the superiority of recording to live performance the commercial creates hyperreality, a reproduction of an original that appears more real than reality, a replacement for reality with a reconstructed one, purported to be better than the original.

Disneyland serves as an excellent example by creating a copy of reality remade in order to substitute for reality; it confuses reality with an illusion that appears real, "more real than real." {11} Disney anesthetizes the imagination, numbing it against reality, leaving spectators with a false or fake impression. Main Street plays off an idealized past. The technological reconstruction leads us to believe that the illusion "can give us more reality than nature can." {12}

Hyperreality reflects a media dominated society where "signs

and symbols” no longer reflect reality but are manipulated by their users to mean *whatever*. Signs recreate reality to achieve the opposite effect (metastasis){13}; for example, in Dallas I must travel west on Mockingbird Lane in order to go to East Mockingbird Lane. Or, Facebook invites social participation when no actual face to face conversation takes place.{14}

Hyperreality creates a false perception of reality, the glorification of reduction that confuses fantasy for reality, a proxy reality that imitates the lives of movie and TV characters for real life. When reel life in media becomes real life outside media we have entered the high definition, misty region—the Netherlands of concrete imagination—hyperreality!{15}

Hyperreality goes beyond escapism or simply “just entertainment.” If that was all there was to it, there would be no deception or confusion, at best a trivial waste of time and money. Hyperreality is getting lost in the pleasures of escapism and confusing the fantasy world for the real one, believing that fantasy is real or even better than reality. Hyperreality results in the total inversion of society through technological sleight of hand, a cunning trick, a sorcerer’s illusion transforming the world into a negative of itself, into its opposite, then calling it progress.

Hyperreality plays a trick on the mind, a self-induced hypnotism on a mass scale, duping us by our technological recreation into accepting a false reality as truth. Like Cypher from the movie *The Matrix* who chose the easy and pleasant simulated reality over the harsh conditions of the “desert of the real” in humanity’s fictional war against the computer, he chose to believe a lie instead of the truth.{16}

# The Devil is a Liar

A lie plays a trick on the mind, skillfully crafted to deceive through partial omission or concealment of the truth. The lie is the devil's (devil means liar) only weapon, always made from a position of inferiority and weakness (Revelation 20:3, 8). A lie never stands on its own terms as equal to truth; it does not exist apart from twisting (recreating) truth. A lie never contradicts the truth by standing in opposition to it.

A lie is not a negative (no) or a positive (yes), but obscures one or the other. It adds by revealing what is not there—it subtracts by concealing what is there. A lie appears to be what is not and hides what it really is. “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A lie does not negate (contradict) or affirm truth. Negation (No) establishes affirmation (Yes). Biblically speaking, the no comes before the yes—the cross then the resurrection; law first, grace second. The Law is no to sin (disobedience); the Gospel is yes to faith (obedience). Truth is always a synthesis or combination between God's no in judgment on sin and His yes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ. “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Law without grace is legalism; grace without law is license.[{17}](#)

[www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/](http://www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/)

The devil's lie adds doubt to the promise of God; “Indeed, has God said, ‘you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1 NASB) It hides the promise of certain death; “You surely will not die” (Genesis 3:4). The serpent twists knowledge into doubt by turning God's imperative, “Don't eat!” into a satanic question “Don't eat?”[{18}](#)

But it is Eve who recreates the lie in her own imagination.

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6).[{19}](#)

Sight incites desire. We want what we see (temptation). Eve was tempted by “the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16) after seeing the fruit, then believed the false promise that it would make her wise. “She sees; she no longer hears a word to know what is good, bad or true.”[{20}](#) Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God’s word.[{21}](#)

## **The Void Machine**

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine.[{22}](#) In the presence of a traditional social milieu, such as family, church or school, it will destroy its host, and then reconstruct it in its own hyperreal image (Simulacra). Telecommunication technology is a Trojan Horse for all traditional institutions that accept it as pivotal to their “progress,” except prison or jail.[{23}](#) The purpose of all institutions is the promotion of values or social norms, impossible through the online medium.

Media at first appears beneficial, but this technology transforms the institution and user into a glorified version of itself. The personal computer, for example, imparts values not consistent with the mission of church or school, which is to bring people together in mutual support around a common goal or belief for learning and spiritual growth (community). This is done primarily through making friends and forming meaningful relationships, quite simply by people talking to each other. Values and social norms are only as good as the people we learn them from. Values must be embodied in order to be transmitted to the next generation.[{24}](#)



Talking as the major form of personal communication is disappearing. Professor of Communications John L. Locke noted that "Intimate talking, the social call of humans, is on the endangered species list."[{25}](#) People prefer to text, or phone.[{26}](#) Regrettably, educational institutions such as high schools and universities are rapidly losing their relevance as traditional socializing agents where young people would find a potential partner through like interests or learn a worldview from a mentor. What may be gained in convenience, accessibility or data acquisition for the online student is lost in terms of the social bonds necessary for personal ownership of knowledge, discipline and character development.[{27}](#)

An electronic community is not a traditional community of persons who meet face to face, in person, in the flesh where they establish personal presence. Modern communication technologies positively destroy human presence. What philosopher Martin Heidegger called *Dasein*, "being there," (embodiment or incarnation) is absent.[{28}](#) As Woody Allen put it, "90 percent of life is showing up."[{29}](#) The presence of absence marks the use of all electronic communication technology. Ellul argued, "The simple fact that I carry a camera [cell phone] prevents me from grasping everything in an overall perception."[{30}](#) The camera like the cell phone preoccupies its users, creating distance between himself and friends. The cellphone robs the soul from its users, who must exchange personal presence for absence; the body is there tapping away, but not the soul! The cell phone user has become a void![{31}](#)

## **The Power of Negative Thinking**

According to popular American motivational speakers, the key to unlimited worldly wealth, success and happiness is in the power of positive thinking that unleashes our full potential; however, according to obscure French social critics the key to

a meaningful life, lived in freedom, hope and individual dignity is in the power of negative thinking that brings limits, boundaries, direction and purpose.

Negativity gives birth to freedom, expanding our spiritual horizons with possibilities and wise choices, which grounds faith, hope and love in absolute truth, giving us self-definition greater than our circumstances, greater than reality of the senses. To freely choose in love one's own path, identity and destiny is the essence of individual dignity.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

[www.probe.org/into-the-void-the-coming-transhuman-transformation/](http://www.probe.org/into-the-void-the-coming-transhuman-transformation/)

All limitless behavior ends in self-destruction. Human extinction looms over the technological future, like the Sword of Damocles, threatening humanity's attempt to refit itself for immortality in a grand explosion (nuclear war), a slow poisoning (ecocide) or suicidal regressive technological replacement. Stephen Hawking noted recently that technological progress threatens humanity's survival with nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering over the course of the next 100 years. Hawking stated, "We are not going to stop making progress, or reverse it, so we must [recognize] the dangers and control them." [\[32\]](#)

In asserting "NO!" to unlimited technological advance and establishing personal and communal limits to our use of all

technology, especially the cell phone, computer and TV, we free ourselves from the technological necessity darkening our future through paralyzing the will to resist.{33}

After we “JUST SAY NO!”{34} to our technological addictions, for instance, after a sabbatical fast on Sunday when the whole family turns off their electronic devices, and get reacquainted, a new birth of freedom will open before us teeming with possibilities. We will face unmediated reality in ourselves and family with a renewed hope that by changing our personal worlds for one day simply by pushing the off button on media technology we can change the future. Through a weekly media fast (negation) we will grow faith in the power of self-control by proving that we can live more abundant lives without what we once feared absolute necessity, inevitable and irresistible. “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10: 27). When we exchange our fear of idols for faith in the Living God the impossible becomes possible and our unlimited potential is released that will change the world forever!{35}

I see trees of green, red roses, too,  
I see them bloom, for me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,  
Are also on the faces of people going by.  
I see friends shaking hands, sayin', “How do you do?”  
They're really sayin', “I love you.”

I hear babies cryin'. I watch them grow.  
They'll learn much more than I'll ever know  
And I think to myself

What a wonderful world. [\[36\]](#)

"[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself . . . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg condition]." – Jacques Ellul [\[37\]](#)

## Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), vii.

2. Aerosmith, *Eat the Rich*, "Livin' on the Edge," Sony, 1993.

3. The same is true of the game last night—I caught the highlights on ESPN—no difference really—it never happened! The Presidential debates, my Facebook page, 911, televangelism, the online (electric) church: all reproductions, all exist at the level of Santa Claus in a dreamy, surreal world not really real: hyperreal, really!

4. French social critic Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) described dimensional reduction in human nature through the process of "mimesis" very similar to Baudrillard's conception of *simulacra* (technological simulation) and Ellul's *la technique* (technological order). *Mimesis* eradicates all protest and opposition to the prevailing technological normalcy and silences all conscientious objections to the obvious or self-evident benefits (taken for granted) and blessings of technological progress. Like a frontal lobotomy when a section of the brain is removed that leaves all necessary automatic biological functions but removes the capacity to higher critical thinking, effectively silencing all differences, removing unique personality, individuality, and private space. The person is reduced to *one dimension* without the critical higher thought process or skills. *Mimesis* or mimicry transcends the adjustment phase to new technology known as *Future Shock* and brings the population into a direct and immediate relationship with the technological environment comparable to prehistoric and primitive cultures in their

relationship to their natural milieus, climates and habitats. Mimesis replaces the traditional social environment with a technological one, an imitation or mimicry (simulacra). Mimesis removes the ability to feel alienation. Through reduction of the individual to a cell (atomization) in the social body, one never feels out of place, discomfort or disease, etc., because there is no longer any sense of individuality or difference. Anesthetizing the soul kills the pain of maladjustment to modernity leaving all feelings alike; joy is indistinguishable from hate. What do people feel after a lobotomy? They feel nothing, *comfortably numb* describes postmodern sentimentality.

