Welcome to the Machine: The Transhumanist God

Authorized Dreams Only Please!

Have you ever wondered if scientists could build a giant machine to solve all the world's problems? Or better yet, why not just become machines and get rid of people all together? Imagine it: no more worries, sickness, war, drug addiction, or poverty. We can solve the world's problems by simply getting rid of people. This sounds fantastic but is actually the goal of the new religion of Transhumanism, which wants to replace the human race with machines.

 The wisest man once said there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9). Despite all our modern innovation and progress, the age-old desire of mankind to become God remains the same. This new religion is steadily gaining ground, perfectly fit for our hyper technological twenty-first century. Transhumanism's beliefs are simple, but their implications will be revolutionary. They want to transcend our mortal bodies and create a super intelligent godlike human and machine hybrid, called a cyborg, or something like the Borg from *Star Trek*. This super machine will solve all our material and spiritual problems by curing disease, extending life expectancy indefinitely, and providing for a meaningful existence through creating a continual sense of euphoria in the brain. There will be no limits to what this super man/machine will be able to do. *All we need to do* is surrender our wills to achieve universal peace and happiness.{1}

Pink Floyd used to sing, "Welcome to the machine. What did you dream? It's alright we told you what to dream."{2} In the brave new world ruled by the cyborg, dreams will all be programmed and peaceful so as not to upset the inhabitants of

utopia. With this hybrid technology, someone will make our decisions for us.

All technology expresses its creator's values and represents a certain view of the world, and how things should be. It is anything but value-free. The question for us is, who will decide what the future will be like in a technologically determined age?

You are What You Worship

Technology shapes the human conception of itself and its relation to the world, including our view of God. In a mechanical age, it is not surprising that people conceive of themselves and others as machines.{3} Human relationships are reduced to efficiency and usefulness or to convenient arrangements. For example, marriage is already largely viewed as an economic contract between two people who may not have anything else in common, rather than as a sacrificial commitment.

Transhumanist philosophy takes the modern mechanistic view to its ultimate level of altering humanity to become a machine. The idea that we become the thing we worship finds greatest expression in the twenty-first century. Those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115). Those who worship money become greedy. Those who worship drugs become addicted, and those who worship the machine will become a machine. In the past, philosophers and poets often used the machine as a metaphor of dehumanization and alienation from modern life; modern society was thought to function like a machine.{4} This means in a machine culture, people feel like numbers or spare parts and therefore entirely expendable. Individual meaninglessness in a mechanistic society will be realized in the very near future, so that individuals will be spare parts and completely assimilated. The future super computer will offer humanity everything, except the freedom not to choose

assimilation.

The machine represents the ideal existence, even the ideal being. The idea of “salvation in the machine” derives from modern thought in a deistic and Unitarian God who created a clockwork universe.{5} Transhumanism has simply transposed that deity into the machine itself and removed the Clock Maker. Now it’s the clock they worship.

Transhumanism affirms artificial selection instead of natural selection. They believe that through science and technology, humanity can direct the cause of evolution. Humanity controls its own evolutionary process to reach a perfectible state. Instead of millions of years to evolve a new species, it will be done in decades, maybe even in one generation.

The Singularity Is Near

Transhumanists expect the merger of humanity and machine around 2045 in an event they call the Singularity. This means artificial intelligence (AI) will equal or exceed human intelligence and there will no longer be any discernible difference. Humanity will lose all distinct consciousness and consider itself as one being.{6}

Humanity then must change itself genetically to keep pace with AI. This will create a giant planetary super organism that knows no distinctions. Humanity will merge with the rest of nature through genetic engineering, and nature will become indistinguishable from the machine. We will no longer know the difference between organic and inorganic, or natural and artificial, something already prevalent today in cities, weather patterns, and food production.

A super organism looks something like a beehive, anthill, or termite mound; various individual cells work together as one. So by mid-century Transhumanism envisions total global unity, not at the political level between states, but ontologically

and biologically. We will have evolved into one massive planet—truly Spaceship Earth, completely interrelated and interdependent, like an anthill. This will be the technological version of the kingdom of God or the Transhumanist version of the millennium.

Ray Kurzweil and the Singularitarians believe people will eventually be able to upload their consciousness into a computer and live forever. [Note: for an intriguing Christian perspective on this idea in a compelling novel, Probe recommends *The Last Christian* by David Gregory.] The religious nature of this movement is obvious in its millennialism or belief in the coming perfect society, and also in its belief in progress and immortality. Critics call the Singularity "the rapture of the nerds," indicating its close connection with religious belief and millennial expectations. The Singularity represents religious belief for computer geeks. The acceptance of progress and human perfection makes Transhumanism the heir of modernity, with its ideal of technological utopianism and its mechanistic view of the body. It's modernism with a vengeance.

The Artilect War

The future may not bring the perfection of the Singularity, but the disaster of the Artilect War. An Artilect is an artificial intelligence or super computer. AI researcher Hugo de Garis predicts that the Transhumanist vision will be disastrous and will result in gigadeath (the death of billions of people). He hypothesizes that by the end of the century, Cosmists, or technically modified people, will want to build Artilects to join with humanity, but that Terrans, or unmodified people, will oppose their construction because it has no benefit to them. A nuclear war will ensue, probably initiated by Terrans as their only way to stop Cosmists.{7}

Jacques Ellul once remarked that "the technical society must

perfect the ‘man-machine’ complex or risk total collapse.”{8} There is no other place to go but up. If the current human enhancement project fails it may prove to have devastating effects for the future of the human race, and if it succeeds the human race faces techno-enslavement or pseudo-extinction by being transformed into another species.

Will the Singularity really happen? It is very possible. Or maybe the Artilect War will happen instead. Perhaps technology will bring the apocalypse instead of utopia. It is all science fiction right now, but science fiction is often correct in the broadest terms. Recall Jules Verne’s vision of space travel to the moon in the nineteenth century when people thought it was pure fantasy and laughed because there was no way to break earth’s gravitational pull. But his work inspired a generation of rocket scientists to find a way to do it, and within a century man was walking on the moon. Something considered impossible was achieved.{9}

A basic principle of futurism states that anything is possible to achieve within twenty years given the resources to do it. And the Bible states that nothing is impossible for humanity in a unified technological society. Gen. 11:6 says “Now nothing that they imagined will be impossible for them.” This of course is talking about Babel, but I think it demonstrates the fact that the discussion of a transhuman transformation should be taken as a credible threat and should be addressed by the church.

Ethic of Limits

The essence of Transhumanist philosophy revolves around the idea that there are no natural or divine limits to what technology can accomplish. It serves the basic technological imperative that says what can be done should be done! This view unleashes all restraint and frees us from all limits, and is one of the greatest examples of the church’s cultural

captivity since we do not present a different view of technology from the rest of society.

This maxim is obviously dangerous because any limitless action leads to self-destruction as a natural corrective. Humanity cannot presume to be greater than the natural limits arrayed against it, such as death or the scarcity of resources. Humanity must learn to live within boundaries.

Christians are called to respect limits and the right balance in its use of technology, between its misuse and its non-use. In an age of limitless technology the church must present an ethic of limitation. This means finding limits to technology, such as limiting computer use, limiting driving, electricity, or even not upgrading. This may seem small, but in trying to discover a workable ethic of technology, it represents something we can do right now. The widow's mite (Mark 12:41-43) will not solve the church's budget deficit, but should be given anyway because it was something she could do, so an ethic of limitation remains a course of action open.

An ethic of limitation only becomes obvious when the situation appears desperate, such as with nuclear weapons, where not even one mishap can be afforded. Other examples consist of over-eating, drug addiction, over-fishing or hunting, or any activity that exhausts natural resources. Because people did not practice limits to begin with, they are now faced with a real possibility of collapse or catastrophe. We must discover the limits to any technology, if we are to use technology correctly and benefit from it. The history of the Tower of Babel teaches that if mankind does not practice self control, God will impose limits Himself in judgment (Gen 11:1-9).

Notes

1. Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York:Penguin, 1999); Gregory Stock, *Metaman:The Merging of Humans and Machines into a*

Global Superorganism (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1993); Lewis Mumford, *The Transformations of Man* (New York:Collier, 1956); Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (New York:Vintage, 1964), 428-436. It was techno critics like Ellul and Mumford that saw the techno future more clearly and soberly than the previously noted Transhumanists. Ellul argued that information would eventually pass from the machine straight to the human brain electronically without being processed through consciousness and that breeding will all be done through artificial means, and natural procreation will be forbidden (432, 433). Whatever problems and disturbances the technology of the future will create will be solved through "a world-wide totalitarian dictatorship" (434). This is exactly what Transhumanist philosophy will bring. Mumford argued that modern technical society will eventually produce a machine replacement for man (100, 117-132).

2. Pink Floyd, "Welcome to the Machine" in *Wish You Were Here*, Capitol, 1975.

3. Cecelia Tichi, *Shifting Gears:Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (Chapel Hill, NC:The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 16; David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology:The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York; Knopf, 1997), 143-171.

4. Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age* (New York:Anchor Books, 1951); Nicols Fox, Against the Machine:The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art and Individual Lives (Washington DC:Island Press, 2002).

5. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine:The Pentagon of Power* (New York:Harvest, 1970), 33; Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, 146; Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation:A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (New York:Routledge, 1992).

6. Lev Grossman, "2045:The Year Man Becomes Immortal", *Time* (February 21, 2011), 43-49.

7. Hugo De Garis, *The Artilect War:Cosmists vs. Terrans:A Bitter Controversy Concerning Whether Humanity Should Build Godlike Massively Intelligent Machines* (Palm Springs, CA:Etc Publications, 2005).

8. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 414.
9. Howard E. McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination* (Washington DC:Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997), 9-27.

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Emerging Adults: A Closer Look at Issues Facing Young Christians

"Emerging adults" is a term coined by sociologists to capture the new reality of 18- to 30-year-old Americans who have not fully assumed the responsibilities of classic adulthood. In previous articles, we looked at disturbing information on the beliefs of emerging adults in America from surveys by Christian Smith of Notre Dame, by Probe Ministries, and by others. In them, we found clear evidence of accelerating erosion in accepting and adhering to basic biblical truths for living, even among those who were born again. Our emerging cultural milieu of pop post-modernism is clearly taking many young adult Christians captive to the "philosophies of men" (Col. 2:8). Here we will take a closer look at the erosion of belief in several important areas.

Christian Smith and his fellow researchers at Notre Dame published an initial book, *Souls in Transition*, covering the results of their 2008 survey of the religious beliefs and actions of emerging adults from age 18 through 23. We discussed their findings in two earlier articles: *Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America*, and *Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths*. Their deep distress over some of the results of their surveys and interviews led them

to publish a follow-up book in 2011 entitled *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. In this book, they focus on five specific areas of concern identified by their earlier research:

1. *Moral aimlessness*
2. *Materialistic consumerism*
3. *Intoxicated living*
4. *Deep troubles from sexually liberated behavior*
5. *Lack of interest in civic and political life*

The troubling characteristics of emerging adult life in America in the early years of the twenty-first century remind us of what Paul warned of in 2 Timothy when he wrote: "in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, . . . arrogant, . . . ungrateful, . . . without self-control, . . . reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Tim 3:1-5).

One major factor in the growth of these problems is the widespread acceptance of pop post-modernism throughout our culture. As Smith points out, the post-modern theory became "democratized and vulgarized in U.S. culture" becoming a "simple-minded ideology presupposing the cultural construction of everything, individualistic subjectivism, soft ontological antirealism and absolute moral relativism."{1}

This popularized post-modern view says there is no objective truth, only the practical truth I choose to live by with my friends. This view leads to a basic disconnect with the teaching of Jesus who claimed His purpose was to "testify to the truth" (Jn. 18:37) because He is the truth.

Dale Tackett, author of The Truth Project, put the problem

this way, “When what is right is what’s good for me, you will find all of the moral chaos that we see today.”{2}

In what follows, we will focus on three of the five areas of concern: moral aimlessness, materialistic consumerism, and the lack of interest in civic and political life.

Moral Viewpoint – A Floating Standard

In his study of American emerging adults, Smith found that their morality is adrift with no standard to hold it in place.

What is morality in the first place? Morality is defined as “a system of ideas of right and wrong conduct.”{3} For Christians, this system is set out for us in the Bible, particularly in the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus, and the New Testament epistles. The Bible makes it clear that God is the source of true morality. It is our responsibility to learn and apply His moral precepts. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Or as Paul instructed in 1Thessalonians, “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (5:21-22). Paul is saying hold fast to the morality taught by Christ.

In a Christian nation, how can there be any confusion about morality? Well, sixty percent of emerging adults say that “morality is a personal choice, entirely a matter of individual decision. Moral rights and wrongs are essentially matters of individual opinion, in their view.”{4} And where do these opinions come from? One emerging adult put it this way, “Like just kinda things that I thought up, that I decided was right for me. So I don’t know. I honestly don’t. It just kinda came outta thin air.”{5} So, we can either look for the Bible as the source of our morality or we can just create it out of

thin air.

When faced with a moral choice, almost half of them said they would do what made them feel happy or would help them get ahead. Less than one out of five said they would "do what God or the scripture" says is right. Many of them said they would not really know if their choice was right or wrong until after it was done and they could evaluate how they felt about it.

Not only do they not look to the Bible or society for their moral compass; they believe that it is morally wrong to assume there is a common morality that applies to all. Because we must be tolerant and accept other's views as right for them, we must not apply our moral precepts to their actions. As Smith put it, "Giving voice to one's own moral views is itself nearly immoral." What they fail to realize is that complete moral relativism and tolerance actually dishonor the beliefs of others. With this view, they cannot accept new views which are superior to their own or act to correct views which are inferior. What someone else thinks is about morality is immaterial to them.

