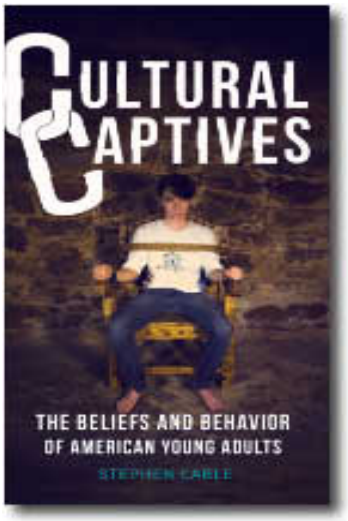
“Nones” are Not Christians Who Choose Not to Identify with a Specific Tradition

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

In our first post, we discussed the distressing rise of **“nones,”** those who select for their affiliation no religion at all, among our emerging adults (18- to 29-year-olds). As of 2014, over 35% of emerging adults classify as **“nones.”** Some distinguished scholars have suggested that a large percentage of **“nones”** are actually Christians who just have an aversion to identifying with a particular religious tradition.

This position seems somewhat odd since the GSS survey, for example, has only four choices that reflect a Christian tradition□Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Christian. None of those four are very specific as to one’s religious beliefs.



But we have another way to see if these **“nones”** are either actually involved, practicing Christians, or are truly wanting to distinguish their beliefs from those of Christianity. Using the GSS survey taken in 2014, we can probe this question to find answers. First, how many of the **“nones”** in this survey say they actually attend a church at least once a month? The answer is less than 7% of them.

Second, how many of these **“nones”** say they believe in a God, believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and

believe that there is life after death? The answer is about 12% of them.

Third, how many of these **"nones"** attend a church and have the three beliefs listed above. The answer is about 1%, or 1 out of every one hundred young adults not identifying as practicing Christians.

These three answers make it very clear that the increase in **"nones"** among emerging adults is not a result of them avoiding association with a particular religion. It is clear that the vast majority of **"nones"** are disassociating themselves from organized religion and from basic Christian doctrine as well.

Note: What about the **"nones"** who select "nothing at all" as their religious preference as opposed to those who claim they are atheists or agnostics? Perhaps, these "nothing at alls" simply do not want to identify with a specific Christian tradition. Well, the 2014 Pew survey indicates that two-thirds of the **"nones"** fall into this "nothing at all" category. So, if all of the positive answers to the three questions above were given by "nothing at alls," their percentages would be 10%, 18% and 2% respectively.

So, again it is very clear that the vast majority of "nothing at alls" have broken away from organized religion and mere Christian doctrine. Most are not, as some scholars suggest, young believers keeping their identity options open.

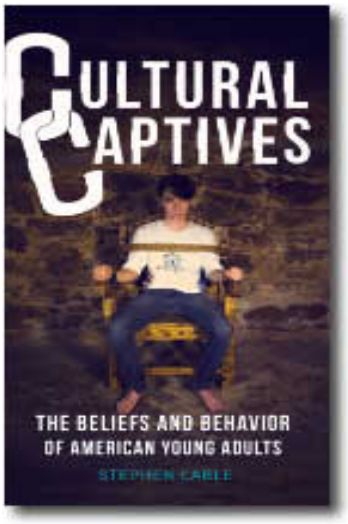
Acknowlegements:
The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ is the source of our data from the 2014 Pew survey.

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

Born-again Protestants Make Up Only 20% of Our Emerging Adult Population and That Number is Trending Down

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

As reported earlier, more than 43% of American emerging adults (ages 18-25) do not identify themselves as being part of the Christian faith. But, that means we still have a majority of emerging adults selecting a Christian faith as part of their identity. How many of that majority are born-again evangelicals, and how has that changed over the years?



In my book, *Cultural Captives*, I reported that the percentage of emerging adults who identified themselves as born-again Protestants had only dropped a small amount from 1976 to 2008, from 28% to 25% of the population. However, the same survey organizations report that the number in 2014 has dropped to 20%. If this sudden drop is a precursor to the rest of this decade, we could see the number drop down to 15% by 2020.

In any case, we find that 20% of emerging adults are born-again Protestants while 43% of them are **"nones"** or of other faiths.

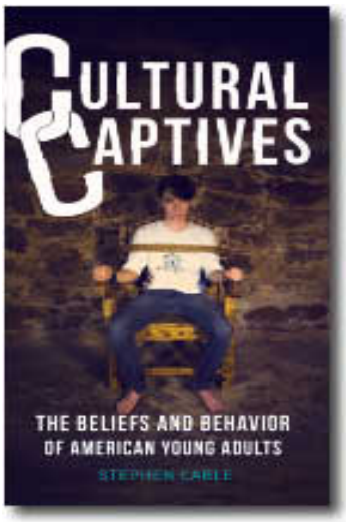
Looking at Protestants who do not consider themselves to be born-again, we find an even more dismal situation. Among emerging adults, they have dropped from around 25% of the

population in 1990, down to around 14% of the population in 2014. But they have only dropped one percentage point since 2008 and appear to have leveled off. So perhaps, they will comprise around 12% of the emerging adult population in 2020.

We appear to be heading down a path where over half of emerging adults will be non-Christians and less that one-fourth will identify as Protestants. We are experiencing a major change in the religious make-up of our country.

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

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable



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

Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of **"nones"** among this

young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the **percentage of emerging adult "nones" was now up to 33% of the population**, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying **35% of emerging adults identifying as "nones"** (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).

When we consider the number who do not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population in both surveys.
If this trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see **over half** of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

Acknowledgments:
The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.
The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ was the source of our data on the Pew survey