# A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

*Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

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

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

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

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

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

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

for the practice of evil.

## The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Notes**

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

8. John 18:10



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# Social Media

*Kerby Anderson assesses how social media's influence is changing our brains and the way we think. He also provides an overview of censorship within social media.*

The influence of social media in our society has increased dramatically in the last decade. This leads to two very important questions. First, how are the various forms of social media and these digital devices affecting us? Second, should we respond to the documented examples of censorship on these social media platforms?

## Social Media Influence

More than a decade ago, social scientists and social commentators expressed concern about how the Internet in general and social media in particular was influencing us. Nicholas Carr raised this question in an *Atlantic* article entitled "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" He observed that "Over the past few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory." He believed this came from using the Internet and searching the web with Google.

He later went on to write a book with the arresting title, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. He surveyed brain research that helped to explain why we don't read as much and why it is so hard to concentrate. The

Internet and social media are retraining our brains. He says, “Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”

A developmental psychologist at Tufts University put it this way. “We are not only what we read. We are how we read.” The style of reading on the Internet puts “efficiency” and “immediacy” above other factors. Put simply, it has changed the way we read and acquire information.

You might say that would only be true for the younger generation. Older people are set in their ways. The Internet could not possibly change the way the brains of older people download information. Not true. The 100 billion neurons inside our skulls can break connections and form others. A neuroscientist at George Mason University says: “The brain has the ability to reprogram itself on the fly, altering the way it functions.”

The proliferation of social media has also begun to shorten our time of concentration. Steven Kotler made this case in his *Psychology Today* blog, “How Twitter Makes You Stupid.” He once asked the author of the best-selling book why he called it the “8 Minute Meditation.” The author told him that eight minutes was the length of time of an average segment of television. He reasoned that “most of us already know exactly how to pay attention for eight minutes.”

Steven Kotler argues that Twitter was reducing the time of concentration to 140 words (back when that was the word limit). He showed how Twitter was constantly tuning “the brain to reading and comprehending information 140 characters at a time.” He concluded that “[I]f you take a Twitter-addicted teen and give them a reading comprehension test, their comprehension levels will plunge once they pass the 140 word mark.”

Not only is there a problem with concentration; there is a

problem with distraction. A study at the University of Illinois found that if an interruption takes place at a natural breakpoint, then the mental disruption is less. If it came at a less opportune time, the user experienced the “where was I?” brain lock.

Another problem is what is called “continuous partial attention.” People who use mobile devices often use their devices while they should be paying attention to something else. Psychologists tell us that we really aren’t multitasking, but rather engage in rapid-fire switching of attention among tasks. It is inevitable they are going to miss key information if part of their focus is on their digital devices.

There is also the concern that social media and digital devices are reducing our creativity. Turning on a digital device and checking social media when you are “doing nothing” replaces what we used to do in the days before these devices were invented. Back then, we called it “daydreaming.” That is when the brain often connects unrelated facts and thoughts. You have probably had some of your most creative ideas while shaving, putting on makeup, or driving. That is when your brain can be creative. Checking e-mail and social media sites reduces daydreaming.

These new media platforms present a challenge to us as Christians. As we use these new forms of media, we should always be aware of their influence on us. They can easily conform us to the world (Romans 12:2). Therefore, we should make sure that we are not taken captive (Colossians 2:8) by the false philosophies of the world.

Christians should strive to apply the principle set forth in Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about

these things.”

A wise Christian will use discernment when approaching the various social media platforms. They provide lots of information and connect us with people around the world. But we should also guard against the worldly influence that is also promoted on many of these platforms.

## Social Media Censorship

Big Tech companies have been censoring content for many years. Many years ago, the National Religious Broadcasters began monitoring censorship on these social media platforms through their John Milton Project for Religious Free Speech. Even back then, their report concluded that “The free speech liberty of citizens who use the Internet is nearing a crisis point.”

A recent Senate hearing provided lots of additional examples. Senator Marsha Blackburn asked why her pro-life ad was pulled during the 2018 campaign because Twitter deemed it “inflammatory.” It is worth noting that she did receive an apology from the executive who added that they made a “mistake on your ad.” Senator Ted Cruz pointed to a Susan B. Anthony List ad that was banned. It had a picture of Mother Teresa with her quote: “Abortion is profoundly anti-woman.” At the top of the poster in the committee room was the word: CENSORED.