This type of thinking will ultimately lead to disaster for the people embracing it. As Chuck Colson said, "So often, the great disasters (of the past) were caused by people disregarding God's standard of right and wrong and doing what was right in their own eyes . . . We've stopped moral teaching in our country and we are seeing the inevitable consequence of failing to teach moral values to a culture. We are seeing chaos."{6}

The whole topic of morality is not something most emerging adults give much thought to. One third of them could not think of any moral dilemmas that they had faced in their lives, while another third of them offered examples that were not actually moral dilemmas. For example, one of them stated, "I guess renting the apartment thing, whether or not I would be able to afford it." That is a dilemma but it is not a moral

dilemma. So through their education from their parents and schools, the vast majority of emerging adults really have not gained a good working knowledge of the concept of morality much less its importance to society. Yet in 1 Peter, Peter makes it clear that our moral actions are one of the most important ways that Christians can share the good news of Jesus Christ. As he said, “For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men” (2:15).

Consumerism – The True Objective of Life

What impact has consumer culture had on the lives of emerging adults?

As Christians, our lives are to be about far more than how much we are able to consume. Jesus never gave his disciples instructions on how to increase their economic wealth. Instead, He sent his disciples out to minister with little more than the clothes on their backs. Similarly, Paul learned to be content with whatever the Lord provided. He states, “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:12-14). To be clear, the Bible does teach us much about how to operate successfully in the business world. But, it is also clear that our purpose in life is to be focused on things with eternal value and not on how much we can accumulate and consume on this earth.

Yet, as a whole, the young, emerging adults in this nation have missed the call of Christ to focus our lives on the eternal rather than the temporal. Instead, not only have they bought into consumerism as the primary goal of life, but they appear to be unable to consider any shortcomings in a life focused on what they can consume. Smith reports, “Contemporary

emerging adults are either true believers or complacent conformists when it comes to mass consumerism."{7}

As one emerging adult put it, "It feels good to be able to get things that you want and you work for the money. If you want something, you go get it. It makes your life more comfortable and I guess it just make you feel good about yourself as well."{8} That statement by itself might not seem so bad until you realize that it is their sole method to feel good about themselves. The more you can consume the better. They miss the balanced view of material things taught in the Bible. For example, in Proverbs we are told,

> *Give me neither poverty nor riches;*
>
> *Feed me with the food that is my portion,*
>
> *That I not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?"*
>
> *Or that I not be in want and steal,*
>
> *And profane the name of my God (Prov. 30:8,9).*

In addition, the idea of limiting one's consumption in order to have the resources to help others is foreign to most emerging adults. Many of them would like to see the needs of the starving people met, "just not by me, not now." If they ever reach a state in life where all their consumer desires are met, then they may consider using some resources for charitable causes. One obvious problem with this approach is that our consumer conscious society always has something new and better that you must purchase and experience.

This attitude is in contrast to that of the Macedonians Paul commends in his second letter to the Corinthian church:

> *. . . that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability,*

> *and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (2 Cor. 8:1-6).*

Rather than "seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and letting the material things be of secondary importance, most young America adults are seeking consumer nirvana and its false sense of well being. With no external moral compass for guidance, they are unwilling to express concerns about the grossest forms of excessive consumerism. As most of them said when asked, "If someone wants it, who am I to say that they are wrong?" When emerging adults refer to a good life, they talk about what they want to possess rather than the good that they can contribute to the world. I find it sad to think about being remembered for how much I consumed rather that how much I contributed. But this thought does not seem to bother these emerging adults.

Civic and Political Involvement – Not For Me

Let continue by examining another disturbing characteristic of young, emerging adults identified by Christian Smith through his extensive surveys and interviews over the last five years: their perception of civic and political involvement. Smith summarizes their attitude by saying, "The vast majority of the emerging adults we interviewed remain . . . politically disengaged, uninformed, and distrustful. Most in fact feel disempowered, apathetic, and sometimes even despairing when it comes to the larger social, civic, and political world beyond their own lives."{9} When we consider that the polls and interviews driving this assessment occurred in the summer of 2008 during the perceived youth movement which brought President Obama into office, this result on political

involvement is particularly surprising.

Some might say that being actively involved in politics is not the right course of action for Christians. And, thus, they may applaud this result. We certainly agree that our primary purpose as Christians will not and cannot be fulfilled through political action. However, what we are talking about here is not a lack of political activism, but rather a disengagement from active participation in the political process. As Paul instructed Timothy, "I urge that entreaties, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). We are to be concerned about the impact of government on our lives. If the people Paul were writing to had the right to vote, I am confident he would have said to pray for and exercise your right to vote.

Through his research, Smith identified six different attitudes toward civic involvement among emerging adults. These attitudes are:

> *1. The apathetic are completely uninterested in politics and make up twenty-seven percent of emerging adults. It is important to note that these individuals were not apathetic in general, just about this area of life.*
>
> *2. The uninformed said their lack of interest was driven by their lack of knowledge about the issues and the players. The uninformed made up thirteen percent of emerging adults.*
>
> *3. The distrustful know a reasonable amount about political issues but do not participate because they distrust the political system and politicians. They believe exercising their right to vote will not make any difference.*
>
> *4. The disempowered point to their inability to change the world (rather than distrust of the process) as their reason to be uninvolved. Around ten percent of emerging adults fall*

into this category.

5. The marginally political represent those who expressed some interest in politics but whose interest did not appear to lead to actual involvement in the process. These marginally political emerging adults make up twenty-seven percent of those interviewed.

6. That leaves four percent of emerging adults (all males) who appear to be genuinely political; that is, interested and involved in the process.

In summary, their interviews found two-thirds of the emerging adult population completely uninvolved and almost one-third with a very limited involvement. This meant only four percent considered the process an important responsibility in life.

This seemingly fatalistic view of politics was found to carry over in other areas of civic involvement such as volunteering and charitable giving. Smith summarized their results saying, "Contrary to some of the stories told in the popular media, most emerging adults in America have extremely modest hopes, if any, that they can change society or the world for the better, whether by volunteering or anything else."{10} With that perception, providing help to others is not a requirement for righteousness, but simply an optional personal choice that most are not prepared to make.

Thinking back to our earlier discussion on the lack of a moral viewpoint, Smith's research found a significant association between those who believe all morality is relative and individualistic and an attitude of apathy, ignorance, and distrust of the political process. In addition, Smith found a significant relationship between "enthusiasm for mass consumerism and lack of interest in political participation."{11} So these three attitudes (no moral standards, consumer consumption as our primary objective, and no real political or civic involvement) appear to be common

elements of the emerging adult belief system.

Emerging Adults – Where Will They Take Us?

One root cause of the attitudes expressed by emerging adults in American is pop post-modern individualism. Each individual must decide what is true for him or her and must not accept a common truth. Therefore, most emerging adults cannot grasp the concept of an objective reality beyond their individual selves that would have any bearing on their lives. As we have seen, this concept undermines their moral compass, their attitudes about consumer consumption, and their involvement in society through politics, volunteering, and charitable giving.

These dominant patterns of emerging adult thought in America should make us consider: "What does it mean?" and, "How can we do something about it?" Some might say it is just the way young people are. We were that way when we were young. They will snap out of it. To that idea Smith would say, "It is a different world today. . . . To think otherwise is to self-impose a blurred vision that cannot recognize real life as it is experienced today and so cannot take emerging adults seriously."{12}

Others may say that is not what I hear on the news. Our young adults are leading a new wave of service and public involvement. To which Smith would say, "The fact that anyone ever believed that idea simply tells us how flimsy the empirical evidence that so many journalistic media stories are based upon is and how unaccountable to empirical reality high-profile journalism can be. . . . we – without joy – can set the record straight here: almost all emerging adults today are either apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, disempowered, or , at most marginally interested when it comes to politics and public life. Both the fact itself and the reasons for it speak poorly of the condition of our larger culture and

society."{13} He continues: "One tendency is to claim that emerging adults are deeply committed to social justice, passionately engaged in political activism, actively volunteering in their local communities, devoting themselves to building a greener, more peaceful and just world. Almost nothing could be further from the truth."{14}

Although the vast majority of emerging adults are disengaged from involvement in the public sphere, they are quite engaged in a different way. As Smith points out, "they pursue these private-sphere emotional and relational investments with fervent devotion. . . . progressing yet further toward the nearly total submersion of self into fluidly constructed, private networks of technologically managed intimates and associates."{15} He is referring of course to their disconnected connections via Facebook, Twitter, and other electronic social media.

We believe that there are several positive actions that we can take as Christians to improve this situation.

First, we need to examine ourselves. Are we living our lives under the direction of the ultimate source of morality, Jesus Christ? Are we consumed by consumerism or are we living for eternity? Are we taking an active part in impacting our society so that we may live godly and peaceful lives for Christ?

Next, we need to recognize that emerging adults under the age of thirty are, for the most part, not taking on the full responsibilities of adulthood. They are still emerging and, consequently, still need coaching. However, as Smith points out, "One of the striking social features of emerging adulthood is how structurally disconnected most emerging adults are from older adults. . . Most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by their peers . . . who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do."{16} As parents, pastors, co-workers,

we should continue to actively engage them in a mentor role. It is important that:

> *1. They understand we look to the Bible as the source for our moral decisions.*
>
> *2. We are living in this world as citizens of heaven and as such consumer consumption is not our purpose for living.*
>
> *3. We have a responsibility to be engaged in our society to keep our freedom to lead godly lives serving the Lord.*

The apostle Peter put it this way: "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles so that in the thing in which they slander you as evil doers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:11,12).

Finally, we need to reach out to emerging adults who are already involved in evangelical churches. We need to let them know that it is okay to engage others with their worldview and their source of truth, Jesus Christ. When they don't share their worldview with others as a gift from God, they are effectively consigning those others to hell. Probe is in the midst of preparing materials that you can use in your church to directly address these issues.

Christian Smith captured the essence of this problem when he wrote, "Might it be true that the farthest boundary of sight that youth today can envision as real and being worth pursuit is entirely imminent, purely material, and completely mundane?"{17} As Christians, our boundary extends beyond this universe to the halls of heaven and puts our lives in a new perspective. Let that eternal perspective been seen in every area of your life.

As historian Christopher Lasch put it, “There is only one cure for the malady that afflicts our culture, and that is to speak the truth about it.”{18}

Notes

1. Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

2. Del Tackett and Chuck Colson, *The Way Out: God’s Solution to Moral Chaos in America*, 2011, www.truthinaction.org/index.php/landing-doing-the-right-thing-full-episode/

3. *American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. “Morality.”

4. Smith, *Lost*, 21.

5. Ibid., 22.

6. Tackett and Colson, *The Way Out*.

7. Smith, *Lost*, 72.

8. Ibid., 73.

9. Ibid., 196.

10. Ibid., 211.

11. Ibid., 218.

12. Ibid., 227.

13. Ibid., 224-5.

14. Ibid., 228.

15. Ibid., 223.

16. Ibid., 234.

17. Ibid., 236.

18. Christopher Lasch, "Give Youth Cause to Believe in Tomorrow," *International Herald Tribune*, December 29, 1989.

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See Also:

Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America
Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths
The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults
Cultural Captives – a book on the faith of emerging adults

Martial Arts and Just War Theory

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese examines a Christian view of martial arts in view of the Just War Tradition.

When I was first asked to speak about Christianity and the Martial Arts I was a little skeptical that a Christian can practice Martial Arts in good conscience. The popular objections immediately came to mind: "Aren't the Martial Arts steeped in Zen Buddhist practice?" And, "Should a Christian really participate in something as violent as karate?" Christians commonly object to Martial Arts for such reasons, even vilifying them as something as bad as witchcraft.

Upon reflection, I realized that the practice of Martial Arts naturally corresponds to something I have thought long and hard about: Just War Tradition. A central principal of both Just War thinking and the Martial Arts is personal self–defense. Just War doctrine states that if a Christian is unjustly attacked or sees an innocent third party under attack and has the ability to either prevent the abuse or intervene,

that he or she should do so. What's more, to fail to render such aid makes one equally culpable in the crime. In other words, inaction and apathy in the face of injustice is just as wrong as the injustice itself.

Just War thinking is usually applied to the relationships between governments and states in times of war. It helps Christians and societies decide if a war is morally acceptable or not and whether it is worthy of their participation. But there is no logical reason to prevent Christians from applying this principle at a personal level. After all, the police cannot possibly be available always and everywhere; we are sometimes forced to protect ourselves.

The Violence Objection

As Americans we naturally think that self–defense means owning a handgun. We live in a gun culture that accepts firearms as a God–given right protected by Law. Christians generally have no objections to gun ownership even though the potential for disaster is obvious. But when it comes to a safer alternative to guns, such as the Martial Arts, practitioners are met with a flurry of protests as if they are embracing some foreign religion. Now, to clear the air, I am entirely in favor of the Second Amendment right to bear arms. I am simply suggesting that those individuals who choose to practice the Martial Arts as a means of self–defense have chosen a safer alternative to gun ownership. (I assume that the discipline replaces gun ownership for them. From observation, gun owners and Martial Arts participants are generally not the same people.)

Guns are so easy to use that the potential for abuse and misuse is frightening and lethal. The Martial Arts, however, requires training, discipline and values related to peace and human dignity. One is taught self–control and respect for life that must accompany any notion of self–defense. Students are taught not to kill but rather to apply only the force necessary for a given situation.

One of the ironies of war states that the defender may become more powerful than the aggressor. This principle was clearly demonstrated in World War II when the Allies routed the Axis powers. At this point, if the defending party does not possess a system of values that imposes limited action out of respect for human life, then the defender becomes the aggressor by virtue of his advantage of power. Only a notion of justice tempered with mercy will prevent the just party from slipping into injustice and excessive aggression.