Mimesis reduces the population to impulsive consumers. Material goods tie us to the system. "People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed and social control is anchored in the new needs it has produced" (Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in Advanced Industrial Society* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1964], 9). People are in love with their technology. Consumer objects express passion and spirituality; "For example, cars are not simply neutral transportation objects but beloved expressions of soul." Their self-image is locked in the kind of cars they drive, houses they live in: "From teen dreaming about a hot set of wheels to the self-imagined sophisticate, it is image that dictates our purchase . . . Most of us can't imagine why anyone would buy a Hummer except to flaunt his financial ability to conspicuously consume . . . . Anyone who doubts the role of image needs only drive a rust bucket" (Lee Worth Bailey, *The Enchantments of Technology* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005], 7). "Image is everything!" Modern technological materialism has become the antithesis of the Christian way of life. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

## 5. Orders of Simulacra:

Renaissance: Copies of Original

Industrial: Mass Production of Original

Hyperreality: Recreation of Original

Metastasis: Reverse effects of the hyperreal stage of simulacra proliferate, comparable to the spread of cancerous tissue. "Metastasis: the transfer of disease from one organ or part to another not directly connected with it" (Benjamin F. Miller and Claire Brackman Keane *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine and Nursing* [Philadelphia: Saunders, 1972]). Hyperreality "more real than real" purports to be a technological improvement on nature and "the signs and symbols," (language) and institutions of traditional society, "better than real;" however, despite the apparent success of the hyperreal stage to deliver on its promise of improvement or "progress," opposite results threaten social stability. Disneyland gets boring. Media technology isolates people rather than bringing them together. Social media turns out to be anti-social. The automobile extends the commute to work. The computer increases the average work load and illiteracy, reduces jobs, depersonalizes individuals, kills privacy, creates universal surveillance, makes pornography and depictions of violence readily accessible to children. The cell phone is actually an excellent bomb detonating device. The computer atrophies human intelligence, logic, and thinking (creative and problem solving skills); through societal dependence on the computer people have forgotten how to think for themselves, and solve problems in any other way. The computer is not a simple tool used to organize knowledge, making it readily accessible, but as the centralizing technology through the digitalization process it recreates the world in its own image. Instead of happiness, the technological order is producing mass neurosis evident in the increase in depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder,

anorexia, bulimia, suicide and the mass inability to differentiate between reality and illusion.

Metastasis in the Orders of Simulacra according to Baudrillard also reflects Jacques Ellul's critical technological analysis in his assertion of the law of diminishing returns (law of reverse effects), *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). Once the threshold of reversal in technological progress is reached, a saturation point, beyond which any further advance is completely unnecessary (and thus further progress despite mass optimism) will produce reverse or opposite effects than intended. The technological threshold is reached when new technology is imposed on the population which was unnecessary prior to its invention. When necessity for a new technology appears after its invention the threshold of beneficial effects inverts and harmful consequences, side effects—intended or not—rapidly multiply. There is no use or felt needs for much of the technology developed in the 20th century; TV, computer, jet engine, rockets, atom bomb, cell phone, innumerable widgets and gadgets, so use is found and need artificially created. People have no felt need for a technology that does not yet exist. When useless technology is developed for its own sake (knowledge for knowledge's sake), rather than liberation it displaces *the good of mankind to the glory of God* as its object or *telos* and becomes an end in itself. The general population never asks for new technology; rather, technology is developed according to the technological imperative—whatever can be done should be done. Its beneficial use is unquestionably assumed and its use promoted through mass advertising and commercials (technological propaganda), and in short order a new necessity is added to the litany of technological requirements. As the list of “must haves” and “can't live without” grows in order to keep pace with the tempo of modern life, users voluntarily surrender their freedom for self-imposed technological necessity, blissfully unaware of any potential side-effects or untoward consequences.

The technological condition may be compared to generational slavery. Those born into servitude accept it as normal. The "happy slave" remains so through refusal to recognize his condition as "slave." He embraces the world as he finds it with all his material needs and appetites satiated. There is no reason to protest, compounded by the fact that he has no ability to do so. A slave will always remain a slave until he recognizes that he is a slave. And without an intellectual horizon to lift him above his condition as a real possibility he will forever remain a slave. The first step to freedom for the slave is to recognize his condition of slavery and the possibility of a different way of life through self-determination, but that is impossible without a degree of abstract analysis and a measure of critical reason. Comparatively, technological determinism imposes its frightful inescapable necessity as a natural order without a meaningful future beyond the present way of life. In stripping society of critical ability to reason and negate that order from a metaphysical view, humanity has lost its only absolute reference point outside its own limited existence and above its concrete situation from which to criticize technology and bring it under ethical control and moral limitation. God is greater than any technological idol made by human hands and provides an immovable ground from which humanity can reassert control, but mankind's Creator, Savior and Helper does him no good if he does not believe in his power or worse confuses it with the status quo, so that the apocalyptic power of God's confrontational judgment that leveled Babel (Genesis 11), Egypt (Exodus), Jerusalem and Rome is convoluted through blessing the technological utopia as *New Atlantis*.

The idolization of technology follows in the wake of modern science and rationalism but has a dehumanizing effect rather than amelioration. New technology brings new necessity and demands rather than freedom that exacts its price from humanity and nature, resulting in a much more complicated and dangerous world. The Apostle Paul stated that if we have food



and shelter we should be content (1 Timothy 6:8). The accumulation of material things beyond meeting basic needs becomes a new burden, an added necessity not there before, resulting in bondage not freedom. People are owned by their possessions, must work harder for their technology and have been reduced to cogs in the wheel of progress rather than individuals with inherent value made in the image of God. From electricity, to phones, appliances to automobiles to computers, cell phones, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam* each new technology begins with the promises of convenience and improving modern life by making it faster, then through habitual use it becomes necessary, eventually addictive. From the basic material needs of food and shelter modern life has added dishwashers, microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners, TVs, cars, computers and most recently the cell phone as necessary for life in modern times. The devaluation of human life pays for the technology that is developed for the sake of expanding the frontiers of knowledge and exploration rather than creating the condition of freedom. Human freedom is lost with each new artificial technical necessity, resulting in an increasingly nihilistic society; where power increases, choice is lost, resulting in increased meaninglessness. Nihilistic sentiment develops along with technological power; "*We know that power always destroys values and meaning . . . Where power augments indefinitely there is less and less meaning*" (Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age* [New York: Seabury, 1981], 45). Technological necessity proliferates along with technological power over nature, reducing the scope of available choices, options or way of life that differs from those ensnared in the modern mechanized mainstream. What possibilities for a decent way of life are open to those who own neither car nor home, do not use a cell phone or computer, or possess at least a college degree? How *successful* will any corporate organization, church, school or business be if it does not use modern communication technology, radio, TV, computer or advertising techniques (propaganda) to promote its cause or product? As the world conforms itself to

technological necessity, “you must get a cell phone and use a computer or risk getting left behind,” it loses touch with the reality outside these devices, which is reduced and recreated online. For example, the traditional “church service” where believers join together in the unity of faith around the communion table as community and family becomes the embarrassing forgery of a lone spectator in front of a one dimensional monitor.

6. Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society* (Macon, GA: University Press, 1988), 7. “Tillich describes the creation of a ‘second nature’ that results from science’s attempt to control nature. Second nature in turn subjects man to the same domination he wishes to exert over nature, making himself subject to the very thing he had created to liberate him” (Lawrence J. Terlizese, *Trajectory of the 21st Century: Essays on Theology and Technology* [Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2009, 155]).

7. Baudrillard’s description of Simulacra is reminiscence of Herbert Marcuse’s depiction of “Mimesis” in *One-Dimensional Man*. Mimesis: the total identification of the individual with technological environment that mimics, apes or imitates historical social conditions, for example the city replaces nature, the automobile replaces the horse and carriage, TV replaces the family hearth, social media substitutes for personal relationships. [Muk-bang](#) replaces family members at the dinner table, traditional institutions that requires a personal presence, school and church, are rapidly transferring to the online medium. Likewise Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society* describes technological advancement or “*la technique*” as creating a new environment, one that overlays both the natural and historical social environments with an urban/industrial/digital one.

8. Braden Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1-13; *Humans Need Not Apply*, CGP Grey, 2014. The Transhuman Transformation is

the ultimate in works salvation that lifts humanity to the next stage in evolutionary development through technological immortality or digitalized godhood that replaces all his physical corruptions with artificial replacements in the simulated heaven of a computer server. The computer does not dominate the will of humanity, enforcing universal peace through fear of annihilation as in the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), but assimilates humanity digitally and recreates it in its own image or highest ideal. The robots are not taking over, rather humanity is surrendering its will and decisions to the computer in tired resignation of life which has become too difficult by its own design.

9. "O LORD . . . What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4, 5). "Angels," Elohim (God) in Psalm 8:5 refers to the divine visitation (theophany) mentioned in verse 4, the Angel of The LORD, i.e., Genesis 18; 19; 22:15; 32:24-32; Exodus 12:12, 13. Humanity was made highest in God's created order, below the creator and above the angelic host in the chain of being; "Don't you know you will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). Angels are "ministering spirits sent to minister to the heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

10. We are not saying one cannot reduce a complicated argument, book, movie etc., to its main points in outline form. We are saying that reduction does not replace the original, as somehow "better." A well-done outline does not alleviate the audience's responsibility to discover for itself, to pick up and read, but will inspire the audience to do so. Reading Calvin's *Institutes*, or Augustine's *City of God* or Thomas' *Summa Theologica* in PowerPoint or Cliff Notes is comparable to watching the Super Bowl in highlights instead of in its entirety from kickoff.

The proliferation of the digital camera as appendage to the cell phone has created the absurd phenomenon of reduction of

reduction in the class room. As the PowerPoint slide has allowed professors to reduce all learning to three pertinent bullet points per slide, so students have followed their cue in picturing the text (taking a picture of the slide). Instead of suffering the laborious and tedious task of jotting down a simple outline in a note book, a helpful mnemonic practice, they take a picture of it, reducing the slide to digital acknowledgement and temporary storage before deletion, in order to make room for the pictures of tomorrow night's Harry Potter costume gala. Education isn't what it used to be, it just isn't!