A number of commentators (Laura Loomer, Milo Yiannopoulos, Alex Jones) have been banned from Facebook and Instagram. Steven Crowder’s YouTube channel has been demonetized. Nearly two-dozen PragerU videos have been slapped with a restricted label on YouTube. The list goes on and on.

Big tech does control much of the media world. Google controls 90% of worldwide search, 75% of smartphone operating systems, 67% of desktop browser, and 37% of digital advertising. Add to this other platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube that

also have a profound influence. At the Senate hearing, Ted Cruz noted that these big tech companies “are larger and more powerful than Standard Oil was when it was broken up” and “larger and more powerful than AT&T when it was broken up.” But does that mean government should get involved?

Those who are advocating government intervention make the case that “platform access is a civil right.” The argument is that private companies are actually violating the civil rights of Americans in the same way that preventing someone to speak in a public park would be a violation. They argue that the big tech companies are a monopoly. And they call for federal and state regulation of these social media platforms arguing that the Supreme Court has argued in the past that government cannot restrict your access to the public square.

The problem with that argument is two-fold. First, these big tech companies are private companies not the government. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms are private property and not the public square. We may not always like what they do, but they are privately owned technology companies and not the federal government, which is governed by the First Amendment.

Second, these companies are protected by a section of the 1996 Communications Decency Act that keeps them from being exposed to potentially crippling liability for something posted on their platform. Some politicians have called for changing that legal protection, but Congress seems unlikely to do anything like that in the near future.

Many conservatives are wary of having the government get involved in patrolling social media platforms. They remind us of the 1949 FCC Fairness Doctrine. This regulation was supposed to provide an opportunity for media outlets to provide content that was fair, honest, and balanced. Talk radio and other forms of media exploded once the Fairness Doctrine was removed. In most cases, government regulation of

the media hurt conservative voices more than helped them.

Even if government were to regulate content on social media platforms, it is worth mentioning that the major tech companies would probably have lots of influence. Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg would have a place at the table as government drafted various media regulations. It is likely that company and many others might even help craft regulations that would protect them from future competitors. We have seen this picture before in other instances when government intervened.

Some have even suggested that we close our social media accounts. If you don't like the way the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* reports stories or provides commentary from people on your side, you don't have to subscribe to those newspapers. If you don't like how MSNBC or Fox News covers stories, you don't have to tune to that TV network. Media outlets are already choosing what to print or broadcast. Social media platforms are no different.

Sam Sweeney has this advice: "Delete your Facebook, yesterday. Don't get your news from Twitter. The issues of free speech on social media will no longer matter to you. They don't matter to me. I've made a decision not to subjugate myself to the whims of our new overloads."

I think most of us want to keep our social media accounts because of the benefit we receive. But I also realize that in light of what we have discussed in this article, many will decide to follow his advice and drop one or more of these social media accounts. We leave that decision to you.

*Additional Resources*

Kerby Anderson, *Arts, Media, and Culture* (Cambridge, OH: Christian House Publishing, 2016).

Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *Atlantic*, July/August 2008.

David French, “Social-Media Censorship is the Product of Culture and Commerce,” *National Review*, 6 June 2019.

Stephen Kotler, “How Twitter Makes Your Stupid,” *Psychology Today*, 15 May 2009.

Jessica Melugin, “Conservative who want Facebook, other social media regulated should think twice,” *Foxnews.com*, 11 June 2019.

Sam Sweeney, “Close Your Social-Media Accounts,” *National Review*, 10 June 2019.



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# Are Surveys Fake News?


On March 7, 2019, Probe’s Senior VP Steve Cable gave a one-hour presentation drawing on his decades of statistical research and insight to probe deeply into the trustworthiness of news containing references to surveys. In this message he shows why we should remain skeptical of what surveys purportedly indicate. Sometimes the actual results are directly opposite of what is claimed.

You can download the mp3 audio recording here.

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# “Gosnell”: The Doctor Who Snuffed Out Babies and His Silencing Accomplices

“Were you guys at the ‘Gosnell’ showing?” asked the older gentleman at the urinal next to me. “Have you ever been in a theater where nobody speaks as they leave the movie?” Two very unusual events had just occurred: the reaction he mentioned and men talking at the toilet! A men’s room discussion ensued, focusing on the heaviness of the topic: abortion and baby killing.