At the personal level, it is very difficult to achieve limited action that seeks to apply only the necessary force when it comes to using firearms. For example, various schools of Martial Arts often teach restraint in kicking or punching, using only enough force to defend oneself. Bullets cannot be recalled and their results are almost always fatal or horribly injurious. On the other hand, Martial Arts techniques like karate are inherently limited in their effects—despite violence—filled popular Kung Fu movies. They are designed to apply only the force necessary to achieve the goal of self—defense without killing or permanently disabling the opponent. Kicks, chops and blocks will always prove less fatal or damaging than shooting someone at point blank range. The use of force is never ideal or welcome, but if given the choice between karate or a .357 magnum for self—defense, the former clearly comes closer to Christian notions of justice and mercy than the latter.

The Eastern Mysticism Objection

The second objection, that the Martial Arts are *necessarily* tied to Eastern mysticism and thus that any Christian practicing these Arts is betraying Christianity, is much easier to answer. The common misconception is that Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen, brought the Martial Arts from India to China in the Sixth Century AD with the spread of Zen Buddhism. Later, the practice spread to Japan. It is certainly

true that the East has created a synthesis between the Martial Arts and mystical philosophy, but this creation represents a fairly modern innovation, especially in Japan with the rise of the Samurai warrior around 1300 AD. This is the most prominent symbol of the Martial Arts in the American mind. These Arts were practiced for millennia before the arrival of Zen in China or Japan and go as far back as 2000 BC in Mesopotamia. Historically speaking, there is no necessary connection between Zen and the Martial Arts.

Philosophically speaking, there is no necessary connection between Zen and the Martial Arts, either. Zen philosophy teaches a way of meditation or a means of achieving enlightenment focused on the practical and tangible world as opposed to the spoken or written word. That is, it doesn't rely on sacred texts or traditional reason, but rather on intuitive experience. Zen adherents prefer practice and encounter with reality rather than simply talking about it. Since the Martial Arts are also very practical and physical, this makes Zen attractive to many Martial Artists, but this represents an incidental connection, not a logically necessary one. The connection between the two practices is a convenience. One no more has to be a Buddhist to practice the Martial Arts than one has to be a Christian to be an American. Simply put, just because Zen appeals to many Martial Artists doesn't mean the two go together essentially. One can do just fine without the other, and that's where Christians can reconcile doing Martial Arts with their faith.

However, the notion of Chi ["chee"], or life–force, in the Martial Arts presents a serious obstacle to many Christians. This underlying idea states that one must align his or her Chi in order to be an effective practitioner. Since Chi clearly represents a pantheist philosophy, a suitable Christian–theist substitute should replace it. Chi is really nothing more than right attitude, enthusiasm and concentration; it signifies the power of the focused mind rather than a mystical supernatural

energy we can draw from. As in all sports and disciplines of any kind, one must focus the mind. This is no different for the Martial Artist than for the marksman who must aim at a target or a ball player who must kick or hit a ball. The body follows the mind.

As Christians legitimately concerned with the compromise of faith with Eastern mysticism or a violent culture, a conceptual union of Just War thinking and the Martial Arts creates an excellent theological and practical tool to reconcile both currents in American society. So, if after considering this perspective your conscience is clear, enjoy the Martial Arts for the sport, discipline and art form that they can be.

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Bringing the Truth of Christ to Your Generation

Are you a believer wondering if you're part of a dwindling population? Do people who follow hard after Christ—and show it by their actions and attitudes—seem to be a vanishing breed? Do you get the feeling that we're living in a post—Christian culture? We're not announcing the end of the Church in America and the West, but there is much cause for concern. We have the evidence straight from the mouths of believers—many of them caught up in captivity to the culture.

Here at Probe, we have been analyzing both existing and new original survey data to obtain a better grip on the realities of born-again faith in America today. Although the evangelical church has remained fairly constant in size as a percentage of

our population over the last twenty years, these surveys show its impact on our society has continued to decline as the percentage of non–Christians has grown considerably over the same period. We see two reasons for this change:

> *1. The increased acceptance of pluralism removes the felt need to share our faith with others. In our new Barna survey, almost one half of all born-again 18- to 40-year-olds believe that Jesus is one way to eternal life, but Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. when followed well, will also result in eternal life.*
>
> *2. Captivity to the culture rather than to Christ's truth shapes believers' perspectives on nearly every aspect of life. The recent National Study of Youth & Religion, a survey of 18- to 23-year-olds, shows that only a quarter of those affiliated with an evangelical church have a consistent set of biblical theological beliefs and that less than 2% of them combine those theological beliefs with a consistent set of biblical beliefs on behaviors and attitudes.*

A combination of pluralism and cultural captivity eliminates both the reason for and the evidence of changed lives needed to effectively share the great news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, these problems are not unique to our time and country. In fact, these problems were key issues addressed in the letters of Peter, John and Paul back in the first century. In this article, we will use the writings of Peter to introduce Paul's response to this problem as laid out in the book of Colossians with special emphasis on Col. 4:2-6.

As advocates of apologetics and a biblical worldview, we often focus on 1 Peter 3:15, which exhorts us to always be ready to give a defense for the hope of the gospel to anyone who asks. However, Peter points out that our testimony for Christ, goes far beyond our ability to make a reasoned defense. In the first chapter of his letter, Peter provides an excellent

description of the hope of the gospel. He makes it clear that only through the resurrection of Christ can we can receive eternal life. He then goes on to describe the ways that we are called to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." Specifically, we are told to proclaim Christ through:

- *our excellent behavior (1 Peter 2:11-17),*
- *our right relationships with others (1 Peter 2:18–3:14),*
- *a verbal explanation of why we believe the good news (1 Peter 3:15-16), and*
- *sound judgment for the purpose of prayer (1 Peter 4:7)*

As our behavior and relationships cause observers to ask us to fully explain the hope that is driving these actions, we have the opportunity to speak the truth to them with words empowered by prayer (1 Peter 3:15-16). So Peter makes it clear that pluralism and cultural captivity are counter to the message of the gospel as portrayed in the lives of genuine believers.

Given this message from Peter, let's take a more in–depth look at how Paul addresses this topic in his letter to the Colossians. In the first two chapters, Paul gives an in–depth description of what the gospel is and what it is not. In the New American Standard version, the reader is told to "set your mind on the things above" where we are living with Christ. Because we are residents of heaven, we need to consider our life on earth from that eternal perspective. From this point on in the letter, Paul lays out the same four instructions as Peter laid out on how we are to share Christ in this world.

In Colossians 3:5–17, we are given the standard for excellent behavior that our *new self* is being renewed to live in accordance with. As Paul makes clear in the first two

chapters, this excellent behavior is not a qualification for heaven; after all, according to Colossians 2:9, the audience of believers is already "complete in Christ." Rather, the purpose of our excellent behavior is so the world can get a savory taste of heavenly living.

Then, in Colossians 3:18–4:1, Paul instructs us on the importance of **good relationships** in our families and at work. It is through our good relationships that the world can see the true meaning of "love your neighbor as you love yourself." As Paul points out, in all of these relationships "it is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

Paul then points to the remaining aspects of fully proclaiming Christ: through **our prayers** and **our words**. He addresses our prayer life as follows:

> *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak (Col. 4:2-4).*

First, we are to devote ourselves to **prayer**, making it a strong player in ordering our lives. I think that "keeping alert in it" gives us the idea that we are to be ready to take something to prayer at any time during our busy daily schedule. Prayer is not to be strictly relegated to a set prayer time, but rather a real–time, always–on communication with God in response to the interactions and challenges of our day. Paul also indicates we should not be praying as a rote habit, but rather with an attitude of thanksgiving, knowing that God hears and responds to our prayers.

Secondly, Paul gives us a consistent topic for our **prayers**: that God would open up a door for the word in the lives of those who need to hear. We may live a life characterized by

excellent behavior and good relationships. But, if we are not praying that God will use our lives to open up a door for the gospel, then we are short–circuiting the purpose of God in our lives. Let me say it directly to you: If you are not seeing doors opening for the word through your life, perhaps you should ask, "What am I praying for? Am I praying that God will open up opportunities for me to share Christ with others?"

Note that in the first chapter of Colossians, Paul explains the mystery of Christ we are to "speak forth" saying,

> *. . .That I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the **mystery** which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Col. 1:25-27).*

We are praying for an open door to speak forth so that everyone can receive the promise of eternal glory through receiving Christ in their lives. In other words, we need to actively ask God to give us entrée into others' lives to communicate the gospel so they can receive the riches of eternal life along with us. Do we really want this? It's a prayer God is sure to answer. If so, we're living according to a biblical worldview in one more essential way. If not, we risk the loss of succeeding generations.

Finally, Paul addresses the importance of our **words** in fulfilling our purpose as followers of Christ:

> *Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col. 4:5-6).*

We need to be wise in our relationships with those who don't

know Christ. The verse literally says we are to redeem the time spent with unbelievers. As followers of Christ, we have the privilege of taking the most temporal and earth–bound thing in the world, time, and converting it into something of eternal value through our behavior, our relationships, our prayers and the words we speak.

We are to make the most of each opportunity to season our speech with the grace of Christ. If our speech is regularly salted with references to God's grace in our lives, we can tell from someone's reaction how we should respond to them. If we are not looking for it, how can we know when God answers our prayers to provide an open door for the gospel? And why would we be praying for it unless we value what God is saying to us here?

In summary, we must make clear to upcoming generations of evangelicals that we have a consistent message from Christ and His apostles on these two points:

> *1. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God and the only possible way to eternal life. Religious pluralism just doesn't work.*
>
> *2. We are called to live distinctly different lives–as captives of Christ not our culture–in our behavior, relationships, prayers and speech. Why? In order to be representatives of the good news of Jesus Christ in a world that desperately needs Him.*

If we choose to live our lives as if these statements are untrue, we have allowed ourselves to be deceived by the persuasive arguments of the world. Let's make the choice not to be taken captive and, instead, be bold and caring in proclaiming the truth for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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The Millennial Generation – The Future of Christianity in America

Millennials are the largest generation in American history and also the least religious generation. Kerby Anderson examines what they believe, how media and technology has affected them, and how pastors and Christian leaders can reach this generation.

The Millennial generation is a group of young people whose birth years range from 1980 to 2000. This generation is actually just slightly larger than the Baby Boom generation (born from 1946 to 1964). Nearly 78 million Millennials were born between 1980 and 2000.

Millennials are already having an impact on business, the workplace, churches, and other organizations. They certainly are having an impact on politics. The 18- to 29-year-old Millennials voted for Barack Obama in 2008 by an significant margin. Because of their impact in business, politics, and the church, they are simply too large and too influential to ignore.

For this article I will be using much of the data from an excellent book by Thom and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation.*{1} Their survey of 1,200 older Millennials (born between 1980 and 1991) provides a detailed look at this generation.

We should begin by noting that not only are Millennials the largest generation, they are also one of the most diverse. That means that for every trend we identify in this

generation, there are also lots of exceptions. But that doesn't mean we can't learn some key facets of the Millennials. Here are just a few characteristics.

First, they are on track to become America's most educated generation. "In 2007, the first year the twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-old age group was entirely comprised of Millennials, 30 percent had attained a college degree. That is the highest rate ever recorded for that age group."{2}

Second, Millennials view marriage differently than previous generations. They are marrying later, if at all. The average age for first marriage has increased approximately five years since 1970 for both men and women. "About 65 percent of young adults cohabit at least once prior to marriage, compared to just 10 percent in the 1960s."{3}

Finally, Millennials are the least religious generation in American history. They may say that they are spiritual, but only a small fraction of them say that is important in their lives. The sad reality is that most Millennials don't think about religion at all.

Perhaps the most amazing response from the survey of Millennials was that they are hopeful. Consider their response to the simple statement: "I believe I can do something great." About 60 percent agreed strongly with this statement, and another 36 percent agreed somewhat. That was almost every respondent, 96 percent in total.{4}

Marriage and Family

How does the Millennial generation view marriage and family? One way to answer that question is to look at the characteristics of their parents.

Baby Boomers wanted the best for themselves. They had a level of self-centeredness that eventually shifted toward meeting

the needs of their children. They wanted everything to be perfect for the Millennial children.

There was a high level of parental involvement. Hence, the parents of Millennials are often called “helicopter parents.” When Millennials were asked about parental involvement, 89 percent responded that they received guidance and advice from their parents.{5} It turns out that the Boomers are helping Millennials make decisions about work and life. Sometimes the parents sit in on job interviews and even try to negotiate salaries. While previous generations might have rejected such advice, 87 percent of Millennials view their parents as a positive source of influence.{6}

This positive view Millennials have of parents extends to the older generation as a whole. While Baby Boomers tended to be antiauthoritarian, Millennials have a very positive attitude towards those who are older. Of the Millennials interviewed, 94 percent said they have great respect for older generations.{7}

When it comes to marriage, Millennials are still optimistic about it even though they grew up in a world where divorce was common. They were asked to respond to the following statement: “It is likely that I will marry more than one time in my life.” For those who responded, 86 percent disagreed that they will marry more than once.{8} Apparently most Millennials plan to marry once or not at all. It is also worth noting that Millennials are marrying much later than any generation that had preceded them.

Millennials also view marriage differently in part because of the political battles concerning same-sex marriage and the definition of marriage. In the survey of Millennials, they were asked to respond to this statement: “I see nothing wrong with two people of the same gender getting married.” Six in ten agree with the statement (40 percent strongly agreed, 21 percent agreed somewhat).{9} Put simply, a significant

majority of Millennials see nothing wrong with same-sex marriage.

The impact of technology on marriage and family is significant. The Millennial generation has grown up with the Internet, cell phones, and social media. It is easier than ever to call on a cell phone or send a text to other members of one's extended family. Posting pictures on Facebook allows family members to immediately see what is happening to their children and grandchildren. Millennials are introducing their families to a variety of ways to stay connected.