11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 166 ff.

12. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: HBJ, 1986), 43.

13. The projections of visual media may have their origins in "the desert of the real" as Baudrillard puts it, but what the spectator sees on his screen, monitor or photograph should not be confused with "reality," but recreated reality mediated through an electronic medium. Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim for media analysis, "The medium is the message," undergirds this critical understanding of media technology. Any fan of live entertainment or sports knows immediately that TV broadcast of a live venue is an entirely different event than being there live behind home plate or on the fifty yard line. Preference for the surreal, sterilized, cartoonish, Apollonian images on TV and in film, rather than seeing the actual blots, blemishes and facial scars of people, perspiring athletes or hearing the crack of the bat is not the central moral issue, which does not come down to preferences, which are already conditioned by excessive media exposure at an early age. The failure to distinguish between reality and hyperreality constitutes the greatest dangers of the technological simulacra. When the general audience mistakes or confuses the hyperreal for reality, it allows itself to be deceived. When it believes what it sees on TV to be the literal unbiased

truth, when in fact TV broadcasts a highly opinionated reconstructed version designed to transport its audience to a dream-like existence, the audience loses touch with reality and becomes immune to moral conscience, guilt and remorse for its actions—for example, war, ecological destruction, racism, etc. Group deception and delusion is rooted in personal inability to distinguish fact and fantasy, reality and illusion creating a strange self-hypnotic mass psychosis, easily persuaded by the predominate image projected into its thinking. “Brainwashing” or “mind control” are not the best choice of words, yet the terms still resonate for many people in describing the immediate effects of visual media on the audience. Electronic media bypass the rational process and speaks directly to the emotional or subconscious. Media effects the shaping of behavior through mass appeal of image, a reproduction of reality framed in drama and grounded in the erotic (sex appeal), moving the mass to do something (doing is being), buy, give, join, fight, etc., without the ballast of critical reflection that will spare a people from rushing headlong into disaster. The irrational nature of the emotional appeal was the cause for Plato’s expulsion of artists, musicians and dramatists from his fictional utopia *The Republic*. By allowing irrational appeal free reign, the public loses the appeal to critical reason as the measure of truth and the people become prone to deception and mass manipulation by a tyrant. Likewise Jesus urges all to pause in rational reflection, “to count the cost” like a king going to war or building a tower, before deciding to follow him (Luke 14:25-33).

The failure to discern the difference between reality and illusion in mass and social media is due to the intoxicating effects of hyperreality and the loss of critical reason in the public’s media consumption. Electronic media numbs awareness to reality and allows escape to fantasy, as the universal *soma* (perfect drug from Huxley’s fictional tale *Brave New World*). The condition of intoxication or “drunkardness” is one of

self-induced madness, so the self-hypnotic condition of electronic media creates a similar neurosis. Karl Marx criticized religion as "the opiate of the people," accurate for the masses living in the industrial conditions of the 19th century, but obsolete as a description of the masses since the invention of television, which has replaced religion as the opiate of the people.

When image dominates a societal mindset and learning, emotional (sex) appeal moves the population in mass conformity or group behavior that ousts critical reason in herd mentality, subject to the whims of the image makers, propagandists, clergy, advertisers, etc. Ellul noted two orders of thinking determined by the means of learning: image and language. Image learning presents knowledge as a totality, each image is a world, complete and ready-made, certain of its own truthfulness, imparting its information instantly so long as we occupy the same space as the image. "The image conveys to me information belonging to the category of evidence, which convinces me without any prior criticism" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36). The image impresses itself on the character of the learner through unconscious acceptance that does not follow the logical sequence of language from start to finish, beginning to end but produces a haphazard collage of contradicting light totalities that appeal immediately to the moment (instant gratification). Image based learning produces a monolithic mentality or stereotypical thinking and prescribed behavior. Critical reason is never allowed to assert differences; extremes are normalized so that everything is accepted. This is very apparent in the current PC orthodoxy widely accepted in the Millennial generation, the first generation raised on the computer, that stupidly pontificates that any assertion of difference between sexes, races, religion, etc., etc., amounts to "hate-crime." For example, the gay lifestyle is no longer an acceptable alternative to monogamy but now has legal sanction as part of the mainstream establishment, despite its irrational and

unnatural character. Islam is accepted as a religion of peace and compatible with Western democracies, yet no proof is ever offered to support this claim from the history of Islam. And the universal inanity of technological neutrality that provides the false sense of individual control over technological use, rapidly degenerates to technological necessity and inevitability of technological progress in actual daily behavior. Technology cannot be both neutral in its character under control of human choices and necessary or not under control of human choices, but autonomous (developing according to its own inner logic) at the same time; yet this inherent contradiction is completely ignored by all advocates of unlimited technological progress, Transhumanists, Futurists or simply all those who feel invested in the latest innovation: intellectuals, preachers, writers, professors, technogeeks, technognostics and technophiles. The smartest people in society appear completely oblivious to the contradiction of believing that technology is neutral in its essence yet necessary in application, rationalizing its rapid acceleration, not because they are bad people but because their thinking is dominated by the image of unlimited progress and human perfectibility projected onto them from the computer, rather than a rational way of thinking growing out of the book and lecture. Computerization of all human life creates the cardinal value of speed for its own sake (faster is better), which necessarily leads to nonlinear or irrational (emotional) learning through images because it is easy, instant, and unconscious, producing stereotypical categories and behavior. The word expressed in speech and writing produces opposition to image domination of the computer because it is slower, linear and critical.

The second order of thinking Ellul says comes from language or the spoken and written word which must follow an arduous task of connecting letters, words, sentences and thoughts to each other through the process of speaking, reading and writing which follows the contours of logical sequence in step by step

growth in knowledge and reason. Language learning does not begin with the self-asserting certainty of the totalitarian image, but develops progressively from "the unknown to uncertain and then from the uncertain to the known." (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36); dialectically including doubt, objection, protest or difference in the attainment of knowledge. Language is rational, self-aware or conscious, certain of what it knows but never exhaustive in its claim to absolute total knowledge, therefore it remains critical or open to differences of opinion and further learning; there is always something new to learn, discover and explore. Language allows for personal identity through individual choices that are free but never absolute or final beyond correction or criticism. In the total world imposed by the image, knowledge is absolute with nothing new possible, therefore it must be accepted uncritically.

Because language is rational it also produces the highest standards in ethics and morality-rooted individual values and beliefs. Rationalism always produces the greatest moralism. In the ancient world the rational school of philosophy (Stoicism) based on their belief in logos (universal reason) was also the most ethical in their practice of universal peace, and equality. In world religions Buddhism stands as the most rational in its beliefs of simple universal truths leading to practical moral behavior (Four Noble Truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by selfish desire, suffering is alleviated by limiting selfish desire, curb selfish desire through the practical application of the Eightfold Path). Modern Rationalism culminating in the 19th century was also one of the profoundest in moral character in all strata of society, education, politics, economics and religion. The ethic of love rooted in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man was considered the essence of Christianity in the 19th century (Harnack, *What is Christianity?*). The Jewish rabbinical approach to learning through language is legendary for its rationalism and strict legalism as well as its Islamic



counterpart in the Muslim devotion to the Koran, Sharia Law and iconoclasm.

In the second order of language, ethics are grounded in personal choices as a product of rational criticism, which allows for meaningful differences of opinion and the free creation of values. In the first order of image learning, all views are standard and all behavior an expression of group conformity. "The image tends . . . to produce conformity, to make us join a collective tendency" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 35). Thus the two orders of thinking are opposed to each other. The first order in totalitarian fashion is in the process of eradicating the second order through purging critical reason from the mindset of the population like a mass spiritual lobotomy that removes part of the brain that contains the higher function of reason and abstract thought process. The image overwhelms the word through reduction and then removal and remaps the collective mind to think accordingly, freedom of thought is left open as possibility only because most people cannot think for themselves but are programmed through media saturation. Note the drift in social media from glorified email responses on Facebook to the forced shrinkage of the word to 120 characters on Twitter, to finally pictures only on Tumblr, and Instagram. The second order in critical toleration of the image does not want to eradicate it, but put image in its place, not as an expression of truth or reality but a simple illustration in service of the word and higher critical function of human nature through which humanity creates its self-definition, limits and significance. The second order of language thinking does not separate rational discourse in philosophy from a dramatic presentation in literature, or the arts, film or TV, etc. The Twentieth Century French Existentialists demonstrated the compatibility of rational discourse through abstract prose and exposition and the concrete embodiment of their ideas in dramatic forms such as plays, novels and movie illustrations. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel wrote the most

penetrating philosophical analysis of the modern condition of alienation as well as the greatest poetic description of modern despair and hope, for example, compare Sartre's tome *Being and Nothingness* with his play "No Exit" or Camus' essay on *The Myth of Sisyphus* to his novel *The Stranger*. Theologian Paul Tillich argued likewise that art serves as the spiritual barometer of culture. Through rational analysis of art, literature and drama the church will gain a better read on the spiritual climate of the society it hopes to evangelize and better tailor its message of the gospel to the concrete situation expressed through peoples felt needs. Even Jacques Ellul the leading social critic of visual media and advocate of word over image adopted a similar method of point and counter point as the existentialists by pairing the most penetrating sociological analysis of technology, raising the question how to limit autonomous technique and answering it with an allegorical interpretative method of the biblical text under the respectable umbrella of Barthian theology through his ethic of limits or nonpower. Compare *The Technological Society* to his biblical exposition of Genesis in *The Meaning of the City*.

14. On Facebook, friends can number into the thousands. New friends are just a click away; you don't even have to know them or even meet them to be friends. Aristotle said that friends are the people we eat with every day. Simple enough to grasp, but what does an ancient Greek philosopher know compared to the moguls of social media?