Despite unseasonable cold and rain, my wife and I had sat with a few others in the local theater late on a weeknight. It was the last chance to see a film that’s been just as shut down as the discussion of its topic: killing of babies born alive by an abortionist so unprincipled that he was foresworn by fellow abortionists and pro-abortion advocates. The perpetrator: Dr. Kermit Gosnell. The film bears his name. It is also subtitled, maybe exaggeratedly, “The Trial of America’s Biggest Serial Killer.” But who cares if a few others killed more humans than he did over 30 years’ time? Gosnell is deservedly serving three life sentences for first degree murder for offing who knows how many newborns as a “service” to poor women.

As we exited the theater, I had nearly commented about the palpable silence, but realized the gravity of the moment and stopped myself. Perhaps it would take a while to process the newly resurrected horror. The alternate thought occurred to me that, even with a likely self-selecting audience of pro-

lifers, silence is what got us to the cultural situation we are in regarding abortion. Would anyone even comment?

The “right to choose” has now been superseded by a debate about personhood of fetuses and babies. Christians often remain silent. Many believe fetal sonogram pictures have dealt a blow to the euphemisms. Turns out, it’s a picture that sealed Gosnell’s doom.

The story tells itself, so the film simply needed to be believable. The superbly cast “Gosnell” pulls it off, with characters as diverse as inner-city young women employed by the mad doctor to a suburbanite prosecutor and mother of five to the queerly eccentric, self-justified Gosnell himself. (The lead actor is the actual Gosnell’s doppelganger!) A well-played Emo blogger may have made the difference in prosecuting the deranged doctor, while the mainstream press was absent without leave. Cable TV-level cursing lends a less religious, more real-to-life tone, but it seemed a bit overdone.

“Gosnell’s” biggest strength, unfortunately, is the unraveling of a chamber of horrors haunted by the abortionist’s classical piano playing and taste for exotic flowers. It is surreal. This cat- and exotic turtle-loving, soft dictator’s demise began as a drug case. In a classic storyline, the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) and FBI encroach on a local police investigation, forcing the investigation down the cul-de-sac of a mere drug bust. As a law unto himself, Gosnell had become a dealer. No one was prepared for the baby body bags and slime of Gosnell’s “clinic.” That is, the headlines and court case were stranger than fiction—and more disturbing than most. Frankly, the pre-Halloween release seems appropriate. Still, the obvious moral implications and the inevitable appeal to conscience provides a critical reality check for all time, something that cuts through the slogans and euphemisms surrounding abortion.

That tension between the practice no one talks about and the

inherent law of right and wrong within human hearts at times splits the screen. The pro-abortion prosecutor subtly rethinks her position as she cuddles her new baby. The most telling scene is the courtroom practice session with the defense lawyer, brilliantly played by Nick Searcy. Here, Gosnell unequivocally states that he has no respect for laws about training healthcare workers up to code. More chillingly, he declares that his diagnosis of fetal-and live-birth babies' viability is the definitive opinion. In other words, the doctor totally violated the classical "do no harm" doctrine of medicine as aided and abetted by authorities, wantonly violated laws designed to protect women, and played God with babies' lives even beyond the allowance of Roe-liberalized abortion laws. But truth has a way of emerging. And history repeats itself in a way.

How so? The up-to-the-minute story, which smells as fishy as Gosnell's clinic and the cover-up-by-negligence that kept him in grim business for a third of a century, is a tale of viewpoint discrimination. The little-known fight to stanch this movie's release and cancel showings parallels the way that authorities ignored—by decree—the egregious crimes of Gosnell. This week, headlines like "'Gosnell' Filmmakers: Theaters Dropping Movie, Preventing People From Buying Tickets" emerged on Christian news web sites—and nowhere else, apparently. "John Sullivan, the film's producer and marketing director, said, 'The fact that we've been dropped from theaters where the movie is the number 6 or number 9 movie is just something you don't see. 'It's hard not to believe it isn't about the content of the movie'."{1} Despite an excellent opening run, Facebook ticket-buyers report refunds from AMC outlets without explanation and in explicable screening cancellations.

It still seems as if there's a conspiracy to shut down knowledge of the facts. The spirit of the grand jury-convening judge who demanded the case not be about abortion lives on.

Recently, NPR played the same card, avoiding the hot button term "abortion." *The Daily Beast* reports that "National Public Radio's own past reporting called Kermit Gosnell an 'abortion doctor.' But when the makers of a new film ["Gosnell"] wanted to pay to use the phrase on air, no dice." According to actual events, which comprise most of the screenplay, health officials had direct orders from the governor's office not to follow up on complaints about the clinic.