Motivating the Millennials

How can we motivate the Millennial generation? The answer to that question is easy: build relationships. Thom and Jess Rainer put it this way. "The best motivators in the workplace for this generation are relationships. The best connectors in religious institutions are relationships. The best way to get a Millennial involved in a service, activity, or ministry is through relationships."{10}

Relationships are important because of their connection to their family. Millennials also see the world as a much smaller place since they can visit anywhere in the world (either in person or on the Internet). And they are connected to people through the new media in ways that no other generation was able to do.

Education is a high priority for Millennials. This generation is on pace to have significantly more college degrees than the rest of the nation as a whole. About a quarter of the current U.S. population over 25 years old has a college degree, but nearly four in ten of Millennials will probably receive a degree.{11}

Millennials do want to make money, but they are not driven by money. Their motivation for education and career are motivated

more by family and friends. One word that often surfaces is the word “flexibility.” They see money as a means to do what they want to do. At the same time, they reject the “keeping up with the Jones’ mentality” that often drives their parents.

Religion is not much of a motivating factor for Millennials. Spiritual matters are not important to them. Only 13 percent of them viewed religion and spirituality as important. And even among those who described themselves as Christian, only 18 percent said their religion was important to them.{12}

Only one group in the study said their faith was important to them. This was the subgroup identified as “Evangelicals” because of their orthodox biblical beliefs. Nearly two thirds (65 percent) said their faith was important to them.{13}

The political orientation of Millennials will no doubt influence elections. Millennials voted for Barack Obama over John McCain in the 2008 election by a two-to-one margin (66 percent to 32 percent). It is also worth noting that only half of the Millennials were eligible to vote that year. A greater percentage of that generation will become eligible to vote in each new election cycle.

Various polls, including exit polls, showed that this generation wanted more centralized power in government. And by more than a two-to-one margin (71 percent to 29 percent) they thought the federal government should guarantee health-care coverage for all Americans. More than six out of ten felt that government should be responsible for providing for their retirement.{14}

Millennials and Media

The Millennial generation has been influenced by media and technology like no other generation. Social commentators made much of the influence of television on the Baby Boomers but the proliferation of Internet, smart phones, and social media

has had an even greater impact on Millennials.

When technology first comes on the scene, there are early adopters, then a significant majority, and finally laggards. Millennials fit into the category of early adopters. In the survey they were asked if they agree with the following statement: “I am usually among the first people to acquire products featuring new technology.” About half agreed with the statement, and half disagreed with the statement.{15} And even for those who disagreed, it is safe to say they did not fit into the category of laggards. Millennials are quick to embrace new technology.

There is one technology that Millennials always have in their hands: video games. “Video-game consoles are part of the industry that pulled in more than twenty billion dollars in revenue in 2008.”{16} If there was one form of technology that is easily identifiable with Millennials it is video games.

When asked how they most frequently communicate when not actually with the other person, they rated phone first (39 percent), then texting (37 percent), and then e-mail (16 percent). At the bottom was by letter (1 percent). The survey also noticed a difference between older and younger Millennials. Put simply, the younger you are, the more likely you are to communicate by texting.

Social media is also a significant part of the lifestyle of a Millennial. Not surprisingly, the most popular social media site was Facebook (73 percent), followed by MySpace (49 percent) as a distant second. They also like to read blogs (30 percent) and write blogs (13 percent). But since blogs require more time and energy than other social media, they do not draw in the large numbers like Facebook and MySpace.

Although social media can be accessed in many ways, still the most pervasive is through the computer. Millennials use computers both for work and for personal use. Most Millennials

(83 percent) use a computer for work and spend about 17 hours on it each week. One out of five Millennials use their computer for work for 40 or more hours per week.{17} And Millennials spend time on computers for personal use. The responses ranged from 5 hours per week to 30 hours per week. The average was 17 hours per week.

If you put these numbers together, you find something shocking. The average Millennial spends 17 hours per week on a computer for work, and spends the same amount of time on a computer for personal use. That totals 34 hours per week on a computer. "That means that roughly one-third of Millennials' waking lives are spent on a computer."{18}

Millennials and Religion

The Millennial generation is the least religious generation in American history. The survey found that they are likely to have a syncretistic belief system. In other words, he or she will take portions of belief from various faiths and non-faiths and blend them together in to a unique spiritual system.

Thom and Jess Rainer found that this generation is less likely to care about religion or spiritual matters than previous generations. When they were asked in an open-ended question what was important to them, spiritual matters were sixth on the list. Preceding them in importance were family, friends, education, career, and spouse/partner.

When asked to describe themselves, two-thirds (65 percent) used the term Christian. Interestingly, nearly three in ten (28 percent) picked either atheism, agnosticism, or no preference. In other words, they have moved completely away from certain belief in God.

When asked if they were "born-again Christians", using a precise definition provided by the interviewers, only 20

percent affirmed this definition of belief and experience. And when presented with seven statements about orthodox Christian belief, the researchers found that only 6 percent of Millennials could affirm them and thus could be properly defined as Evangelical.{19}

A third (34 percent) of Millennials said that no one can know what will happen when they die. But more than one-fourth (26 percent) said they believe they will go to heaven when they die because they have accepted Christ as their Savior.{20}

Church attendance has been decreasing with each generation. The Millennial generation illustrates that trend. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) rarely or never attend religious services.{21} About one-fourth (24 percent) are active in church (meaning they attend at least once a week). This might suggest that a number of Millennials who attend church do so as seekers. In other words, they are at least spiritually interested enough to visit a church even though they may not be saved.

The Millennial generation presents a significant challenge for us as Christians. The largest and least religious generation in American history is here and making an impact. If the church and Christian organizations are to be vibrant and effective in the twenty-first century, pastors and Christian leaders need to know how to connect to the Millennials. The first step is understanding them and their beliefs. That is why I recommend the book by Thom and Jess Rainer and encourage you to visit our Web site (www.probe.org) for other information on this generation.

Notes

1. Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2011).
2. Ibid., 3.

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 16.
5. Ibid., 55.
6. Ibid., 56.
7. Ibid., 59.
8. Ibid., 63.
9. Ibid., 66.
10. Ibid., 105.
11. Ibid., 108.
12. Ibid., 111.
13. Ibid., 112.
14. Ibid., 115.
15. Ibid., 188.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 197.
18. Ibid., 198.
19. Ibid., 232.
20. Ibid., 233.
21. Ibid., 236.

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Boy Scouts and the ACLU: A War of Worldviews

Byron Barlowe, an Eagle Scout and Assistant Scoutmaster, assesses the battle with the values of the ACLU from an insider's perspective.

Traditional Mainstay As Good Cultural

Influence vs. Liberal Legal Activists with Social Engineering Agenda

In a gang-ridden section of Dallas, 13-year-old Jose saw a Boy Scouts recruiting poster. That started Jose's improbable climb to Scouting's highest rank of Eagle and a life of beating the odds. He said this about Scoutmaster Mike Ross: "He was a father figure watching over me, the first time I felt it from someone other than my [single] mom."{1}

In February 2010, the Boy Scouts of America, or BSA, celebrated a century of building traditional values into nearly 100 million youths like Jose through adults like Mr. Ross. The original Boy Scouts began in England in 1907. The Prime Minister said the new movement was "potentially 'the greatest moral force the world has ever known'." Yet surprisingly, there are those who would gut the movement of its culture-shaping distinctives.

In this article we take a look at the warring worldviews of The BSA and its arch-enemy, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In his book *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For*, Texas governor and Eagle Scout Rick Perry writes, "The institutions we saw as bulwarks of stability—such as the Scouts—are under steady attack by groups that seem intent upon remaking (if not replacing) them in pursuit of a very different [worldview]."{2} In a crusade to elevate the minority viewpoints of girls who want entry, as well as atheists and gay activists, the ACLU's unending efforts to ensure inclusiveness undermine the very Scout laws and oath that make it strong—commitment to virtues like kindness, helpfulness and trustworthiness. This is no less than a war of worldviews.

I ran through all the ranks from Cub Scouts to Eagle Scout, worked professionally with the BSA, and now serve as Asst. Scoutmaster. I have first-hand, lifelong knowledge of

Scouting's benefits to boys, their families, and society. Nowhere else can young men-in-the-making be exposed to dozens of new interests (which often inspire lasting careers) and gain confidence in everything from leadership to lifesaving to family life. Scouting is good life skills insurance!

The pitched battle between the BSA and the ACLU embodies what many call the Culture Wars—battles that in this case reveal contrasting values like humanism vs. religious faith, politically correct "tolerance" vs. more traditional, absolutist views and radical individual rights vs. group-centered freedoms of speech and association. The contrast is stark.

Conservatives relate most to Scouting. "Of course, the *Boy Scout Handbook* is rarely regarded as being a conservative book. That probably accounts for why the *Handbook* has managed to continuously stay in print since 1910. If it were widely known how masterly the book inculcates conservative values, it would, like Socrates, be charged with corrupting the nation's youth."{3}

Scouting is also good for culture. Harris pollsters found that former Scouts agreed in larger numbers than non-Scouts that the following behaviors are "wrong under all circumstances": to exaggerate one's education on a resume, lie to the IRS, and steal office supplies for home use. Scouts pull well ahead of non-Scouts on college graduation rates. The "stick-to-it" mentality that Scouting demands comes into play here and in other findings. Scouting positively affects things like treating co-workers with respect, showing understanding to those less fortunate than you and being successful in a career. "This conclusion is hard to escape: Scouting engenders respect for others, honesty, cooperation, self-confidence and other desirable traits."{4} It also promotes the freedom to exercise a Christian worldview within its program, which provides a venue for transmitting a Christian worldview within the context of the outdoors and community service.

The absolutist morality of Scouting stands in stark relief to the moral relativism of our day and to the ACLU's worldview. Wouldn't you prefer to hire someone with Scouting's values of trustworthiness and honesty?

The Battles, Including Girls Joining the BSA

The Boy Scouts of America celebrates its centennial this year, but its long-time nemesis the ACLU isn't celebrating. In fact, they and other litigants have maintained a siege against the BSA in court in order to transform key characteristics including Scouting's "duty to God," the exclusion of openly gay leaders, and Scouting's access to government forums like schools. "In all, the Boy Scouts have been involved in thirty lawsuits since the filing of the [original] case," many brought by the ACLU.{5}

The opening salvo was a string of lawsuits on behalf of girls who wanted membership, many brought by the ACLU. The primary legal issue regarding these kinds of cases is "public accommodation." The BSA's position is that refusing membership to certain individuals like girls and open gays is its right as a private organization. Freedoms of speech and association are at stake for the BSA. Indeed, the definition of freedom of association is "the right guaranteed especially by the First Amendment . . . to join with others . . . as part of a group usually having a common viewpoint or purpose and often exercising the right to assemble and to free speech."{6}

In the case of Mankes vs. the BSA, the plaintiff claimed that restricting membership to boys amounted to sex discrimination. Yet the court decided against the claim on the basis that "the Boy Scouts did not, in creating its organization to help develop the moral character of young boys, intentionally set out to discriminate against girls."{7} Even the U.S. Congress chartered separate Scouting organizations, one for girls and

one for boys, not one unisex organization.

C.S. “Lewis puts it this way in discussing the crisis of post-Christian humanist education: ‘We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.’”{8} I believe that even the most committed feminist would inwardly hope for brave, virtuous men of integrity. That’s what Boy Scouts is all about: engendering young men with chests.

Underneath these battles lies an aversion to any kind of discrimination of supposed victims. The ACLU’s goals raise ethical concerns: when one individual or a minority seeks rights that are not in the best interest of the community at large, it leads to unintended consequences, like possibly shutting down good institutions like the Scouts.

It’s understandable why some girls would want to participate. However, given gender differences and the right to freedom of association, it seems best to restrict the Boys Scouts to boys.

The Battles over Gay Leaders (the Scouts’ Doctrine of “Morally Straight”)

A very contentious battle between the Boy Scouts of America and equal rights advocates revolves around disallowing openly gay leaders from joining the organization. “The BSA’s position is that a homosexual who makes his sex life a public matter is not an appropriate role model of the Scout Oath and Law for adolescent boys.”{9} Or as Rick Perry puts it, “Tolerance is a two-way street. The Boy Scouts is not the proper intersection for a debate over sexual preference.” He continues, “A number of active homosexuals, with the assistance of the ACLU and…various gay activist organizations have challenged the BSA’s long-standing policy.” {10}

The landmark Dale case featured a lifelong Scouter who discovered his gay identity only then to realize the Scouts' policy against openly gay leaders. Eventually landing in the U.S. Supreme Court, BSA vs. Dale marked the end of cases in this category. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that state laws may not prohibit the BSA's moral point of view and the right to expressing its own internal leadership.{11}

Ultimately, gay people could launch their own organization and any good Scout would recognize the right for them to do this. Even the courts have implied this view, again and again upholding the Scout's rights to operate the way they see fit. Why would it be improper for a private organization like the BSA to restrict leadership to those who share its values?

"BSA units do not routinely ask a prospective adult leader about his (or her) sex life," writes Perry.{12} This approach falls in line with the controversial "Don't ask, don't tell" doctrine of the U.S. military that's currently being challenged in court. Where members of the military may be concerned about the affect of another squad member's sexuality on its rank-and-file members, Scout units are concerned with the even greater influence of adults on the minds and morals of the children they lead.

A biblical worldview recognizes that belief that gay rights supersede traditional moral teachings springs from the fleshly, fallen state of man's soul. Romans 1 says humans "suppress the truth," and speaks out against unnatural acts in a clear allusion to homosexual unions. People—sometimes believers—fight morality as revealed by God through our conscience and stated moral law. The virtue ethics of the Scouts at least makes room for this morality.