15. Baudrillard and Eco validated Gasset's thesis in *Revolt of the Masses* that science and technology sows the seeds of its own demise by elevating the mass of humanity through its values of discovery, invention and discipline, yet the mass revolt against those values that brought them to dominance. This is the same basic thesis that argues we are the victims of our own success as applied to capitalism and the accumulation of wealth. One generation works to achieve a

level of wealth that the next generation inherits with all the benefits of wealth but none of the sacrifice of the previous generation. Therefore it squanders it not knowing the value of wealth not having to work for it and being raised in privilege.

Gay Marriage is another recent example of simulacra. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. Contemporary society is under a spell, thinking it can remake the institution of marriage founded in the Bible between one man and one woman (Genesis 2 and Matthew 19) to include its opposite or whatever the courts deem acceptable; eventually the courts will accept the union of people and their pets. Already the Disney Corporation has changed the name of The Family Channel to Free Form, an ominous precursor to the dissolution of meaning to the sacred word family in American popular culture and its reprobate legal system.

16. Reality and Truth are not coequal or synonymous terms, but signify different metaphysical orders. Ellul noted that the unity of reality and truth expresses "the unity of being" (Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 96), or the right relationship between the Creator and his creation. Truth belongs to God's essence alone, as the One Eternal Absolute. Reality expresses the multifaceted finite human concrete situation. When our reality aligns with God's truth we experience the peace of redemption that passes understanding, harmonious being. Reality is the realm of sight that leads us away from the truth of the invisible God who cannot be seen and is found only through the word (speech, talk, conversation, discourse, lecture, song). The visible is the realm of false idols incarnated as very real visible powers (gods): Money, the State, and Technology (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95). The order of reality is the order of human life which Nietzsche argued may include error. "Life no argument—We have fixed up a world for ourselves in which we can live—assuming bodies, lines, planes, causes and

effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith, nobody now would endure life. But that does not mean that they have been proved. Life is no argument; the conditions of life could include error." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 177 [121]). Iconoclasm then becomes the mission of the church as it proclaims the gospel and demolishes spiritual strong holds which is the battle for the mind "destroying speculations . . . raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6); "iconoclasm is always essential to the degree that other gods and other representations are manifested . . . Today reality triumphs, has swept everything away and monopolizes all our energy and projects. The image is everywhere, but now we bestow dignity, authenticity and spiritual truth on it. We enclose within the image everything that belongs to the order of truth" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95).

17. In terms of an ethic of technology biblical truth translates as limit before use or law before license. For example, When adults set time limits on media use for their children anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour of screen time be it TV, computer or cell phone, they are practicing an ethic of technology.

Social critic Jacques Ellul stated; "The 'yes' makes no sense unless there is also the 'no' . . . the no comes first, death before resurrection. If the 'No!' is not lived in its reality the yes is a nice pleasantry, a comfort one adds to one's material comfort, and as Barth has conclusively shown the No is included in the gospel" Quoted in Lawrence J. Terlizese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Cascade: Eugene, OR, 2005), 127; Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, 25.

18. Original Divine Command: "From any tree of the Garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17 NASB).

Satanic Recreation of the original command: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'"(Genesis 3:1 NASB).

Imperative turns into question through a simple shift in voice emphasis, "Don't eat!" to "Don't eat?", inciting disobedience instead of obedience as its effect, confusing the knowledge of good and evil.

19. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. A copy is never greater than the original and to believe that a glorified reduction, a snap shot somehow surpasses the original shows just how far along the popular delusion has advanced. Simulacra is portent to antichrist: "The one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness"(2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Mass media qualifies as "a deluding influence": remaking the image of God in the image of an image. "Language is unobtrusive in that it never asserts itself on its own. When it [mass media] uses a loudspeaker and crushes others with its powerful equipment, when the television set speaks, the word is no longer involved, since no dialogue is possible. What we have in these cases is machines that use language as a way of asserting themselves. Their power is magnified, but language is reduced to a useless series of sounds which inspires only reflexes and animal instincts" (Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 23).

The first commandment teaches that "You shall not make any graven images . . . you shall not bow down to them nor worship them (Exodus 20:4, 5). The construction of image is always a reduction from an original and imperfectly copies what it claims to represent; presenting a false image of God, an idol.

The idol transforms its worshipers into its own image. All those who worship idols become like them (Psalms 115).

By worshiping the creature humanity dehumanizes itself by bowing down to the created order lower than itself. The prohibition against worshiping idols is meant to spare God's people from corrupting God's glory by reducing the invisible Creator to the visible creation and enslaving themselves to the works of their own hands. Idolatry exchanges "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . ." (Romans 1:23). The idol is the construction of man, representing his ideal of God (image) in his own image, which in turn recreates man as slave in the image of the idol. Here we see perfectly in the biblical model of idolatry, the same Transhumanists enterprise of constructing an ideal image (cyborg) in the image (mankind) of an image (the computer), leading not to human ascendance or godhood but dehumanization or slavery by placing humanity lower than its own creation (the cyborg condition). Man builds an idol he thinks represents God which in truth is a reduction of the glory of God into the image of the creature and lowers himself through worship of the false image of God making himself a slave to a thing that appears real but really does not exist outside of humanity's faith in its own self-projection.

The first commandment prohibits "graven images" the invisible God cannot be seen in the works of human hands (Acts 17). All images of God are an affront to his holiness and danger to his children. Idols reduce God to the false image which then further reduces worshipers.

Iconoclasm is the central liberation mission of the church in its declaration of the gospel.

"No one can see God and live" (Exodus 33:20). "Images are incapable of expressing anything about God. In daily life as well, the word remains the expression God Chooses. Images are in a completely different domain—the domain that is not God

and can never become God on any grounds" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 91).

20. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 96.

21. God's revelation comes only through the spoken word received by faith never through sight, which must remain subservient to the oral, spoken invisible message. "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). "We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen . . . By faith we understand . . . Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11). "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written; 'The righteous live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). "Set your mind on things above [the invisible Christ, "the way, the truth and the life"], not on the things that are on earth [the visible, material, tangible, concrete reality of the present world]." "Fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The aural, auditory sense or put simply the ear is the organ of perception and faith never the eyes. Sight brings only doubt; despite popular opinion seeing is not believing, but unbelief. The desire to see the truth is rooted in doubt and unbelief; "Unless I see . . ." doubting Thomas said, ". . . I will not believe" (John 20:25). "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). "Sight played an enormous role in the Fall and caused all of humanity and language to swing to its side. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the Bible so often relates sight to sin. Sight is seen as the source of sin, and the eye becomes the link between reality and the flesh. The eye is seen as the focusing lens of the body (but only of the body). The Bible speaks of the lust of the eye and of the eye as the source and means of coveting. Now we know

that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair, since sin always depends on it. "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20: 17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes everything—all the other sins" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 100, 101). Because Eve looked upon the fruit, she lusted after wisdom, the knowledge of good and evil, a possession she desired but did not work for or earn that did not belong to her. "Eve coveted equality with God . . . She coveted autonomy of decision" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 101). Lust is born from sight of the material possession. The Tenth Commandment lists a prohibition of desire on what does not belong to us but is rightfully our neighbor's: his wife, house, domesticated animals and servants, all must first be seen before desired. Today we call these possessions status symbols, spouse, house, cars, money, etc., etc., all the objects of consumer desire that dominate our visual horizon through advertising, commercials and the all-pervasive world of image, which fills us with materialistic greed.

22. Technological convergence brings TV, computer, cell phone, video game (telecommunications) together as one medium. Professor of Philosophy Andy Clark notes that the cell phone is the gateway to the cyborg condition: "The cell phone is, indeed, a prime, if entry-level cyborg technology" (Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 27). The cell phone has evolved from a clumsy mobile phone into a sleek microcomputer that puts the full resources of the internet at the fingertips of the user.

The computer medium heralds the absolute closing of the human mind and cultural diversity by subverting all ends to its means it creates the condition necessary for total domination of the human spirit. All total systems subvert ends to means in their revolutionary beginning, such as the Napoleonic empire, fascism and communism. "By any means necessary," or "for the good of the cause" becomes the motto of the radical



on the road to totalitarian paradise (Serfdom). The computer coopts all nontechnical areas; in the form of "technical aid and support" subverting their ends by overbearing means. As the absolute single point of convergence for all humanity the computer fixes its own organizational categories on every person, discipline (field) or organization that uses it. The passage of admission to digital utopia is technical conformity (surrender). All nontech people and fields must soon learn the ways of the computer, if they expect to survive in the new universal cyber regime (the technological order). Liberal Arts, for instance no longer exists as a separate track or discipline in a dialectical counter balance to Science. Beholden to the computer for success it has sold its spiritual birth right as moral conscience through cultural critic or prophet to the rational establishment. By way of apt analogy, in the past when churches received State support through official recognition as the established religion they became in effect the court prophets, chaplain's to the king. They "sold out" to the powers that be, forfeiting their divisive voice. Dissent is never allowed in any total system by definition, otherwise it would not be total. Those who profit from the system are not in a position to disagree with its direction without mortal endangerment. The old maxim "never bite the hand that feeds you" was rigorously applied by the official religions in the past. Likewise, rarely is a critical voice heard today through the prodigious production of liberal arts in media, except for science fiction film. The old dichotomy of art and technology embodied in the Intellectual verses the City model has resolved itself in the computer. Chilton Williamson, Jr. noted the subtle reeducation the older generation of writers must endure in order to practice their craft using the computer. "Writing ought to be, technically speaking, among the simplest and natural of human actions. The computer makes it one of the most complex and unnatural ones. It is nothing less than a crime against humanity, and against art, that a writer should be required to learn how to master a machine of any kind whatsoever in order to write a single

sentence. But no writer today can succeed in his craft if he does not learn to become a more or less skillful machine operator first." ("Digital Enthusiasm" in *Chronicles* [June 2014, 38.6], 33). The end or goal of writing (to be read by others) has been subverted by means of the computer (Subversion: to corrupt an alien system for different ends from within, for example; primitive Christianity was subverted by the political forces of the later Roman Empire, creating Christendom). Computer subversion of humanity has been repeated simultaneously with writing since the digital revolution in the 1990's.