Gosnell's "hellhole" of an abortion mill defied imagination. It was a nasty nest of cat filth and biohazards. Turns out, lots of that biological "waste" were the bodies of infants killed both in the womb past legal dates, whom the butcher-doctor "snipped" in the neck after they were delivered. "As liberal commentator Kirsten Powers wrote at USA Today back in 2013, 'Infant beheadings. Severed baby feet in jars. A child screaming after it was delivered alive during an abortion procedure. Haven't heard about these sickening accusations? It's not your fault.' Powers continued, 'Since the murder trial of Pennsylvania abortion doctor Kermit Gosnell began . . . there has been precious little coverage of the case that should be on every news show and front page.'" Years later, the crickets can still be heard. Gosnell's gruesome methods boggled the mind of jurors and moviegoers. Still, the trial was not allowed to "be a case about abortion." Nor the film. Yeah, right.

So, the docudrama about a "prolific serial killer" seems to be merely another extension of the strange silence induced by a biased system and a duped public. On a radio interview, the producer said he had to raise funds himself, as with other such independent conservative films. He has faced astonishing resistance at every turn in the four-year process of creating and releasing "Gosnell." Studios supposedly balk because of controversy, but conservatives know that there is more viewpoint discrimination than anything at work. One would almost think that there are tweaked consciences being

defended.

In a monumental scene, the prosecutor shows the gruesome picture of a late-term born-alive baby boy who had been executed by Gosnell. Courtroom fact-finding, arguments, and persuasive appeals gave way to the impact of a picture, worth many more than a thousand words. May the light of day shine on the awful picture of death-dealing in and out of the womb in the court of public opinion and individual hearts and minds. "Gosnell" provides a revealing and compelling picture that will hopefully live on despite the spotty and embattled theater releases.

Note

1. *The Christian Post*, posted Oct. 22, 2018, accessed Oct. 25, 2018. www.christianpost.com/news/gosnell-filmmakers-theaters-dropping-movie-preventing-people-from-buying-tickets-228090.



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# Politicized Culture

*Kerby Anderson examines the politicized nature of American culture, offering the Bible's antidote of a call to civility.*

## Social Media's Role in Politicizing Issues

I think most of us lament how just about everything in our culture has become politicized. We can attribute that to the fact that we live in a nation that is divided. The clash of worldviews is more apparent than ever before.

In this article I want to talk about the politicized nature of our culture. First I would like to look at how technology has accentuated this problem. In a recent column, Daniel Foster points the finger to social media. The title of his column is “Everything All the Time.”{1}

His perspective is simple. “It is no longer the case that technologies of communication merely accelerate the public discourse, they now ensure that every possible public discourse happens simultaneously.” In other words, we don’t hear these comments one after another. We hear every comment all at the same time.

We have always had conflicts and differences of opinion in this republic. But these seem to have intensified because of the means of our communication. We could work through our differences “at a pace consistent with
social cohesion.” Now we “get a no-holds-barred battle royale in which all things are always at stake.”

Football and the national anthem provide a good example. We were told that Colin Kaepernick did not have a job in the NFL because he was either: (a) a terrible quarterback, or (b) was being blackballed by the NFL owners.
Foster argues that the truth was obviously in between: he is a middling NFL talent who might have the job if he didn’t come with so much baggage.

Of course, the discussion quickly moved beyond him to many of the other NFL players that decided to kneel during the national anthem. Either they were presented as saints or traitors. Soon the protests became something else: a referendum on America. Lost in all of that was the reason for the actions of the football players.

The tackle for the Pittsburg Steelers (Alejandro Villanueva) decided to stand for the national anthem with his hand on his

heart. As an ex-Army Ranger, he could do nothing less. Yet, he was made a hero by many and criticized by others.

He wasn't trying to make a statement, and I don't think he was trying to defy his coach and teammates. He was merely trying to do what he thought was right. He was distressed with how he was being portrayed in the media by both people who approved of his actions and by those who disapproved. He was merely trying to do what he thought was right before playing the game of football.

In this world of new media, everyone's opinion is available simultaneously. And the most strident opinions are often given more attention because they are the more extreme. There is little time to digest them and evaluate them because they are coming fast and furious.

## Politicizing Sport and Education

An NFL player kneeling during the national anthem isn't the only place where we see a politicized culture.

For example, the controversy over the NFL players seemed to be dying down until President Donald Trump intensified the debate with his speeches and tweets. But politics in sports began long before he became president.

ESPN has been losing viewers, in part, because it has become much more political. Sports journalist Clay Travis put it this way: "Middle America wants to pop a beer and listen to sports talk, they don't want to be lectured about why Caitlyn Jenner is a hero, Michael Sam in the new Jackie Robinson of sports, and Colin Kaepernick is the Rosa Parks of football."