Despite all the cases, "evidence of a planned, strategic legal assault on the Scouts didn't arise until the ACLU became involved, with cases that focused Scouts' 'duty to God.'"{13}

The Battle over “Duty to God”

Boy Scouts and Scout leaders are really into patches for our uniforms. One of the most beautiful I’ve ever owned is my Duty to God patch earned at the legendary Rocky Mountain Scout adventure ranch known as Philmont. The requirements were minimal: take part in several devotions and lead blessings over the food. Nothing dictated which god to pray to, just a built-in acknowledgement of the Creator. This non-sectarian, undirected acknowledgement of God is classic Scout stuff. The program has long featured specific special awards for all major world religions, including Christianity. Scouting’s Creator-consciousness can seem vague or even smack of animistic Native American religion, but troops chartered by Christian organizations like ours simply turn it into a chance to honor the God of the Bible.

This hallmark of Scouting is vilified by atheists and agnostics who would participate in Scouting only minus the nod to God. The ACLU has carried out a culture-wide campaign to cut out all mention of God from the public square, motivated by a warped value of self-determination.{14} Seeking protections from all things religious, the ACLU’s activist lawyers have raised human autonomy up as the ultimate good. And the Boy Scouts are a tempting target to further this cause célèbre. From where do the ACLU’s motivations spring? Apparently, from the ideology known as humanism, a philosophical commitment to man as the measure of all things coupled with an atheist anti-supernatural bias. But not even Rousseau, whose political theory emphasized individual freedoms, would likely have gone so far. In his view, the individual was subordinate to the general will of the people—and most people in American society agree that the BSA’s values and impact outweighs any individual right “not to hear” anything at all of religion.{15}

When the BSA lays out its broad yet very absolute

requirements, the most prominent and controversial are a "duty to God"{16} and a Scout's pledge to be reverent.{17} This in no way dictates which or even what kind of deity one's faith is ascribed to, but it sharply clashes with the ACLU's ideals of secularism and humanism. In effect, the BSA directly challenges the sacred-secular split so prevalent today, where faith is to be kept totally private and godless science serves as the only source of real knowledge. As a result of this worldview mistake, religious commitments and the supernatural are relegated to the personal, subjective, and ultimately meaningless level.

One blogger opines about a duty to God passage in the original 1910 Scout handbook:

> *"A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others." Such an earnest and irony-free worldview is naturally antithetical to the South Park-style mock-the-world moronity that pervades the culture. In a society that combines libertarian Me-ism with a liberal nanny state that suckles "men without chests," it is not surprising that the ranks of Boy Scouts are dwindling (Scouting is down 11 percent over the last decade). But we should be cheerful that an institution where self-sacrifice and manly virtues are encouraged manages to survive at all.{18}*

The ACLU was not involved in the first "duty to God" case against the Scouts. Yet by 2007, its "involvement in fourteen cases against the Boy Scouts had covered, cumulatively, more than 100 years of litigation."{19} The ACLU's view, according to Governor Perry, "is that if one citizen believes there is no God, they must be protected from public references to or acknowledgement of an Almighty Creator. . . . When they get their way, the ACLU enforces upon us the tyranny of the minority."{20}

Thank God the courts have not yet allowed this to happen.

Pluralism Done Right

A fellow in my Sunday school sounded alarmed when I asked the class to pray for a Scouting trip: “Isn’t The Boy Scouts a Mormon outfit?” Since Mormons use Scouts as their official youth program for boys, his experience was skewed. Yet, the BSA is a non-sectarian association that simply requires chartering groups to promote belief in God and requires boys to reflect on reverence according to their family’s chosen religion. *The Boy Scout Handbook*, (11th ed.) explains a Scout’s “duty to God” like this: “Your family and religious leaders teach you about God and the ways you can serve. You do your duty to God by following the wisdom of those teachings every day and by respecting and defending the rights of others to practice their own beliefs.” Note the genuine tolerance toward other religions. Even a pack or troop member cannot be forced by that unit to engage in religious observances with which they disagree.{21} This policy is the best way to handle a wide-open boys’ training program in a very pluralistic culture.

Many Christians talk as if any kind of pluralism is anathema, especially the religious kind, as if we should live in a thoroughly Christianized society that, for all intents and purposes, is like church. However, this is unrealistic. America’s Founding Fathers guarded against state-sanctioned religion.

God Himself tacitly acknowledged, even in the theocracy of the Old Testament period that living around His people were those of other religions. Jehovah didn’t force people to believe in Him. God was pluralistic in the sense of allowing man’s free will.

The Boy Scouts reflects this larger reality and it serves the

organization well. It is not seeking to be a church or synagogue or temple. The BSA's Scoutcraft skills and coaching, its citizenship and moral training, remains open to people of all religions. The BSA's vagueness regarding "duty to God" is actually a plus for Christians interested in promoting their own understanding of God and His world. Talk about a platform to pass along a biblical worldview! Think of it: Scouting's genius is that it combines outdoor exploits like regular camping trips and high-adventure activities with moral and religious instruction in the context of boy-run leadership training. Regular and intensive meetings with dedicated adults to review skills and Scouting's ideals provide ample time for what amounts to discipleship. Some of the richest ministry opportunities in my quarter-century as a full-time minister have been during Scoutmaster-to-Scout conferences in the great outdoors.

If you're committed to seeing the next generation of boys walk into adulthood not only as capable young men but with their faith intact, Scouting is one of the best venues out there. Hopefully, the ACLU won't be able to quash that.

Notes

1. *Readers Digest*, May, 2010, 138.
2. Rick Perry, *On My Honor: Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts Are Worth Fighting For* (Macon, GA: Stroud & Hall Publishers, 2008).
3. Carter, Joe, "The Most Influential Conservative Book Ever Produced in America," First Thoughts (the official blog of the journal First Things), posted February 8, 2010: http://bit.ly/fI8V9Z.
4. Perry, *On My Honor*, 163.
5. Ibid., 57.
6. Dictionary.com. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/freedom of association (accessed: April 21, 2010).

7. Perry, *On My Honor*, 59.
8. Lewis, C.S., *The Abolition of Man* (Macmillan Publishing: New York, NY) 1947, p. 34; as quoted by R. J. Snell, "Making Men without Chests: The Intellectual Life and Moral Imagination," First Principles: ISI Web Journal, posted Feb. 25, 2010: www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1380.
9. Ibid., 69.
10. Ibid., 71.
11. Ibid., 71-73.
12. Ibid., 69.
13. For a brief list of individual cases, some of which are being brought by the ACLU, see: www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp.
14. Evans, C. Stephen, Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion: 300 Terms & Thinkers Clearly & Concisely Defined (Intervarsity Press: Downer's Grove, Ill.), 2002, p. 103.
15. The Scout Oath, quoted in reprint of 1910 original *Boy Scouts of America: The Official Handbook for Boys,* Seventeenth Edition p. 32, accessed 1-20-11 http://bit.ly/gaM5OM. (Note, the table of contents links to page 22, but page 32 is the actual location in this format.)
16. The Scout Law, 33-34.
17. Carter, "The Most Influential Conservative Book Ever Produced in America."
18. Perry, *On My Honor*, 64 and 66.
19. Ibid, 87-88.
20. Bylaws of Boy Scouts of America, art. IX, § 1, cls. 2-4, as quoted on the BSA legal Web site: www.bsalegal.org/duty-to-god-cases-224.asp.

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Should Christians Respect Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled "Should Christians Respect Obama?" was forwarded to me. Perhaps you've seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

> **Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.**
>
> **Dr. David Barton – on Obama**
> Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !
>
> I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !
>
> Why am I doing this ? It is because:
> – I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;
> – I do not share his Abortion beliefs;
> – I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;
> – I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make $150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);
> – I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;
> – I do not share his view that America is not a Christian

Nation;
– I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;
– I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
– I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
– I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
– I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
– I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
– I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ; and
– I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our

criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson
GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !
(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)
Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"
"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan
I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK…..

In GOD We Trust……..

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the

man.” It’s like saying, “I respect my boss’s position of authority over me, but I don’t respect my boss.” But in my experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to “do everything without complaining or arguing.” That habit derives only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I’m particularly unnerved by the way the term “embodiment of Evil” was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn’t portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every sentence is exclaiming, that’s a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)

- From Dad: “Dr. Barton’s website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity.” Thanks Dad!

• Thirdly, there are at least three of the President's views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian than bearing false witness.

• Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/

Privacy 2010

Introduction

Ten years ago, I did a Probe radio program called "Privacy 2000."{1} At the time, American citizens were concerned about some of the new technological advances and government programs that seemed to be threats to their privacy.

So much has happened in the last ten years. Technological developments have provided individuals, companies, and governments with new tools which could be used to violate our privacy. A war on terror has changed our perception of what is or is not appropriate for government to know about its citizens. In fact, I developed a week of radio programs on "Homeland Security and Privacy."{2}

One thing I have noticed is that most Americans seem less concerned about intrusions into their lives. Part of it may be due to a resigned assumption that we have to give up some of our privacy to fight the terrorists. But another significant reason, I believe, is a younger generation that seems completely unconcerned with threats to their privacy. After all, many of them are sharing intimate details of the lives on Facebook and MySpace. Why be concerned if companies, the government, or the general public knows details of their lives when they voluntarily share those details on social networks?

This is not to say that all citizens are unconcerned about privacy violations. Recent debates about a national ID card and the collecting and centralization of medical information for government health care programs illustrate that many people are concerned about privacy. But the percentage of citizens concerned about privacy seems to be decreasing.

Privacy is something that most of us take for granted until we lose it. And often we lose our privacy in incremental steps so

we are less aware of our increased exposure. Some events can shock us back to reality. Identity theft or the posting of embarrassing information on the Internet can quickly remind us how much privacy we have lost.

We should also make a distinction between privacy and secrecy. Whenever someone expresses concern over a violation of their privacy, another is sure to ask, “What do you have to hide?” The question confuses privacy with secrecy. You may not have anything to hide, but that doesn’t mean that you are willing to have companies collect lots of information about you and then sell it to other companies for a profit. You may not want your future boss to know about a medical procedure that was done twenty years ago. You may not want a telemarketer to have your purchasing history so he can call your mobile phone.

In this article we look at various ways we have lost our privacy. These range from intrusion to deception to profiling to identity theft.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Intrusion

Privacy is a common word but often misunderstood because of it various meanings. We know when we feel that someone have violated our privacy, but we can’t always give a definition to it, especially in this age in which new technology allows perpetrators to cross boundaries more easily than in the past.

David Holzman describes three basic meanings for privacy.{3} They are easy to remember because they all begin with the letter s. The first is seclusion. That is the right to be hidden from the perceptions of others. The second meaning is solitude. This is the right to be left alone. The third meaning is self-determination, which is the right to control information about oneself.

He suggests that privacy violations can be viewed as seven sins ranging from intrusion to deception to profiling to

identity theft. Let's look at each one of these sins against privacy.

Sin of Intrusion – The classical form of privacy abuse is intrusion. This "is the uninvited encroachment on a person's physical or virtual space."{4} In previous ages, it took the form of voyeurism or peeping. Technology today allows for a much great intrusion into our lives and is often much more difficult to detect.

In recent years, we have read about how actors, models, and sportscasters have had their privacy violated by people who placed cameras or listening devices in their rooms or on their person and recorded them. But it isn't just the famous that are being recorded. Every day pictures are being taken of us as we walk into banks, into grocery stores, or past ATM machines. We are being recorded on the streets and at traffic lights. It has been estimated that the average person is caught on surveillance cameras three hundred times a day in London.{5}

And it is not just big brother that is watching and listening to you. Voyeurism technology is available to anyone who wants to purchase it. Stores and Web sites "sell remote listening devices, digital optics, scanners for picking up cell-phone conversations, and even infrared scanners."{6}

Radio Frequency Identification Devices (RFID) act like a wireless bar code and is being used more often in stores and other establishments (such as libraries) for inventory control. Geographic Positioning System (GPS) receivers are satellite locating devices that are found in cars, cell phones, and many other devices.

Intrusion violations have been made easier by technology. In the past, someone had to get near to you in order to spy on you. And that increased the possibility that you would find out that someone is watching you. Now we live in a world where

your privacy is being violated, and you are probably not even aware that it is happening.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Latency and Deception

Sin of Latency – Most of the damage to your privacy comes from stored information. The harm is minimized if personal information is not retained. The sin of latency comes from the excessive hoarding of information beyond an agreed-upon time. Most companies do not have a data-aging policy.

It is understandable why companies and the government collect excessive information. First, they need to have enough information so they know they have the right person. There are lots of John Smiths in a particular locality. They need to know you are the particular John Smith they want. In the past, a telephone number was sufficient identification. Now we have more than one phone and change numbers regularly. So our Social Security number and other identifiers are necessary.

A second reason for companies to collect information is so they can more effectively sell their products and services to you. They collect that information from the forms you fill out and even place cookies on your computer in order to catalogue your visits to their Web site.

We might assume that a company would delete your information when you close your account. Most companies merely mark your file as inactive. And many of them sell your information to others. “A consumer record with up-to-date information is worth around $200 for cell phone information. Social Security information sells for $60 and a student’s university class schedule goes for $80.”{7}

One of the largest collectors of personal data is Google. When you search for items on the Internet, Google collects that

information, and that reservoir of information can begin to paint a picture of your interests, opinions, and worldview. And because Google saves that information for a long time, it can do extensive database matching.

Google was involved in a legal battle with the U.S. Department of Justice that subpoenaed their log files. They wanted to use them to make the case that pornography constitutes a substantial part of Internet searching. A judge ruled that Google needed to only turn over a limited set of information with identifying notations stripped off.{8}

Sin of Deception – With so much electronic information available in databases, it is tempting for individuals, companies, and even bureaucrats to use personal information in a way that was not authorized by the person.