By giving children at the earliest age possible a computer to play with and master, turning work into play, the technological oligarchy has guaranteed that they will grow to become computer technicians in some degree and has successfully circumvented the nasty reeducation process necessary to all revolutions in the past. As the product of the digital revolution the Millennial generation has inherited the onerous responsibility of being the first generation raised on the computer as their defining characteristic. They are the first non-national generation, identifiable by digital acuity, video game addiction and the cell phone, rather than by race, gender or creed. The world that they create will ultimately prove their humanity or not.

One machine that can do everything controls everyone, even now as I write an unsolicited advertisement appears on my computer screen telling me that "Technical support is designed to monitor your system for issues." Positively Orwellian! No greater insidious subtlety to seduce the human spirit than the emerging global technological order has appeared since the Tower of Babel!

All total systems are inherently corrupt and eventually self-destruct.

23. Philosopher Michael Foucault builds on Jeremy Bentham's

purposed panoptic system theory by arguing that Bentham's proposed universal prison surveillance system that kept prisoners under constant watch has been extended to contemporary society through media saturation. Law Professor Jerry Rosen argues that through social media society has entered a condition he describes as "Omniopticon" where we are all watching each other (*The Naked Crowd*); Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 152; Reg Whitaker *The End of Privacy: How Total Surveillance Is Becoming a Reality* (New York: New Press, 1999).

24. Hyperreal communities, churches, schools, dating sites do not allow for individual charisma, personal persona, flamboyancy, speech impediments, warts, blemishes, ugliness, beauty, intelligence, everything thing that makes an individual unique disappears behind the brilliance of a cartoon reality.

The modern socialization process once reserved for family, church and community in traditional society has been usurped by media and the State. Socialization is the rather sensitive and all important process through which values are imprinted on youth. Socialization is everything! Society receives its understanding of right and wrong, good and evil in a word normalcy through socialization. In the mission of the church socialization is equal to evangelism. If the church successfully evangelizes a society, converting everyone to the Christian faith, it must then pass those values to the next generation, if it fails to do so it must then start the whole evangelization process over. Regrettably, the American church is learning this lesson the hard way, after surrendering the socialization process of Christian youth to media, and public schools. The most media saturated and technologically adapt generation in human history is rapidly becoming the most nihilistic since late antiquity.

Media transmits collective values directly to the social body by passing the individual consciousness. Mass media transmits

its own values of consumption and materialism that traditional family, church and community as social agents cannot compete with according to social critic Herbert Marcuse. Media transmits the values of "efficiency, dream, and romance." "With this education, the family can no longer compete." The father's authority is the first traditional value to fall. (Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry to Freud* (New York: Vintage 1955, 88).

25. John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 19.

26. The only reason people give as to why they use media technology is because of its convenience, it is easier to send an email or text than write a letter and use a postage stamp. However, ease of use and convenience shows lack of understanding as well as accountability. "I use it because it is easy" is hardly a thought-out moral defense for one's action! And here is where the trap lies for all of us. The history of technology demonstrates that convenient and pervasive use over time slowly turns into necessity. What was once done because it was so easy to do, eventually must be done. TV, computer and most recently the cell phone, these technologies never appeared as necessities but convenience, but now they are irresistible necessities. Convenience turns into necessity because it was so easy to send a text, or email, we have forgotten how to communicate in any other way, or refuse to relearn those old ways. Convenience dulls the spirit and numbs the mind, producing stupidity and apathy by removing all other practices from our intellectual horizon. Beware of anything thing that looks so easy, it is nothing more than a hook to necessity. The old saying, "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is," applies to technology as well. "Whatever appears to make your life easier right now in the long run may make it more difficult." Convenience turns into habit, habit turns into need, need turns into addiction.

27. The friendships forged in traditional institutions create the social support network for an individual throughout his professional career. As an online professor I did not know how to write a letter of recommendation for a student I have never met in person. Education has become so dominated by technical learning, all students in essence are studying to be engineers in their field whether teachers, medical practitioners, social workers etc.; they are taught efficient methods as administrators or managers of large groups of people.

28. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962).

29. Quoted in Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society*, 43.

30. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 122. "Even more, it [the camera] keeps me from proceeding to cultural assimilation, because these two steps can be taken only in a state of availability and lack of preoccupation with other matters – a state of "being there." (Ibid).

31. In line with Baudrillard thesis on the orders of simulacra, popular cell phone use, namely texting, demonstrates regressive effects of the latter stage of simulacra: metastasis or reversal of effects. It is quite common to see people texting and even preferring texting to any other mode of communication, especially phone calling, when it is obviously easier to call and talk than it is to text, time wise and in terms of context and amount of content necessary for successful conversation, yet texting is preferred because of its impersonal nature; people prefer the harder task of texting because it is impersonal, however, impersonal communication is less effective to the point of communication.

32. *Radio Times* (January 2016). Hawking said bluntly, "I think the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race." Quoted in "Rise of the Machines"

in the *Dallas Morning News* Sunday, February 14, 2016, 1P. Recognizing and controlling the dangers of progress is a call for limits and boundaries to technological acceleration possible only through negation.

33. The fear of living without the necessity that controls us reveals the modern condition of technological determinism. In confronting determinism we must appeal to “the individual’s sense of responsibility . . . the first act of freedom, is to become aware of the necessity” (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxiii).

Necessity (whatever we fear we cannot live without) is always a limitation placed on human nature, such as the basic biological needs to eat and sleep. Necessity limits freedom and therefore power and ability. Death is also a necessity, without which new life and growth cannot take place. However, death is the last enemy, which is defeated finally in the resurrection of the saints (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). To believe as Transhumanists do that death can be overcome through technological enhancement can only result in abomination. Professor of Computer Science Matthew Dickerson prophetically asks, what if the Transhuman “transformation is based on something that is not true? What will we be transformed into?” (*The Mind and the Machine: What it Means to be Human and Why it Matters*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), xiv.

34. A campaign to “JUST SAY NO!” to further technological advance that threatens human existence, such as artificial intelligence, must be a collective effort for the entire human race, but begins with our own personal individual choices in limiting technological use, i.e. TV, computer, cell phone, and automobiles, and set boundaries to consumption on all consumer products. Resist the digitalization of traditional life through technological transfer of community to the online medium. Despite the convenience of a total online education it is unconscionable and detrimental if online students never

encounter a real college classroom, talk face to face with a professor and argue in group discussion with peers. Likewise, the church cannot remain the Body of Christ by shunting its responsibilities to parishioners, new members and seekers by declaring online and televised services equal to a live one. "Do not forsake the assembly of yourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25) prohibits a total digitalization of Christian worship and community. Christ said, "Where two or three have gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The bodily presence necessary for community conveyed in these passages must not be allegorized by techno-agnostics who equate physical isolation in front of an electric screen to be "just as good" as being there.

35. We are enslaved to what we fear we cannot live without whether it be money, sex or technology. The rich young ruler did not follow Christ because he could not imagine life without his wealth, the security, comfort and power it bestowed was greater than the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24). The disciples were in shock at Jesus' utter intolerance to devotion to anything other than God: "You cannot serve God and money [technology, power]" (Matthew 6:24). Knowing their own attachment to wealth, they despaired, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). It appears impossible to give up what we fear we cannot live without. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?" (Matthew 6:25); the perennial anxiety and pursuit of the faithless and fearful enslaved to material (bodily) necessity; "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing [enhancement]?" (Matthew 6:25). "For after all these things the Gentiles [unregenerate] seek" (Matthew 6:32). "But Lord Jesus, we cannot live without cell phones and computers, any more than we can live without money! Get real, be reasonable—Lord you are asking the impossible of mortal sinners." And Jesus agrees, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark

10:27).

36. Louis Armstrong – *What A Wonderful World* Lyrics | MetroLyrics

37. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxi.

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# 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<sup>{1}</sup> showed the percentage of **nones** was now up to **one third** of the population. The Pew Religious Landscape<sup>{2}</sup> 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-Againists 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 surveys, Portraits of American Life Survey 2012<sup>{3}</sup> and Faith Matters 2011<sup>{4}</sup>. 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 than 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 in America is much lower than that of other ethnicities. Many Hispanics in America 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 as 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](http://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](http://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](http://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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## Big Data

*"Big Data" describes the sea of digital facts, figures, products, books, music, video, and much more that we live in.*



*Kerby Anderson calls for a biblical response of discernment and integrity.*

We live in the world of “Big Data.” That is the new way people are trying to describe this sea of digital facts, figures, products, books, music, video, and much more. All of this is at our fingertips through computers and smartphones. And there is a lot of data. Eric Schmidt, executive chairman for Google, estimates that humans now create in two days the same amount of data that it took from the dawn of civilization until 2003 to create. No wonder people say we live in the world of “Big Data.”

This remarkable change in our world has happened quickly and seamlessly. Today we take for granted that we can create data and access data instantaneously. Pick up the book *The Human Face of Big Data* and look at the pictures and stories that describe the powerful impact the tsunami of data is having on our lives and our world.[{1}](#) Look at how this vast amount of data is being used by individuals, universities, and companies to answer questions, pull together information, and persuade us to purchase various goods and services.



One article in *USA Today* explains how “Big Data” will transform our lives and lifestyles.[{2}](#) Retailers can target you with online purchasing appeals because of the data they already collect from you when you are online. They can suggest books, videos, and various products you would be interested in based upon previous searches or purchases.

If you have a smartphone, think of how you already depend upon it in ways that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. It can help answer a question someone poses. It can direct you to a place to eat. If you need gas for your car, it can tell you where the closest gas station is located.

“Big Data” also provides power through instant access to

information. Juan Enriquez, author of *As the Future Catches You*, writes that “today a street stall in Mumbai can access more information, maps, statistics, academic papers, price trends, futures markets and data than a U.S. president could only a few decades ago.”[{3}](#)

Welcome to the world of “Big Data.” We have more information at our fingertips than any generation in history. As you will see, Christians need to be thinking about this change in our world. We as individuals and as a society must consider how to use all of this accumulated information wisely.