In fact, a recent survey validates his conclusions. "The study aggregated 43 different media markets to see the political leanings of ESPN consumers in those markets."{2} The study found that Republicans were
fleeing ESPN in droves. In the last year, the ESPN audience

became 5 percent less Republican and ESPN 2 actually became 10 percent less Republican. The biggest partisan shift happened on ESPN News, whose audience became 36 percent less Republican.

Last week the editors at the *Wall Street Journal* explained why we need some areas of our life that are not dominated by political thought. "Healthy democracies have ample room for politics but leave a larger space for civil society and culture that unites more than divides. With the politicization of the National Football League and the national anthem, the Divided States of America are exhibiting a very unhealthy level of polarization and mistrust."{3}

Politics has also been a part of education, especially higher education, for some time. Political correctness led to attempts to prevent certain professors from gaining tenure and kept certain speakers from even being allowed to speak on campus. Universities may say they believe in free speech, but I think we all know that certain religious views and political views are essentially banned from the academy.

Politics has now become part of the business world. Just like on college campuses, we see that certain social and political views are not allowed in the corporate world. Just ask employees at Google and Mozilla who lost their jobs because one wrote a memo about gender and diversity and the other gave a donation to support traditional marriage. No wonder America is so polarized. Nearly everything in our world has become political.

This politicized political environment has moved into nearly every area of life, including the military.

## Politicizing the Military

The military might be one arena that you could assume would not be politicized. Unfortunately, we have seen how even the

military has been affected by the political environment we find ourselves in today.

We have some examples during the 2016 presidential campaign. Candidate Trump seemed to question the heroism of Senator John McCain when he said, “I like people that weren’t captured.” Trump also belittled the Khan family who criticized him at the Democratic Convention. His approval ratings dropped significantly due to his critical comments about that Gold Star family.

More recently, we have seen the controversy that erupted when a Gold Star wife and a member of Congress complained about the way President Trump talked on the phone to her about the loss of her son. Before it was over, you had the media, members of Congress, and key figures in the Trump administration making comments and charges about what was supposed to be a desire to console a mother who lost her son.

In a recent column, Ben Shapiro reminds us that when we politicize a sacred space in our culture it is a serious problem.{4} He believes it is serious “because no culture can exist without certain cultural capital—trust—and that trust exists only when there are certain spaces in which we can assume agreement without having to ask.”

When there is shared agreement, there is communication and less friction. If every issue becomes contentious, then the chances for miscommunication increase. Also the cost of transactions increases dramatically.

One of the cultural taboos (until recently) have been the politicization of Gold Star families. Their loved ones have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and they certainly deserve to be left alone to grieve and rebuild their lives. They should not be at the center of politicized statements.

President George W. Bush provides a good example of how to respond. You might remember that he was the target of a Gold

Star mother by the name of Cindy Sheehan. Instead of opposing her or reacting to her, he allowed her to make harsh political statements and did not respond.

It is worth remembering she alleged that Bush went to war for oil. She even said that Bush sent her son to die to make his oil friends rich. She even camped out near his home in Crawford, Texas to protest him. He showed character and restraint.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us to learn. In this politicized environment, we need to be peacemakers as people of integrity and civility. We should practice restraint because it is often better to turn the other cheek. Sometimes it is better not to respond or retaliate. After all, that is what is what the Bible tells us to do.

## Philosophical and Spiritual Roots of Politicizing

Why has nearly everything in society become politicized? We have talked about the role of social media and other cultural factors. Today I would like to look at the philosophical and spiritual reasons.

What we are seeing in our society can also be seen in Western civilization. It is the loss of civility. The two words share the same etymology. The root word means to be "a member of the household." Just as there are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household, so there are rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. Those rules have collapsed in the 21st century.

How can we summarize the principles of civility? I believe Jesus simply expressed the goal of civility when he taught that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). If we truly love our neighbors, then we should be governed by moral standards that express concern for others

and limit our own freedom.

Perhaps that is why civility is on the decline. More and more people live for themselves and do not feel they are morally accountable to anyone (even God) for their actions or behavior. We live in a world of selfishness and narcissism and we aren't about to let anyone limit our freedom to be ourselves.

Civility also acknowledges the value of another person. Politeness and manners are not merely to make social life easier. We are to treat each other with respect and afford them the dignity they deserve as people created in the image of God. It is improper not to treat them with the dignity they deserve.