Here are some principles that arise from our discussion so far. When a company or governmental agency asks for personal information we should have the right to know three things: what they are going to do with it, how long they will keep it, and whether they will make it available to others. When we fill out a form for a credit card or enter into a contract for a car or house, we reveal lots of information. We may naively assume that they will be the only ones who will see that information. That is not so. Regularly we see stories in the news about companies selling consumer data to third parties. Most of us would be shocked at how much information about us in the hands of people who have never met or done business with.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Profiling and Identity Theft

Sin of Profiling – Past behavior is not always a perfect predictor of future behavior, but it can be a surprisingly accurate one. That is where profiling comes in. Collecting

information about what goods and services someone purchases can enable companies to predict a consumer's future purchases.

Profiling is often used to predict more than that. David Holzman says that he worked with one credit card company that said "it was able to pinpoint when its consumers were having life crises such a mid-life depression by psychographically analyzing their buying patterns."{9}

One of the best known examples of profiling is credit scoring. Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion rely on FICO scores. A high score will help you get a home loan. A low score may result in being denied a home loan and even having to pay higher interest on other forms of credit. Most Americans don't know their credit score (only about two percent), and most do not understand the algorithm used to calculate it.

Profiling is also used to fight terrorism, but have also caught innocent people in their profiling net. For some time my name was on a watch list, and people like columnist Cal Thomas and Senator Ted Kennedy were on a no-fly list.

These mistakes prove an important point: profiling is a guessing game. And sometimes a wrong guess can have a detrimental impact on citizens and consumers.

Sin of Identity Theft – Most of us know what identify theft is because it has happened to someone we know or else we have heard commercials about how to protect ourselves from identity theft. Although this crime did exist in the past, it has exploded on the scene now because of technology and the changing nature of transactions. Personal information is readily accessible on the Internet. And in the electronic marketplace of today, purchases are not made face-to-face. It is easy for someone to assume your identity and leave you with the consequences.

How easy is it? A New York busboy was caught stealing the identities of people on the Forbes 400 list. He used the

Internet to do the research and had been successful in stealing the identities of famous people like Steven Spielberg, Oprah Winfrey, and Ted Turner.{10}

Sometimes all a hacker or thief needs is your Social Security number and your mother's maiden name. Unfortunately it is relatively easy to obtain this information. Universities, banks, and all sorts of institutions use your Social Security number as your identification number. Genealogy files online most likely have your mother's maiden name. Once a theft has that information, he or she is ready to access your financial accounts.

Sometimes we inadvertently give out that information. A phone call from someone pretending to be a bank executive can often elicit confidential information. "Phishing" is a mass e-mail with a message pretending to be a bank or brokerage. People who believe that it is genuine will enter information that the theft can use to drain their bank accounts.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Outing, Lost Dignity

Sin of Outing – Some privacy violations are deliberate and can take place when someone reveals information that another person would like to remain hidden. The term "outing" is usually used to describe a public revelation of a closet homosexual, but we can use the term to describe any information that is published about a person they do not want to be public.

Citizens, politicians, and even corporations have been the targets of Internet messages that have been used to damage their reputation. A number of court cases have attempted to force Web site managers to reveal the identities of those who are spreading false and libelous information.

Sometimes outing is a good thing. Think of all the potential pedophiles that have been caught because they thought they were chatting online with a potential underage victim. Sting operations by the police have successfully revealed the motives of some who intend to proposition their young victims.

Sin of Lost Dignity – This last concern is more difficult to quantify, but we all realize that when private information is made public, we can lose a part of our dignity. What if all of your medical records were made public? What if every essay you ever wrote in school was available online?

Even public figures (like politicians) believe they should have a zone of privacy. Past and current presidents have refused to publish all of their medical records, school records, and other private information. While we may debate whether public figures should reveal all of this information, we would probably all agree that private citizens should not lose a zone of privacy in their lives.

In this article we have talked about how technology allows us to peer into other people's lives. That is why we need to revisit the subject of ethics as it relates to technology that can violate our privacy. We shouldn't use technology to spy on others or to hurt their reputation. Christians should express their concerns about intrusions into their privacy.

This subject 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. Kerby Anderson, “Privacy 2000,” Probe Web site, 2000, www.probe.org/privacy-2000/.
2. Kerby Anderson, “Homeland Security and Privacy,” Probe Web site, 2003, www.probe.org/homeland-security-and-privacy/.
3. David Holzman, *Privacy Lost: How Technology is Endangering Your Privacy* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006), 4.
4. Ibid., 5.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 13.
9. Ibid., 19.
10. Ibid., 23.

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Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America

Steve Cable looks at the results of the National Study on Youth and Religion and concludes the real need for evangelicals in America is not redirecting a pent–up spiritual interest into orthodox Christianity, or overcoming an emotional aversion to organized religion, but instead, demonstrating that spiritual issues are worthy of any real attention at all.

This article examines the trajectory of Christianity in America by looking at what researchers are learning about “the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults.” This last phrase is the subtitle of a recent book by Christian Smith and

Patricia Snell which summarizes the results of a groundbreaking study based on the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NYSR).{1} In 2002/3, Smith and his team surveyed over three thousand teenagers and conducted detailed interviews with over 250 of the survey respondents. These same people were surveyed again in 2005 and again in 2007/8. The 2007/8 survey also included over 230 in–depth interviews. Through this effort, we can gain insight not only into the current beliefs and practices of these young adults but also how those beliefs and practices have changed over the five year transition from teenager to young adult.

Emerging Adults: A New Life Stage

These 18– to 23–year–olds represent the future leaders of our nation and our churches and will be the parents of the children who will lead America into the second half of the twenty–first century. Barring a major change in our culture, their attitudes toward Christianity are a preview of the role of Christianity in America in the near future. Those of us committed to Jesus' Great Commission should recognize the importance of understanding these cultural trends so that we effectively communicate the truth of the gospel to an increasingly confused culture.

Let's begin by highlighting a few aspects of the culture which shape the thinking and actions of these young adults. The first point that Smith and Snell make is that a new life phase has developed in American culture. The experience of young Americans as they age from 18 to 30 is much different today than during most of the twentieth century. Full adulthood "is culturally defined as the end of schooling, a stable career job, financial independence, and new family formation."{2} Four factors have contributed to making the transition to full adulthood an extended, complex process:

1. *the dramatic growth in higher education*

2. *the delay of marriage*
3. *the expectation of an unstable career*
4. *the willingness of parents to extend support well into their children's twenties*

Because of these factors, most young adults assume that they will go through an extended period of transition, trying different life experiences, living arrangements, careers, relationships, and viewpoints until they finally are able to stand on their own and settle down. Many of those surveyed are smarting from poor life choices and harmful lifestyles, yet they profess to have "no regrets" and are generally optimistic about their personal future when they finally get to the point they are able to stand on their own. Some researchers refer to this recently created life phase as "emerging adulthood," covering the period from 18 to 29. Through the rest of this article, we will refer to this age range as *emerging adults*. Keep in mind that the surveys and interviews are limited to the range from 18 to 23 and there will certainly be some difference between 29–year–olds and this lower range.

Although, these emerging adults face a period of significant changes, we will see that for many that profess to be Christians, they have already established a set of beliefs and attitudes that have them on a trajectory moving away from a vital Christian walk with Jesus Christ. To put it in the words of Paul, they have already been "taken captive" by their culture (Col. 2:8).

Emerging Adults: Cultural Themes

Through their interviews and the results of other studies, Smith and his team identified over forty cultural themes that impact the overall religious perspective of emerging adults. A sample of those themes gives a feel for the general cultural milieu shaping the lives of today's emerging adults.

Theme #1: Reality and morality are personal and subjective, not objective.

Most emerging adults cannot even conceive of, much less believe in, the existence of a common shared reality that applies to all people. According to Smith and Snell, "They cannot, for whatever reason, believe in—or sometimes even conceive of—a given, objective truth, fact, reality, or nature of the world that is independent of their subjective self-experience and that in relation to which they and others might learn or be persuaded to change. . . . People are thus trying to communicate with each other in order to simply be able to get along and enjoy life as they see fit. Beyond that, anything truly objectively shared or common or real seems impossible to access."{3} It appears that the perceived inability to know objective truth causes emerging adults to settle for getting along and enjoying life as the highest good they can aspire to. This cultural theme is driving them into the life of vanity Solomon warns us of in Ecclesiastes rather than the life of higher calling Paul knew when he wrote:

> *One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal*

This subjective view of reality is clearly reflected in the conversations of emerging adults. Based on their interviews, the authors report,

> *The phrase "I feel that" has nearly ubiquitously replaced the phrases "I think that," "I believe that," and "I would argue that"—a shift in language use that express[es] an essentially subjectivistic and emotivistic approach to moral reasoning and rational argument . . . which leads to speech in which claims are not staked, rational arguments are not developed, differences are not engaged, nature is not referenced, and universals are not recognized. Rather, differences in viewpoints and ways of life are mostly acknowledged,*

> *respected, and then set aside as incommensurate and off limits for evaluation."{4}*

Our young people are growing up into a culture where there is no context for real dialogue about truth and truth's impact on our life choices.

The inability to believe in or search for objective truth stands in contrast to Jesus' claims that He came "to testify to the Truth" (John 18:37) and that He is "the Truth" (John 14:6) and Paul's instruction to Christians to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15).

Without any concept of an objective standard, morality is determined by one's individual feelings. If you feel good about an action then it is right. If you feel bad about an action it is wrong. Most emerging adults would say, "If something would hurt another person, it is probably bad; if it does not and is not illegal, it's probably fine."{5}

Theme #2: It's up to the individual, but don't expect to change the world.

Most emerging adults have no concept of a common good that would motivate us to put another's interests ahead of our own or to attempt to influence another's behavior for the common good. "The most one should ever do toward influencing another person is to ask him or her to consider what one thinks. Nobody is bound to any course of action by virtue of belonging to a group or because of a common good."{6}

The authors continue:

> *Again, any notion of the responsibilities of a common humanity, a transcendent call to protect the life and dignity of one's neighbor, or a moral responsibility to seek the common good was almost entirely absent among the respondents. . . .{7}*

> *Most emerging adults in America have extremely modest to no expectations for ways society or the world can be changed for the better. . . . Many are totally disconnected from politics, and countless others are only marginally aware of what today's pressing political issues might be. . . . The rest of the world will continue to have its good and bad sides. All you can do is live in it, such as it is, and make out the best you can.{8}*

Theme #3: Uncertain about purpose, but consumerism is good stuff.

Most emerging adults are still unsure as to what their purpose in life might be. Is there something greater that they should devote themselves to? Lacking any concept of a common good takes the teeth out God's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39) and to "regard others as more important than yourself, do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:3–4).

Self–sacrifice for others was clearly not a part of their life purpose, but almost all of them are sure that being able to buy the things they want and to live a comfortable affluent lifestyle are key aspects of their purpose. There does not appear to be any tension in their thinking between loving God and loving material things as well. "Not only was there no danger of leading emerging adults into expressing false opposition to materialistic consumerism; interviewers could not, no matter how hard they pushed, get emerging adults to express any serious concerns about any aspect of mass–consumer materialism."{9} In this cultural environment, Jesus' admonition in Luke 12 is desperately needed:

> *Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15).*

Theme #4: Sex is not a moral issue.

Partying, hooking up, having sex, and cohabitating are generally viewed as an essential aspect of the transition from teen years to adulthood. This cultural theme creates a dissonance with their attitude toward serious practice of religion since they recognize that most religions are not favorable towards partying and sex outside of marriage. Choosing to ignore any religious moral teaching from their teen years, "the vast majority of emerging adults nonetheless believe that cohabiting is a smart if not absolutely necessary experience and phase for moving toward an eventual successful and happy marriage. . . . None of the emerging adults who are enthusiastic about cohabiting as a means to prevent unsuccessful marriages seem aware that nearly all studies consistently show that couples who live together before they marry are more, not less, likely to later divorce than couples who did not live together before their weddings."{10}

Emerging Adults: Cultural Perspective on Religion

Within these broader cultural themes, Smith and Snell identified a set of prevailing religious cultural themes which create a framework for how many emerging adults view religion. These themes were dominant messages across the 230 interviews and the survey results, but do not reflect the views of all emerging adults.

Feelings towards religion

The general feelings of emerging adults toward religion appear to be driven by their years of diversity training and adherence to religious pluralism. Religion does not seem to be viewed as a controversial topic by emerging adults. They are not averse to talking about religion, but they are not very likely to bring it up for discussion. As the authors

discovered,

> *there are many more important things to think and talk about. In any case, for most it's just not a big issue, not a problem, nothing to get worked up over. . . . For very many emerging adults, religion is mostly a matter of indifference. Once one has gotten belief in God figured out . . . and . . . feels confident about going to heaven . . . there is really not much more to think about or pay attention to. In this way, religion has a status on the relevance structures or priority lists of most emerging adults that are similar to, say, the oil refinery industry.{11}*

Even though they realize that religions claim to be different and to have the truth, most emerging adults believe that all religions share the same basic principles. Basically, religion is about belief in God and learning to be a good person. One respondent put it this way: "The line of thought that I follow is that it doesn't matter what you practice. Faith is important to everybody, and it does the same thing for everybody, no matter what your religion is." Another said, "I find it really hard to believe that one religion is exactly true. I would say that if anything's right, it would be probably something common in most religions."{12}

Consequently, even for the faith that you affiliate with it is fine to only select those aspects that feel right to you and mix in aspects from other faiths to find what works for you.