## **An Ocean of Data**

Nearly a century ago, a dystopian novel imagined a world where every building was made of glass so that various authorities could monitor what citizens are doing every minute of the day. Dan Gardner suggests that the world of Big Data already makes that possible.[{4}](#)

The term Big Data describes the continuous accumulation and analysis of information. There is a reason people are calling it Big Data. I noted earlier that humans now create in two days the same amount of data that it took from the dawn of civilization until 2003 to create. Some predict that we will now be creating that same amount every few hours.

Dan Gardner says we are awash in an ocean of information. “Every time someone clicks on something at Amazon, it’s recorded and another drop is added to the ocean. . . . Every time a customs officer checks a passport, every time someone posts to Facebook, every time someone does a Google search—the ocean swells.”

Anyone who has access to that data can begin to use powerful computer algorithms to sift through texts, purchases, posts, photos, and videos to extract more data and trends. Gardner says it will be able to extract meaning and “sort through

masses of numbers and find the hidden pattern, the unexpected correlation, the surprising connection. That ability is growing at astonishing speed.”

We actually welcome some aspect of Big Data. When I buy a book online from Amazon, it recommends other books I might want to know about and purchase. When I buy a book at Barnes and Noble, the register receipt instantaneously prints out a list of other books similar to the one I just purchased.

This ocean of Big Data is also intrusive. The government knows more about you than you might want them to know. The Internal Revenue Service is collecting more than your taxes these days. They are collecting a massive amount of personal information on your digital activities: credit card payments, e-pay transactions, eBay auctions, and Facebook posts.

Why is the Internal Revenue Service using Big Data to invade your privacy? Government leaders are putting pressure on the IRS because the federal government needs more money, and it is estimated that as much as \$300 billion in revenue is lost to evasion and errors each year. Collecting and analyzing this data might be one way to close the so-called “tax gap.”

The amount of data the government and private industry collects on us each day is overwhelming. Like the fictional novel, we seem live in a world where all the buildings are made of glass.

## **Keeping Up With the Data**

Juan Enriquez believes that we are going to have trouble keeping up with all the data coming our way. He explains the data explosion in his essay, “Reflection in a Digital Mirror.”<sup>{5}</sup> He says, “Most modern humans are now attempting to cram more data into their heads in a single day than most of our ancestors did during entire lifetimes.” He goes on to say that in the time it takes to read his essay, “the amount of

information generated by the human race will have expanded by about 20 petabytes.” That is equivalent to about three times the amount of information currently in the Library of Congress.

We are trying to keep up. He estimates that we “try to cram in, read, understand, and remember at least 5 percent more words than the year before.” That essentially means that five years ago we were trying to cope with 100,000 words per day. Now we are trying to cope with 130,000 words per day.

Who can keep up? Two years ago, a global marketing intelligence firm estimated that “we played, swam, wallowed, and drowned in 1.8 zettabytes of data.” To put that in perspective, the firm used this illustration. Imagine you wanted to store this data on 32-gigabyte iPads. You would need 86 billion devices, just enough to erect a 90-foot-high wall 4,000 miles long.[\[6\]](#)

The good news is that we don’t have to collect, catalog, and analyze all the data. Computers with powerful algorithms can do much of it. We will benefit greatly from this tsunami of data. We will go from sampling the available data to having a collection of enormous data sets. We will know the world around us in unprecedented ways.

The explosion of digital data is also unprecedented. Juan Enriquez estimates that in 1986, only 6 percent of the world’s data was digital. The world wide web was still three years away. There was no Google or any of the services that we take for granted today. Now more than 99 percent of the world’s written words, images, music, and data are in digital form.

On the one hand, we are drowning in a sea of data. On the other hand, we have access to this data because we live in a digital world. The real question we will have to ask in the 21st century is what to do with all this data.

We will need discernment. Proverbs 3:21 admonishes us to

“preserve sound judgment and discernment.” Proverbs 15:14 reminds us that a “discerning heart seeks knowledge.” Paul prayed that believers would “be able to discern what is best” (Philippians 1:9-11). We will need discernment in this age of Big Data.

## Dark Data

We live in a world filled with digital facts, figures, books, music, and video. Most of it is at our fingertips, and that is a good thing. But there is also the great concern over what could be called “Dark Data.”

Marc Goodman has written about “Dark Data,” and he is concerned.<sup>[7]</sup> He has worked on security issues in more than 70 countries and sees the possibilities for criminals in our digital world.

He reminds us that criminals and terrorists have found ways to use these new devices and innovations. Sadly, we often underestimate their creativity and can easily be a step behind those who intend us harm. Sometimes they have better access to information than law enforcement and Homeland Security.

Drug-runners in Mexico not only have the latest smartphones but have actually been building their own encrypted radio networks in their country. Drug cartels in Columbia are using their vast wealth from drugs “to fund research and development programs in everything from robotics to supply chain management.”

During the terrorist attack in Mumbai five years ago, the terrorists were armed not only “with the standard artillery and explosives, but also with satellite phones, Blackberrys, night vision goggles, and satellite imagery.” If that is what terrorists had access to years ago, it is reasonable to assume that the next terrorist attack will come from terrorists using even more sophisticated technology.

One of the greatest innovations for the terrorists is their open-source intelligence center, which they developed across the border in Pakistan. They were able to monitor the Internet and social media to determine the progress of their terrorist attacks. They had a real-time open-source feedback loop that gave terrorists situational awareness and tactical advantages.

One final concern about dark data is the ability to affect many more people with a crime or terrorist attack. Access to all of this data gives the bad guys an advantage unavailable to criminals in the past. Jesse James could rob a train. Bonnie and Clyde could rob a bank. A few dozens or a few hundreds would feel their impact. Today hackers can steal information from millions of people. Cybercrimes can ruin the lives of many more people, and cybercriminals may even be harder to catch.

These new technological advances and the incredible amount of data will no doubt make our world a better place. But we should also realize that criminals and terrorists will also be there to exploit it. We need to train those in law enforcement and counterterrorism in the latest technology so they can keep us safe.

## **Big Data and Surveillance**

The TV program begins with these words: "You are being watched. The government has a secret system: a machine that spies on you every hour of every day. I know because I built it. I designed the machine to detect acts of terror, but it sees everything."

The program I am talking about is the CBS series *Person of Interest*. The creator of the program, Jonathan Nolan, hit a cultural nerve about our increasing lack of privacy. In her article about the program, Susan Karlin reminds us that the storyline is fiction but based upon real-life source material

that Jonathan Nolan cited in his interview with her.<sup>{8}</sup> He got some of his ideas from books like *The Watchers: The Rise of America's Surveillance State* and from the government's defunct Total Information Awareness Office.

This isn't the first time Jonathan Nolan has raised the question of surveillance in the scripts he has written. When he co-wrote the script for the movie *The Dark Knight*, he inserted a scene where Batman turns all of the Gotham City cell phones into tracking devices so he can find the location of The Joker.

According to Susan Karlin, "Nolan got a taste of encroaching surveillance while growing up in the North London neighborhood of Highgate. 'Scotland Yard began putting cameras up everywhere,' he recalls of a time long before local phone hacking scandals erupted. 'There were cameras out on street corners; English police employed cameras. When I moved to the States at 12, there weren't any cameras. Now you're seeing some cities catching up. In Manhattan, they counted 5,000 in 2005. In 2010, the number was uncountable.'" When you add all the cell phone cameras in the population to these other cameras, you can easily see we have lost our privacy.

The popularity of the television program is no doubt due to many factors, in addition to concerns about privacy and surveillance. Whatever the reasons, it has struck a nerve and caused us to once again think about Big Brother.

This topic also reminds us that we must live our lives above reproach. Philippians 2:14-15 says "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach," which is an attribute that should describe all of us. Live a life of integrity and you won't have to be so concerned about what may be made public in

age where we are losing our privacy.

## Notes

1. *The Human Face of Big Data*, Against All Odds Productions, 2012.
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3. Juan Enriquez, *As the Future Catches You*, Crown Business, 2005.
4. "Big Data could know us better than we know ourselves," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 27, 2012.
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# C.S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn explains how a series of radio talks during WWII became one of Christianity's most cherished classics.*

One can rarely predict all the consequences which will follow a particular decision. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded



Poland. Two days later, France and Britain declared war on Germany. World War II was officially underway. Back in England, C. S. Lewis was “appalled” to find his country once again at war with Germany. Nevertheless, he believed it was “a righteous war” and was determined to do his part “to assist the war effort.”[{1}](#)

At this point in his life, Lewis was already a fairly successful Oxford don. “His academic works and lively lectures attracted a large student following.”[{2}](#) Although he published a number of academic studies, Lewis also enjoyed writing popular literary, theological and apologetic works. In 1938 he published the first volume of his science-fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*. And in 1939, as the war began, he was working on *The Problem of Pain*, a thought-provoking discussion of the problem of evil and suffering.[{3}](#)



It was this latter work which attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC. Welch and his assistant, Eric Fenn, were both committed Christians who firmly believed that Christianity had something vital to say to the men and women of England as they faced the horrors and challenges of war. According to Welch:

In a time of uncertainty and questioning it is the responsibility of the Church – and of religious broadcasting as one of its most powerful voices – to declare the truth about God and His relation to men. It has to expound the Christian faith in terms that can be easily understood by ordinary men and women, and to examine the ways in which that faith can be applied to present-day society during these difficult times.[{4}](#)

After reading *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis, Welch believed that he had found someone who just might meet his exemplary standards of religious broadcasting. He wrote to

Lewis at Oxford University in February 1941, and asked if he might consider putting together a series of broadcast talks for the BBC.<sup>{5}</sup> Lewis responded a couple days later, accepting the invitation and indicating a desire to speak about what he termed “the law of nature,” or what we might call “objective right and wrong.”<sup>{6}</sup> Although Lewis could hardly have known it at the time, this first series of talks would eventually become Book I in his bestselling work of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.