Again, this may help answer why civility is on the decline and political divisions seem to be growing. An increasing majority in our society no longer believes in moral absolutes. A significant number do not believe in God and therefore do not believe we are created in God's image. The moral restraints that existed in the past are loosed. As this crisis of morality and theology unfolds, so does barbarism and decadence. Civility is what is lost from society.

If this is so, then the rise of rudeness and incivility cannot be easily altered. Miss Manners and others have written books about how our nation can regain its civility. But if the crisis is greater than a lack of anners (and I believe that it is), its solution must be found in a greater social change than merely teaching manners or character.

Ultimately, a return to civility must flow out of a moral and religious change. And I believe Christians should lead the way by exemplary behavior. In essence, Christians must be the best citizens and the best examples of civility in society.

## The Bible’s Antidote

Let’s turn from the loss of civility and the subsequent rise in a politicized culture to what the Bible has to say about this idea of a civil discourse.

At the heart of civility is the biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself. While it is relatively easy to love people who are your friends or people who are nice to you, the real test of Christian love comes when we are with strangers or with people who are not civil to you. When we find ourselves being criticized in social media or face to face, we shouldstill treat these critics with dignity and respect even if they are not civil to us. Even if they are not gracious toward us, we should not repay them with incivility.

Our duty to be civil to others should not depend on whether we like them or agree with their moral or political perspectives. They may be disagreeable, and we are free to disagree with them, but we should do so by giving grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that “A gentle answer turns away wrath.”

Civility also demands that we not retaliate. The Apostle Paul teaches in Romans (12:9, 14, 21) we are to “Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” Paul goes on to say that we should “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” Finally, he concludes, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Civility also requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that
he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”

Civility also requires that we watch what we say. The Bible clearly warns us of the danger of the tongue in James 3:5-8. We should watch what we say and what we write.

We should work to cleanse our language of harsh, critical, and condemning words. We should rid ourselves of nasty and vulgar language. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

In summary, we should be a positive example as we engage the world. We should do so with courage, compassion, character, and civility.

**Notes**

1. Daniel Foster, "Everything All the Time," *National Review*, 16 October 2017, www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2017-10-15-2050/everything-all-time.
2. "Shocking Study Reveals Just How Liberal ESPN Has Become," The Daily Caller, 24 May, 2017, dailycaller.com/2017/05/24/shocking-study-reveals-just-how-more-liberal-espn-has-become/
3. "The Politicization of Everything," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 September 2017, www.wsj.com/articles/the-politicization-of-everything-1506291118.
4. Ben Shapiro, "Gold Star Families Are Sacrosanct," *National Review*, 24 October 2017, www.nationalreview.com/article/453028/honoring-gold-star-families-protecting-innocents-some-things-must-remain-sacred

# 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.


*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/

## 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/

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/

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. Terlizzese, *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 programed 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. Terlizzese, *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-gnostics 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.

# Trends in American Religious Beliefs: An Update

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

## Are Nones Still Increasing Toward a Majority?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Protestants while 43% are non-Christian.

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

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

## Biblical Worldview Beliefs Considered from A Newer Survey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## How Confident are Americans in Those Running Organized Religion?

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

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

Not surprisingly, the surveys show our confidence in these

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Hispanic Religious Landscape

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

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

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

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

Eastern religion?

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

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



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# 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."{5} 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.{7} 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 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.{8} 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.

2. Chuck Raasch, “Big data transforms our lives and lifestyles, *USA Today*, 13 December 2012.

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.

5. *Human Face of Big Data*, 18-21.

6. Ibid., 19.

7. Ibid., 74-77.

8. Karlin, Susan, “‘Person Of Interest’ Creator Jonathan Nolan Isn’t Paranoid—Or Is He?” *Fast Company*, 21 September 2011.



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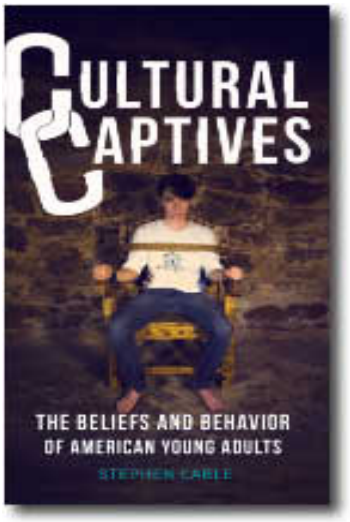
# Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

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, 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