Purpose of religion

All major world religions answer the major questions of life: Where did I come from? Why am I here? What happens when I die? Is there anything I can do during this life which will impact what happens to me after I die? Consequently, religions provide a perspective on how to be in a right relationship with our creator during this life and how to maximize our benefits in the afterlife (or after–lives, for some

religions). However, most emerging adults take a more pragmatic view. According to the interviews, “The real point of religion, ultimately, in the eyes of most emerging adults, is to help people be good, to live good lives.”{13}

In fact, it is not really important if they have true answers to these key questions. As one of the interviewees stated, “What do you mean by religious truth? Because all religions pretty much have a good message that people can follow. I would say that basic premise of the religions, like where they get their message from, is false, but the message itself is good.”{14}

Kids learn right and wrong from church activities. “By the time a kid becomes a teenager or young adult, that person has pretty much learned his or her morals and so can effectively ‘graduate’ and stop attending services at the congregation. What is the point, after all, of staying in school after you have been taught everything it has to teach?”{15}

The results of this research confirm that the “cultural captivity” or “sacred/secular split” (identified by Nancy Pearcy as a major challenge for American Christianity) is a dominant factor among emerging adults. Most emerging adults have religious beliefs, but “they do not particularly drive the majority’s priorities, commitments, values, or goals.” One observed, “I don’t think it’s the basis of how I live, it’s just, I guess I’m just learning about my religion and my beliefs. But I still kinda’ retain my own decision or at least a lot of it on situations I’ve had and experiences.”{16}

Perhaps the most chilling quote from Smith and Snell is their conclusion on this theme: “It was clear in many interviews that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives.”{17}

These insights make it very clear that it is not enough to equip teenagers with a set of basic Christian doctrines that define a good Christian. We must also get them to understand that these truths relate to the real, everyday world, and that we can trust them to inform and enlighten our daily choices, attitudes, and activities.

Some of the other themes identified by Smith and Snell are listed below:

- *The family's faith is associated with dependence.*
- *Religious congregations are not a place of real belonging.*
- *Friends hardly talk about religion.*
- *Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is still alive and well. (see "Is This the Last Christian Generation.")*
- *What seems right to me" is authoritative.*
- *Take or leave what you want.*
- *Evidence and proof trump "blind faith."{18}*
- *Mainstream religion is fine, probably.*
- *Religion is a personal choice—not social or institutional.*
- *There is no way to finally know what is true.*

Emerging Adults: Trends in Religious Participation and Belief

What impact does this postmodern cultural milieu have on the religious lives of emerging adults? The survey results provide a lot of insight into that question.

First we find that these emerging adults are much less involved in organized religion and personal religious practice than are older adults. For example, the percentage of emerging adults praying daily is only about two–thirds of the percentage of Baby Boomers who currently are daily pray–ers. Similarly, the percentage of emerging adults who regularly attend worship services is only about half of the percentage

of Baby Boomers who currently are regular worship service attendees. It is important to note that when these metrics are compared against the behavior of Baby Boomers when they were in their twenties, the Baby Boomers had numbers that were almost as low as today's emerging adults. This comparison gives some reason to believe that today's emerging adults will exhibit increased levels of religious involvement as they mature.

However, before banking on that historical trend, we need to remember that these emerging adults will be entering their thirties in a culture very different than the culture of the late 70s and early 80s. During this period, as Smith points out, "the larger popular culture of that era was still oriented around the outlook of ideological modernity." This outlook supported the ideal that if we applied ourselves diligently we could uncover absolute truths on which to base a successful life. Today's emerging adults are immersed in a postmodern culture that "stressed difference over unity, relativity over universals, subjective experience over rational authorities, feeling over reason." In this cultural environment there is little reason to be hostile toward organized religion, but there is also little reason to pursue it either.

The effects of this can be seen in two major differences between the religious practices of Baby Boomers during their early twenties and those of today's emerging adults. First, the survey results show that the number of mainline Protestants and Catholic young adults regularly attending church has dropped by almost fifty percent from the 1970s to today. Today, less than fifteen percent of Catholic emerging adults and less than ten percent of mainline Protestants attend religious services on a weekly basis. In contrast, the attendance percentage for evangelical Protestants has actually grown slightly over the same time period. Second, the number of young adults who identify themselves as not religious or as

a religious liberal has grown from thirty–seven percent in 1976 to sixty–one percent in 2006; an increase of sixty–five percent.

The NSYR not only gives us insight into the differences between generations and age groups, it also lets us examine the changes in the practices and thinking of these young people as they moved from teenage high school students into their early twenties. For our purposes, we will look at two primary areas of change: religious affiliation and religious beliefs. At the top level, these surveys show that there is a high degree of continuity in these two areas. That is, the majority of the young adults surveyed have retained the same affiliation and basic beliefs through this five year period. At the same time, there is a large minority that has experienced changes in these areas.

Over one third of the emerging adults surveyed are now affiliated with a different religious group than they were five years ago. On the positive side, twenty–five percent of those who originally identified themselves as Not Religious are now affiliated with a Christian religion (mostly evangelical denominations). However, over the same period, seventeen percent of those who originally identified themselves as Christian now identify themselves as Not Religious. The greatest changes were seen among mainline Protestant denominations where fully one half of the emerging adults changed their affiliations with half of those identifying as Not Religious and most of the rest now affiliated with evangelical Protestant denominations.

Lest we mistake these changes for a positive trend, keep in mind that the absolute number of emerging adults converting to Not Religious is five times the number of those converting from Not Religious to a Christian affiliation. In fact, when we analyze the change in religious beliefs and activities as those surveyed moved from teenagers to emerging adults, we find that over forty–one percent of them became less religious

over the five year span while only 3.6 percent of them became more religious during that period.

If we define cultural captivity as looking to the culture rather than to Christ and the Bible as truth and our primary guide for living, then the following seven beliefs would give a good indication of someone who is not culturally captive.

Percent of those surveyed who ascribed to a particular religious belief

Belief	U.S.	CP		MP
	2008	2003	2008	2008
My religious faith is very or extremely important in shaping my daily life.	44	70	57	33
Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead.	68		83	59
Only people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus go to heaven.	43		64	33
Only one religion is true.	29	49	45	22
Morals are not relative; there is a standard.	51		65	50

God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today.	63	79	74	57
Demons or evil spirits exist.	47	66	63	32
Ascribe to seven biblical beliefs above (based on 2008 affiliation).	10		22	10

CP – Conservative Protestant MP – Mainline Protestant

As seen in the last row of the table, nine out of ten emerging adults do not hold to a consistent set of basic biblical teachings. For those affiliated with an evangelical Protestant church the number drops to about eight out of ten, an alarming figure for denominations which stress the authority and accuracy of the Bible. For those affiliated with a mainline Protestant church, the number remains at nine out of ten, consistent with the average for all emerging adults.

Christian Smith and other researchers suggest that one interpretation of this data is that it is a result of the success of liberal Protestantism capturing the culture. The views taken by the majority of emerging adults are more consistent with those espoused by liberal Protestant theologians than by those espoused by conservative theologians. However, this success has the effect of making mainline Protestant churches irrelevant to the younger generations since the church offers the same relativism as the culture.

Emerging Adults: Teenage Factors

Influencing Current Behavior

One topic of interest to evangelicals is what aspects of a teenager's life will most impact their religious beliefs and behaviors as an emerging adult. In his study, Smith analyzed the religious trajectories from the teenage years into emerging adulthood. As these teenagers left home for college and careers, moving out from under the more or less watchful eyes of their parents, how did their religious beliefs and behaviors change? Overall, they found a significant decline in religiousness with the percent of the group that was highly religious dropping from thirty–four percent in 2003 down to twenty–two percent in 2008. Basically, one in three highly religious teenagers is no longer highly religious as an emerging adult.

Smith and his team used statistical analysis techniques, comparing the original teenage survey results with the emerging adult survey results taken five years later, to identify the factors in teenage lives that were associated with significantly higher levels of religiousness during emerging adulthood. The teenage period factors they found consistently very important in producing emerging adults with higher involvement in their religion were:

- *frequent personal prayer and scripture reading*
- *parents who were strongly religious*
- *a high importance placed on their own religious faith*
- *having few religious doubts*
- *having religious experiences (e.g., making a commitment to God, answered prayers, experiencing a miracle)*

Some teenage practices had a surprisingly weak correlation with emerging adult religious involvement. These weaker factors included:

- *level of education*

- *frequency of religious service attendance*
- *frequency of Sunday School attendance*
- *participating in mission trips*
- *attending a religious high school*

Let's explore some of these influencing factors to see what lessons we can glean.

Religiously Strong Parents

First, teenagers who view their parents as strongly committed to their religion are more likely to be highly religious as emerging adults. Even though the teenage years begin the process of developing independence from one's parents, it does not mean that what parents think, do, and say is not important. As Smith points out,

> *the best empirical evidence shows that . . . when it comes to religion, parents are in fact hugely important . . . By contrast it is well worth noting, the direct religious influence of peers during the teenage years . . . proved to have a significantly weaker and more qualified influence on emerging adult religious outcomes than parents. Parental influences, in short, trump peer influences.{19}*

Note this result is true regardless of whether the emerging adult felt close to their parents during their teen years. These results led Smith to chastise American adults for swallowing the myth that "parents of teenagers are irrelevant." He encourages us not to back away from discussing and promoting our religious beliefs with our children during their teenage years when they are first able to begin asking some of life's basic questions.

Personal Religious Disciplines

Second, the analysis showed that it was not participation in religious events, trips, or peer groups, but rather commitment

to individual religious disciplines that was a strong factor in predicting high religious involvement as an emerging adult. In other words, putting teenagers into a religious setting is not sufficient. However, if they come to the point where they realize the value of personal interaction with God through prayer and Scripture, they are much more likely to continue in that path. One reason for that correlation is that the practice of personal devotion which is *not* directly observed by peers, parents, or youth leaders, indicate a teenager that has placed a high value on the role of God and His truth in their lives. Another reason is that a consistent intake of God's truth helps to confirm the power and validity of the Scriptures as our guide for living. As Jesus told his followers, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

One take–away from this finding: perhaps we should judge the success of our youth groups less on the number of teenagers attending events, trips, and classes and more on the number who are committed to personal spiritual disciplines because they recognize the value they bring. Perhaps it is worth risking the "attendance hit" of having fewer fun times in order teach them the importance of "longing for the pure milk of the Word" (1 Peter 2:2).

College vs. Culture

One somewhat surprising result dealt with the impact of college attendance on religious faith and practice. Prior research on Baby Boomers has shown that higher education had an undermining effect on the religious and spiritual lives of young adults in these preceding generations. Many of us Baby Boomers discovered that the social network of our high school years which was generally supportive of religious belief and involvement was in stark contrast to our college campus where those beliefs were often viewed as backward and inappropriate for a college educated person. This environment contributed to

a higher decline in religiousness among college attendees compared to those who did not attend college. Today, however, several studies, including the NYSR, have shown that "in fact those who do not attend college are the most likely to experience declines in religious service attendance, self–reported importance of religion and religious affiliation."{20} For most measures, the differences are not large, but they are certainly counter to the results from the 70s and 80s.

Smith and other researchers have suggested several reasons for this major change. These possible causes include:

· the growing influence of campus–based religious groups
· colleges changing attitudes to be more supportive of religious interests
· a growing number of committed Christian faculty
· the growth of religious colleges and universities
· the major long–term decline in American college students' interest in answering questions about the meaning of life
· the influence of postmodern relativism which undercuts the authority of the professors as a source of truth
· adolescents who are less rebellious and more conventional than earlier generations

However, I would suggest that if all of these factors were significant, we should see less decline in religiousness from the teen to emerging adult years than we saw for the Baby Boomer generation. As we saw earlier, this is not the case. The decline in religious involvement and belief is greater for today's emerging adults as a whole than it was for the Baby Boomers. The transition period is just as corrosive if not more so. A reasonable conclusion would be that the culture itself has become just as corrosive as the college. Movies, television, music, and public schools are promoting the same counter–religious message once found primarily in academia.

Other studies have found that many teenagers have already conformed to the culture in their "real lives" before leaving high school and are maintaining the appearance of religiousness to please their parents and authority figures. Once they leave that environment to attend college or pursue a career, they are relieved to be able to set aside their faux religion and focus on their real–life pursuits.

One conclusion I would propose is that this data shows that the types of training and perspective that Probe offers to prepare students for the college environment are equally important for those students who are not headed for college. All teenagers need to be shown why they should value the perspectives taught in the Bible over the perspectives of their popular culture because the biblical perspectives are rooted in verifiable reality rather than the subjective postmodern morass of our popular culture.

Emerging Adults: Exposing Some Myths

As is often the case, a careful examination of well–designed cultural research identifies weaknesses in popularly held perceptions of reality; that is, facts often expose myths. Let's look at three popular myths that must be modified or discarded in the light of the NYSR results.

Myth 1: Emerging adults are very spiritual but are not into religion.

A popular perception is that although most young adults are not that interested in the external practice of organized religion, they are strongly committed to a personal faith and development of their spirituality. Although their outward involvement has declined, their inward commitment remains strong and their public involvement can be expected to return as they settle down into marriage and children. However, the data does not support this perception. As Smith states,

“little evidence supports the idea that emerging adults who decline in regular external religious practice nonetheless retain over time high levels of subjectively important, privately committed, internal religious faith. Quite the contrary is indicated by our analysis.”{21}

Smith and his team used the survey responses to categorize the respondents into six different religious types. Four of these types, representing seventy percent of emerging adults, are generally indifferent to both traditional religions and spiritual topics. Of the remaining thirty percent, half of those are what Smith labels Committed Traditionalists who are actively involved with organized religion. Another half of the remaining (i.e., fifteen percent of the total) are labeled Spiritually Open. It is important to understand that Spiritually Open is not the same as Spiritually Interested. Smith reports, “Most are in fact nothing more than simply *open.* They are not *actively* seeking, not taking a lot of initiative in pursuit of the spiritual.”{22} So, when the data is analyzed, it appears that less than five percent of emerging adults could be considered as spiritual but not religious.

Consequently, it appears that the challenge for the church is not redirecting a pent–up spiritual interest into orthodox Christianity, but, instead, demonstrating that spiritual issues are worthy of any real attention at all.

Myth 2: Emerging adults are hostile toward the church.