## Right and Wrong

*Mere Christianity* originated as a series of talks entitled *Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*. Lewis pitched his idea to James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, in the following terms:

It seems to me that the New Testament, by preaching repentance and forgiveness, always *assumes* an audience who already believe in the law of nature and know they have disobeyed it. In modern England we cannot at present assume this, and therefore most apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt. Hence if I gave a series of talks, I shd [sic] mention Christianity only at the end, and would prefer not to unmask my battery till then.<sup>{7}</sup>

In certain respects, this was a rather difficult time to be involved in religious broadcasting. Most of the talks were not pre-recorded, but were given live. And because of the war, the British government was anxious to insure that no information that might be “damaging to morale or helpful to the enemy” end up in a broadcast.<sup>{8}</sup> As Eric Fenn, the BBC’s Assistant Director of Religion, who worked closely with Lewis in the editing and production of his talks, later recalled, “. . . every script had to be submitted to the censor and could not be broadcast until it bore his stamp and signature. And

thereafter, only that script—nothing more or less—could be broadcast on that occasion.”[{9}](#)

Lewis not only had to contend with these difficulties, however, he also had to learn (as anyone who writes for radio must) that this is a very precise business. Since “a listener cannot turn back the page to grasp at the second attempt what was not understood at the first reading,” the content must be readily accessible for most of one’s listening audience.[{10}](#) Additionally, the talks must fit within a narrowly defined window of time. In Lewis’s case, this was fifteen minutes per talk – no more, no less. As one might well imagine, Lewis initially found it rather difficult to write under such constraints.[{11}](#)

Eventually, however, the combination of Fenn’s coaching and Lewis’s natural giftedness as a writer and communicator paid off. The talks were completed and successfully delivered. The BBC was pleased with its new broadcasting talent and quickly enlisted Lewis for a second series of talks.[{12}](#)

## **What Christians Believe**

This second series would be titled *What Christians Believe*. Since these talks would require Lewis to more directly communicate some of the core truths of the Christian faith, he sent “the original script to four clergymen in the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches for their critique.”[{13}](#) Although Lewis was a brilliant and well-read individual, he was nonetheless a layman with no formal training in theology. Since his desire was to communicate the central truth-claims of Christianity, and not just the distinctive beliefs of a particular denomination, he wanted to be sure that his talks were acceptable to a variety of Christian leaders. Although a couple of them had some minor quibbles with certain things that Lewis had said, or not said, they were basically all in agreement. This was important to

Lewis, who later tells us, “I was not writing to expound something I could call ‘my religion,’ but to expound ‘mere’ Christianity, which is what it is and was what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not.”[\[14\]](#)

The BBC was elated with this second series of talks, liking them even more than the first. According to Justin Phillips, who wrote a book on the subject, it was this second series of talks which most closely fulfilled James Welch’s original vision as Director of Religion for the BBC “to make the gospel relevant to a people at war. It speaks of the core doctrines of Christianity and explains them in plain English to the general listener.”[\[15\]](#)

Eric Fenn, who helped with the editing and production of the talks, wrote appreciatively to Lewis afterwards to tell him he thought they were excellent. He then asked if Lewis might consider doing yet another, even longer, series sometime in the near future.[\[16\]](#) Lewis would agree to the request, but he was beginning to get a little disenchanted with some of the unanticipated consequences of his success. Already a very busy man, with a variety of teaching, writing, and administrative responsibilities, Lewis now found himself, in addition to everything else he was doing, nearly overwhelmed by the avalanche of mail he was receiving from many of his listeners. This Oxford don was clearly making a powerful connection with his audience!

## **Why Was Lewis So Popular?**

According to Justin Phillips, “Even though Lewis was a prolific correspondent himself, even by his standards it was all becoming a bit too much to cope with.”[\[17\]](#) Indeed, were it not for the able secretarial support of his brother Warnie, Lewis may *not* have been able to keep up with it all.

Jill Freud, one of the children evacuated from London at the

start of the war, lived with the Lewises for a while. She recalled just how much help Warnie offered his brother, whom they called "Jack":

He did all his typing and dealt with all his correspondence which was considerable – so huge it was becoming a problem. There was so much of it from the books and then the broadcast talks. And he was so meticulous about it. Jack wrote to everybody and answered every letter.[{18}](#)

Indeed, Warnie later estimated that he had pounded out at least 12,000 letters on his brother's behalf![{19}](#) So what made Lewis so popular? What enabled him to connect so well with his readers and listeners?

In the first place, Lewis was simply a very talented writer and thinker. When it came to communicating with a broad, general audience, Lewis brought a lot to the table right from the start. But according to Phillips, the BBC should also be given some credit for the success of the broadcast talks. He writes, "The attention given to Lewis's scripts by his producers in religious broadcasting made him a better writer."[{20}](#)

Ironically, even Lewis's rather volatile domestic situation may have contributed to his success. Lewis was then living with his brother, who had a drinking problem, a child evacuee from London, and the adoring, but also dominating, mother of a friend who had been killed in World War I. Phillips notes:

All this helped to 'earth' Lewis's writings in the real world. . . . It took him out of the seclusion of the Oxford don . . . and gave him a real home life more like that of his listeners than many of his professional colleagues.[{21}](#)

Finally, Lewis combined all of this with a rather disarming humility in his presentations. He wasn't pretending to be better than others; he was only trying to help. And his listeners responded in droves.

## The Impact of the Broadcasts

The BBC eventually got a total of four series of talks out of Lewis. Each of the series was so successful that the BBC continued, for quite some time, to entreat Lewis to do more. But according to Phillips, Lewis was becoming increasingly disillusioned with broadcasting. The BBC issued one invitation after another, but nearly eighteen months after his fourth series concluded Lewis had turned down every single one of them.[{22}](#) Although he would eventually be tempted back to the microphone a few more times, the days of his broadcast talks were now a thing of the past. While he was glad to be of service in this way during the war, Lewis never really seemed to care that much for radio. Indeed, in one of his less serious moods, he even blamed the radio “for driving away the leprechauns from Ireland!”[{23}](#)

In spite of this, however, the impact of the broadcasts has been immense. Since first being aired on the BBC, these talks have generated (and continue to generate) a great deal of interest and discussion. *Mere Christianity*, a compilation of the talks in book form, continues to show up on bestseller lists even today.[{24}](#) And Phillips, speaking of the cumulative impact of *all* of Lewis’s writings, observes that while numbers vary, “in the year 2000 some estimates put worldwide sales of Lewis’s books at over 200 million copies in more than thirty languages.”[{25}](#)

As the origin of *Mere Christianity* shows, however, we cannot often predict how it may please God to use (and perhaps greatly multiply) our small, seemingly insignificant, investments in the work of His kingdom. Lewis was simply trying to do his part to be faithful to God and to help his countrymen through the horrors of World War II. But God took his humble offering and, like the story of the loaves and fish recounted in the Gospels, multiplied it far beyond anything Lewis could ever have reasonably imagined.

This should be an encouragement to us. As we faithfully exercise our gifts and abilities in the service of Jesus Christ, small and inconsiderable though they may seem to be, we may one day wake to find that incredibly, and against all odds, God has graciously multiplied our efforts to accomplish truly extraordinary things!

## Notes

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*Time of War*, 158.

20. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 165.

21. *Ibid.*, 183.

22. *Ibid.*, 268.

23. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 276.

24. See, for example, [www.bookvideoawards.com/bookstandard/images/BestSellersAwards\\_Program.pdf](http://www.bookvideoawards.com/bookstandard/images/BestSellersAwards_Program.pdf) and [peopleofthebook.us/2007/02/](http://peopleofthebook.us/2007/02/).

25. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 279.

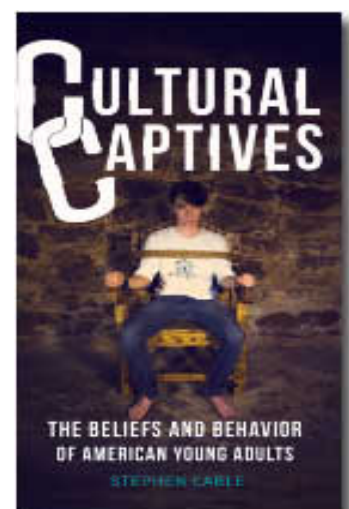
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## Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

One of the dismaying trends I reported on in my book, *Cultural Captives*, was the significant increase in the percentage of people who indicated that their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. I referred to this group collectively as the **“nones”** (those with “no religious affiliation”). The percentage of emerging adults (i.e., 18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as **“nones”** in 2008 was 25% of the population. This level is a tremendous increase from the 1990 level of 11%.





Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of **“nones”** among this young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the **percentage of emerging adult “nones” was now up to 33% of the population**, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying **35% of emerging adults identifying as “nones”** (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).

When we consider the number who do 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 trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

#### Acknowledgments:

The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.

The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> was the source of our data on the Pew survey

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# The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults

*Steve Cable explores the results of Probe's survey of 18- to 40-year-old born agains, focusing on the role of parents in their faith.*

## The State of Born Again Emerging Adults

In previous articles [{1}](#) we considered the dramatic changes in the beliefs of American evangelicals particularly among young adults. It certainly appears that we are sliding into an era of cultural captivity where one's identification with Christ and an evangelical church does not keep one from holding a set of beliefs consistent with the culture and counter to biblical truth. Here we want to consider the role that parents had in establishing these inconsistent belief systems of their children, and think about some ways today's parents may be able to counter these destructive patterns in the future. Before looking at the roles parents do and should play in establishing these belief systems, let's consider some of the key belief trends that are driving our concern.



Foremost among our concerns is the dramatic change in the number of young adults who hold to no Christian religious beliefs or espouse a liberal view of Christianity. Looking at data from 1970 to the present, we uncover a disturbing new trend. From 1970 through 1990, the number of 18- to 25-year-old Americans who professed no Christian belief was constant at about twenty percent of the population. In 2000, this non-Christian group had grown to about thirty percent of this young generation, and by 2010 the numbers had exploded to around thirty-six percent. [{2}](#) If this trend continues, less than half of young adults will consider themselves Christians by the year 2020.