Several recent books have suggested that the dominant attitude of unchurched young adults is one of critical hostility toward the church.{23} Their research suggests that emerging adults view the church as hypocritical, hateful and irrelevant. Although he acknowledges that some of these feelings exist, Smith believes that the data demonstrates that these attitudes are not as prevalent as others suggest. In fact, eight out of ten emerging adults state that they have “a lot of respect for

organized religion in this country" and seven out of ten disagree that "organized religion is usually a big turnoff for me." Going a step further, a strong majority of emerging adults would disagree with the statement that "most mainstream religion is irrelevant to the needs and concerns of most people my age."{24}

Given these results, why are we presented with strong cases to the contrary? First, there are a significant minority who view the church as an irrelevant turnoff, and a majority who believe that too many religious people are negative, angry, and judgmental. Second, Smith surmises that some of this perception comes from conducting "interviews with non–representative samples of emerging adults . . . by authors who are themselves alienated from mainstream religion . . . (or) by pastoral and ecclesial reformers within mainstream religion who want to make the case that traditional churches are failing to reach young people today and so need to be dramatically transformed in a postmodern or some other allegedly promising way."{25}

Once again this is a good news / bad news story. The good news is that most emerging adults do not have strong emotional barriers build up against organized religion. However, the vast majority of them are indifferent to religion and confused about its role in life. According to Smith,

> *Most emerging adults are okay with talking about religion as a topic, although they are largely indifferent to it–religion is just not that important to most of them. . . . To whatever extent they do talk about it, most of them think that most religions share the same core principles, which they generally believe are good.{26}*

Myth 3: Religious practice does not impact personal behavior.

Another common perception is that religiously devoted young adults are not appreciably different from other young adults

in their actual life practices when it comes to sexuality, generosity, community service, drug use, and integrity. We are often told that out of wedlock pregnancy, cheating, and drug use are the same for evangelical young adults as for the rest of society. It is certainly true that affiliation with an evangelical denomination makes only a small difference in those behaviors. But does a deep personal commitment to a relationship with Jesus Christ make a difference? The survey data allowed Smith and his team to differentiate between simple affiliation and devotion. What he discovered is that those emerging adults who are devoted to their faith exhibit significantly different lifestyles than the norm. In particular, these devoted emerging adults are:

· more than twice as likely to give and volunteer their time
· more than four times less likely to engage in binge drinking or drugs
· twenty–five percent more likely to have attended college
· almost two times less likely to think that buying more things would make them happier
· twice as likely to abstain from pornography
· more than twice as likely to have abstained from sexual intercourse outside of marriage

The results clearly show that a deep commitment to a Christian religious faith has a significant impact on one's lifestyle. As Smith concludes, "emerging adult religion–whatever its depth, character, and substance–correlates significantly with, and we think actually often acts as a causal influence producing, what most consider to be more positive outcomes in life for emerging adults."{27}

Exposing these myths helps us focus on the key challenge for the future. It is not redirecting a pent–up spiritual interest into orthodox Christianity, or overcoming an emotional aversion to organized religion, but instead, demonstrating that spiritual issues are worthy of any real attention at all.

Notes

1. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. Ibid., 5.
3. Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 46.
4. Ibid., 51
5. Ibid., 47.
6. Ibid., 49
7. Ibid., 68.
8. Ibid., 72
9. Ibid., 67.
10. Ibid., 63.
11. Ibid., 145.
12. Ibid., 146.
13. Ibid., 148.
14. Ibid., 149.
15. Ibid., 149.
16. Ibid., 154.
17. Ibid., 154.
18. Meaning, since religion belongs to the category of faith, there can only be knowledge and truth in other areas.
19. Ibid., 285.
20. Ibid., 249.
21. Ibid., 252
22. Ibid., 296.
23. For example, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . And Why it Matters* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007).
24. Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 133, Table 4.15.
25. Ibid., 296.
26. Ibid., 286.
27. Ibid., 297.

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See Also:

Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths
Emerging Adults A Closer Look
The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults
Cultural Captives – a book on the faith of emerging adults

New Media and Society

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the ups and downs of the new media such as Facebook and Twitter, and their impact on us.

How is the new media affecting the way we think and the way we interact with others in society? I want to look at the impact the Internet, social networks, and portable media devices are having on our world.

Rachel Marsden doesn't think it is positive. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* she says:

> Spare me the stories of your "genius" tech-savvy child who can name every country on Google Earth, or how, because of your iPhone, BlackBerry and three cell phones, you juggle 20 tasks at once and never miss any business—even at 4 a.m., because you sleep with your portable devices. Does anyone care that technology is destroying social graces and turning people into rude jerks?{1}

She isn't the first to notice that the new technology and new mobile devices are changing the way we interact with others. And, as we will discuss later, they apparently are also changing the way we think, affecting everything from creativity to concentration.

Rachel Marsden wonders, “When did it become acceptable for technological interaction to supersede in-person communication?” I have news for her. It happened long before cell phones were invented. When I was a graduate student at Yale University, I noticed something odd about my academic advisor. Whenever the phone would ring, he felt he had to answer it. He could be advising me or we could be deep in the midst of a discussion of a research project. But if the phone rang, he stopped the conversation and answered the phone, staying on the phone until that conversation was over. I began to think that the only way I could ever have a sustained conversation with him would be to call him on the phone.

Of course, mobile devices make it even easier to ignore face-to-face interaction. Now the world revolves around the person who has instant access to others using these devices. Rebecca Hagelin says that narcissism has crept into our world. In 2006, *Time* magazine voted “You” as the “Person of the Year.” So much of media and advertising today is about indulging your fantasies.

Rebecca Hagelin is concerned about the impact this is having on our children. “Young people spend hours every day updating their Facebook pages, post and e-mail countless pictures of themselves, and plug their ears with music to create a self-indulgent existence shut-off from everyone around them.”{2}

While some of the impact is positive, much more should concern us and cause us to change our behavior.

The Internet and the Way You Think

Can the Internet change how you think? That was a question columnist Suzanne Fields asked recently.{3} If you go to Edge.org, you will notice that the question they pose for this year is slightly different. It is, “How is the Internet changing the way you think?” They pose this provocative

question because of the impact of computer chips, digitized information, and virtual reality on the way we think and how we receive information in this "collective high-tech electronic ecosystem for the delivery of information."

I have also been wondering about the impact of the Internet and the new media on our thinking. Unlike Suzanne Fields, I wasn't wondering *if* the Internet was changing our thinking but *how* it is already changing the way we think. There were two reasons why I have been thinking about this.

First, look at the younger generation being raised on the Internet. If you haven't noticed, they think and communicate differently from previous generations. I have done radio programs and read articles about the millennial generation. They do think differently, and a large part of that is due to the Internet.

A second reason for my interest in this topic is an *Atlantic* article by Nicholas Carr entitled "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" He says, "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."{4}

It's not that he believes his mind is going, but he notices that he isn't thinking the way he used to think and he isn't concentrating like he used to concentrate. "Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages."

He believes this comes from using the Internet and searching the web with Google. And he gives not only his story, but he also gives many anecdotes and as well as some research to back up his perspective.

For example, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University explains, “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.

Now 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.”{5}

The Internet does appear to be altering the way we read and think, but more research is needed to confirm if this true. If so, parents and educators need to take note of what is happening in our cyberworld.

BlackBerries, Twitter, and Concentration

Have portable media devices altered our ability to concentrate? That certainly seems to be the case. Nearly all of us have noticed that people with a BlackBerry sometimes seem distracted. And after they answer an e-mail, they seem to spend a few minutes trying to recollect their thoughts before they had the interruption.

An article in *Newsweek* magazine documents what many of us have always suspected: there are two major drawbacks to these devices.{6} The first is distraction overload. 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.

A second problem is what is called “continuous partial

attention." People who use mobile devices (like a BlackBerry or an iPhone) 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 BlackBerry.

But another hidden drawback associated is less creativity. Turning on a mobile device or a cell phone 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 reduces daydreaming.

We also can see how new technology affects the way we process information and react to it emotionally. The headline of one article asked this question: Can Twitter make you amoral?{7} Research was done at the Brain and Creativity Institute of the University of Southern California to see the impact of social networks like Twitter.

What the researchers found was that human beings can sort information very quickly. And they can respond in fractions of seconds to signs of physical pain in others. But other emotions (like admiration and compassion) take much longer to register. In fact, they found that lasting compassion in a relationship to psychological suffering requires a level of persistent, emotional attention.

So how does that relate to a technology like Twitter? The researchers found that there was a significant emotional cost of heavy reliance on a rapid stream of news snippets obtained through television, online feeds, or social networks such as Twitter. One researcher put it this way: "If things are

happening too fast, you may not even fully experience emotions about other people's psychological states and that would have implications for your morality."

The point of these studies is that media does have an impact. A wise and discerning Christian will consider the impact and limit its negative effects.

Social Networks

Social networks such as Facebook and MySpace create an interconnected web of friends and family. People who study these networks are beginning to understand the impact they are having on us.

At a social networking site, you find someone and ask to be his or her friend. Once you are accepted, you become a member of their network, and they become a member of your network. This opens to door to finding and making additional friends. The ability to extend your circle of friends is one of the many benefits of social networking.

One concern about social networking is that it, like most of the new media, increases distraction and fragmentation of thought. The quotes, stories, jokes, and video clips come at an increased rate. A concentrated conversation with one person is difficult. Look over the shoulder of someone in a social networking site who has lots of friends. Content quickly scrolls downward, and it feels like you are at a party where lots of people are all talking at once.

Also these networks tend to shorten our time of concentration. Steven Kotler makes this case in his *Psychology Today* blog, "How Twitter Makes You Stupid."{8} 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 is reducing the time of concentration to a few dozen words. He thinks that constantly using Twitter will tune "the brain to reading and comprehending information 140 characters at a time." He predicts "that if you take a Twitter-addicted teen and give them a reading comprehension test, their comprehension levels will plunge once they pass the 140 [character] mark." I am sure someone is already testing that hypothesis. Soon we should know the results.

Social networks do help us keep track of people who do not live near us, and that's a plus. But we are kidding ourselves if we believe that social networks are the same thing as true community. Shane Hipps, writing in *Flickering Pixels*, says this about virtual communities: "It's virtual—but it ain't community."

Social networks also have a great deal of power to influence us. Sociologists Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler document this in their new book, *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives.* They believe that happiness is contagious and so is obesity and quitting smoking. We are not only influenced by our friends, but are even influenced by our friend's friends. They say the world is governed by what they call "three degrees of separation."

Addiction is another concern. Years ago, counselors discovered Internet addiction. Now they are starting to talk about Facebook addiction. Lots of youth and adults spend too much time in front of a computer. Social networks are wonderful tools, but wisdom and discernment are necessary in order to use them correctly.

Media Addiction

The Barna Group does lots of surveys, and that has led George Barna to conclude that “media exposure has become America’s most widespread and serious addiction.”{9} I have always been hesitant to label our high levels of media exposure an addiction. We seem to have an addiction label for every behavior. But George Barna makes a convincing case.

Addiction changes our brains by altering the chemical balance and flow within the brain and by even altering the structure of the brain. According to the American Psychiatry Association, we can legitimately call something an addiction when certain symptoms manifest themselves.

For example addictions change our brain structure, altering emotions, motivations, and memory capacity. Addictions cause withdrawal symptoms when exposure to the addictive item is eliminated. Addictions cause the people to abandon or reduce their involvement in normal and healthy activities.

Certainly media can be positive in terms of education and relaxation. But most media content, Barna argues, “winds up serving the lowest common denominator because that’s where the largest audience” is to be found.

There is a generational trend. The builder generation did not grow up with media and never became accustomed to it. The boomer generation embraced media, and the following generations expanded it use in ways unthinkable a few decades ago.

If we were truly serious about controlling the media input in our lives and our children’s lives, we would see examples of parents putting boundaries on media exposure. We see nothing of the sort. Expenditures on personal media, in-home media, and mobile media continue to increase.

It is not that parents don’t understand the dangers. Barna

reports that three-quarters of parents say that exposure of their children to inappropriate media content are one of their top concerns. But they continue to buy their kids the media tools and continue to allow them to be exposed to inappropriate content.

By the time a young person reaches age 21, he or she will have been exposed to more than 250,000 acts of violence through TV, movies, and video games. He or she will have listened to thousands of hours of music with questionable lyrical content. Most parents know that much of what their children see or hear isn't wholesome

This may be one of the biggest challenges for society in general and even the church in particular. Most parents recognize the danger of the media storm in which they and their children live. But that are unwilling to take the necessary steps to set boundaries or end their media addiction.

Some Concluding Biblical Principles

In a previous article on Media and Discernment, I talked about the need for Christians to evaluate the impact of media in their lives. We need to develop discernment and pass those biblical principles to our children and grandchildren.

The new media represents an even greater threat and can easily conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Media is a powerful tool to conform us to a secular worldview and thus take us captive (Col. 2:8) to the false philosophies of the world.

Christians should strive to apply the following two passages to their lives as they seek discernment concerning the media. The first is Philippians 4:8. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

The second is Colossians 3:2–5. “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

Notes

1. Rachel Marsden, “Technology and the New Me Generation,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 December 2009.
2. Rebecca Hagelin, “Narcissism and Your Family,” 15 February 2010, www.townhall.com/hagelin.
3. Suzanne Fields, “Can the Internet Change How You Think?” 15 January 2010, www.townhall.com/fields.
4. Nicholas Carr, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” *Atlantic*, July/August 2008.
5. Ibid.
6. Sharon Begley, “Will the BlackBerry Sink the Presidency?” *Newsweek*, 16 February 2009.
7. “Can Twitter Make You Amoral? Rapid-fire Media May Confuse Your Moral Compass,” 14 April 2010, www.in.com.
8. Steven Kotler, “How Twitter Makes You Stupid,” Psychology Today, 15 May, 2009, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-playing-field/200905/how-twitter-makes-you-stupid.
9. George Barna, “Media Addiction,” 25 January 2010, www.barna.org.

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