This concern over the future is heightened by the conflicted beliefs of young born agains. Among young adults, who consider themselves born again believers, only about one-third of them ascribe to a basic set of biblical beliefs. These beliefs include a creator God, a sinless Jesus, salvation through grace, a real Satan, an accurate Bible and the existence of absolute moral truths. This statistic means that over two-thirds of these born agains do not ascribe to one or more of these beliefs. Overall, this means that less than ten percent of young American adults profess to being born again and hold to a set of biblical beliefs as compared to the sixty-eight percent who hold to no Christian beliefs or a liberal view of Christianity.

When we delve further into young adult beliefs, we find that their beliefs appear to be hodgepodge of cultural concepts and what's going on in their life, with little or no connection to their religious upbringing. Even though emerging adults looked to religion as a place to learn good morals, in his study Christian Smith discovered a chilling paradox. "It was clear . . . that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives." [\[3\]](#) One emerging adult observed, "I don't think it's the basis of how I live, it's just, I guess I'm just learning about my religion and my beliefs. But I still kinda retain my own decision or at least a lot of it on situations I've had and experiences." [\[4\]](#) In fact, when we look at how many have a consistent biblical worldview that carries over into their views on sexuality, science, a concern for the poor, and basic religious practices, the survey data indicates that less than two percent of evangelical young adults would qualify. So the overwhelming majority of young evangelicals are not carrying their basic religious beliefs into the realm of everyday decision making.

# The Impact of Parents on Spiritual Beliefs

So, what role did their parents have in establishing these inconsistent beliefs?

In 2010, we commissioned a survey to help us examine the causes and potential opportunities to change the marked shift in the thinking of young adults over the last decade. We surveyed over 800 born again, young adults across America to get an understanding for what they thought about spiritual and cultural issues *and* how they felt about their beliefs and actions. One area of questioning was, “When you think about how you developed the religious beliefs you hold today, who do you feel had the greatest influence on you? Did your beliefs come from your family, your friends, your church, your independent studies, your college professors, or others?”

The answers we received to this question were not shocking but still sobering. More than sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that the source that had the greatest influence on their religious beliefs was a family member, with the vast majority of those saying it was parents or grandparents. Over twenty percent of the respondents pointed to another influential individual such as a pastor, youth leader, or college professor. Only about eleven percent stated that something less personal such as a youth group or the Bible was the greatest influencer of their religious beliefs.

As Christian Smith noted, “What the best empirical evidence shows . . . is that . . . when it comes to religion, parents are in fact *hugely* important.”<sup>{5}</sup> In fact, “religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference.”<sup>{6}</sup>

Of those who stated that a family member was the primary influence, over seven out of ten stated it was their mother or

grandmother while less than three out of ten said it was their father or grandfather. So clearly among born again young adults, the female side of the family has a greater influence in passing down religious beliefs than do the males. One can postulate that this may be due to a combination of greater spiritual involvement on the female side of the family and a higher level of communication with their children. However, the rate of fatherly influence almost doubles for young adults with a biblical worldview compared to those without such a worldview. So it appears that fathers who hold a biblical worldview are much more likely to be involved in establishing the spiritual beliefs of their children.

Less than one out of ten of the respondents listed a pastor as the primary source of influence, and only three percent listed a youth group. These church-related functions may have an important role in helping to shape our religious beliefs, but our survey shows that it is at best a secondary role for the vast majority of people. We are mistaken if we are relying on the church to pass on the right type of beliefs to our children. Parents, what you communicate through your lives is picked up by your children. What are you communicating to them concerning religious beliefs?

## **The Translation of our Beliefs**

Since the beliefs of today's young adults are dramatically different than the dominant beliefs of forty years ago, does this mean that older adults have changed their beliefs as well, or have the beliefs been translated by the younger culture into something different?

An important part of understanding this question is that the survey results on who was the most significant source of our religious beliefs were almost identical regardless of racial background or levels of church attendance. In other areas of consideration such as biblical worldview, views on cultural

behavioral issues, and church involvement, we found significant differences based on racial background, education, etc. But it appears clear that no matter our race, economic level, or religious beliefs, our mothers are the primary sources that pass down those beliefs to the next generation. In other words, if born-again believers have degraded views on worldview and cultural issues, it appears that their parents are communicating (or at least not contradicting) similar views.

As we look at the hodgepodge of religious and cultural beliefs held in our society, we can see the results of what Christian Smith referred to as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[\[7\]](#) The Baby Boomers and their children are captives of our society's focus on pluralism and tolerance as the only acceptable views. With this view, I can hold to certain religious beliefs that are strictly private in their application. But, when those religious views begin to move into areas which may imply someone else's belief is wrong, then I need to modify my beliefs to be more accepting. To believe in God as creator and Jesus as his sinless Son is probably okay. But when I say that Jesus is the only way we can be reconciled to God, I am starting to step on other's toes, making it inherently wrong.

On the one hand, Baby Boomers have bought into the cultural distaste for absolute beliefs which makes them loathe to state their beliefs too strongly. This viewpoint has been interpreted by the younger generation as an indication that those beliefs are not firm but rather culturally determined. So living in a more multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and sexually liberated generation, these young adults pick and choose among biblical beliefs and distinctly non-biblical beliefs, with no apparent concern for the discontinuity in their belief systems.

The culture is winning the battle on two fronts. First, the older generation is buying into the importance of not being too forthright with their views. Second, the younger

generation, given no clear direction from their parents, is buying into a disjointed set of views that avoids any conflict with others. According to Smith's research, the result is that the vast majority of young adult Americans are holding to some form of mainline Protestant philosophy. This philosophy states that Jesus is a worthwhile model of good behavior but our focus should be on getting along and not making waves rather than promoting faith in Christ.

## **Countering Parents with a Truth Experience**

Have we, the Baby Boomers, the parents and grandparents of our society, so flummoxed up the works that we have started a downward spiral of disconnected beliefs from which we cannot recover? Of course, time will tell, but if we hold to a consistent set of biblical worldview beliefs, we should not sit back and wait patiently for the end of Christianity as we know it. We are called to "proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man so that we might present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

Interestingly, of those respondents who graduated from college and have a biblical worldview, a much greater percentage of them pointed to a source other than a family member as the most influential. This factor is probably the result of college students having their faith challenged and looking for answers from pastors, Bibles, and books. In other words, the direct challenge to their faith presented by some professors and many of their peers caused some to fall away but caused others to examine the reasons for their belief in Christ. We do not need to fear this examination. Our Lord's case is more than capable of standing up to examination. In fact, it is the only religion that has a consistent, viable explanation for the complexities and shortcomings of life as we know it.

If a hostile, or at least a highly skeptical, attack on the

basis of their faith caused some to examine their reasons for belief and come out with a stronger, more biblical faith, perhaps a friendly encouragement to examine their faith could produce similar results. If the parents are passing on a watered down, inconsistent set of beliefs, perhaps we can change those beliefs by causing the young adults to run them through a consistency and credibility filter. Probe has been doing this for years through our [Mind Games](#) conferences and summer camps for high school students. We have seen that this approach makes a difference.

Is it too late to make a difference in the lives of our young adults? When Viggo Olsen was in his mid-twenties, beginning his residency to become a doctor, his wife's parents had a change in their belief system, becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Viggo wanted to restore his wife's parents to sanity so he began an intense study to show the obvious failure of Christianity to address the real world. What he discovered was that a biblical worldview was the only viable answer to understanding our lives and our future. He went from a mission to disprove Christianity to accepting Jesus not only as his Savior but as his purpose in life as a medical missionary to Bangladesh. [\[8\]](#)

In a similar way, we need to encourage, or better yet force our younger church-goers to examine their beliefs and compare them with the teachings of Christ. Ask them not to live an unexamined life conforming to the culture, but rather to examine their beliefs and see if they stand up to close examination.

## **Consistent Worldview Parents are Best**

Unfortunately, many parents have not been passing on a clear view of faith in Christ from generation to generation. Instead our belief system, even among those who believe they are going to heaven when they die because of their faith in Jesus, has



been eroding into a mishmash of popular cultural beliefs mixed in with some variation of beliefs taught in the Bible.

Confronting young adults with the disconnects and shortcomings created by their mixture of beliefs as compared to a consistent Christian worldview can get their attention and bring about changes in their thinking. This confrontation with truth has been a major focus of Probe throughout the years.

However, a major take-away from these studies should be for the young adults who are parents of our future generations. Listen up, young adults! If you do not communicate a clear set of biblical worldview beliefs through your words and through your actions, your children are going to pick up on the worldview you *do* communicate. Your desire to fit in with the culture and not make too many waves will result in children who believe that the culture is the ultimate authority on truth and right living. Why? Because that is what your life is saying to them loud and clear.

Suzie strongly believed that sex outside of marriage was wrong before God. It had a detrimental effect on the individuals caught up in it and on the society which promoted it. However, she felt that many of her friends did not view it in the same way she did. So, to get along, she never said much about it. What she did not realize was that her children were watching what she said. Even though she had told them she hoped they would remain pure until marriage, they did not hear her standing up for sexual purity among her friends. Without even thinking about it, her children relegated sexual purity to a nice ideal but not an important belief to live by. Suzie was instrumental in establishing their thinking on this topic. Their thinking lined up with what Suzie demonstrated was important to her even though it did not really line up with what she truly believed.

As parents, our beliefs have the greatest impact on our children's views. Things that you may not believe but grit

your teeth and say nothing about will become core beliefs of your children. The society is saying they are true; they don't see a consistent disagreement from your words or your life. Thus, it must be the right value to hold. This process of gradually turning over our core beliefs to be reset by the culture is at least partially the reason for the tremendous shift in our cultural morality over the last sixty years.

As parents, we can make a difference in future generations. We need to hold fast to the truths of Jesus Christ, speak them with our tongues, and live them through our actions. Our children are still looking to us for truth in this area. Let us commit to not let them down by deferring to the norms of the culture.

## Notes

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7. Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-170.
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