Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

- John Donne, Divine Sonnet X
amendment remedies" when speaking about rival politicians. Another holds up a picture of the Speaker of the House, and after some verbal mockery, slaps it as though he's striking the person in the face. Another, addressing a rally, says, "Let's beat that other side to a pulp. Let's take them out, let's chase them down."

So should we be surprised that the rhetoric of violence - not to mention actual violence - filters into the church, too?

Most frightening of all is that my friend's attacker thought he was doing a righteous thing: in his diatribe he invoked the example of Phinehas - who, you'll recall, ran a sword through a couple who was sinning ([Numbers 25:1-9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=numbers+25:1-9&version=NASB)), and was commended for his holy zeal. (Which should remind us how careful we must be about using stories from the Israelite theocracy as models for contemporary church life.)

I'd love to be able to say that the church has the advantage over culture in that we not only preach against violence and division, but consistently demonstrate peacefulness and harmony far beyond what the world around us is capable of. But if there are those whose goal is the purification of the church (rather than, as it should be, to make others want to accept Christ by our words and Godly example) things like this will happen. No matter who you may accuse of being against the best interests of this church, Jesus insisted we not weed the field, but wait for Him to do it at the harvest ([Matthew 13:24-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+13:24-30&version=NASB)).

Have you experienced threats or actual violence in your ministry? What can we do to bring peacefulness and civility to our church discussions? [Talk about it on our Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com).
What happened next? What do you do if you begin to find inroads into the homeless community? Watch the follow up video as Steve and Cyndee Holms experiment by providing a spiritual community for the homeless without disrupting the existing church worship structure. Fiddletown Faith is produced by Pacific Union Support Services.

-Dave Gemmell

**Reading for Pastors**

Thanks to Pew Research, a conversation between brothers Christopher Hitchens (an outspoken atheist) and his brother, Peter (a believer), about whether civilization can survive without God. A bit long, but worth reading.

Controversies continue throughout the country over whether communities will allow the building of mosques and Islamic centers. If they can't build mosques, churches may be next! (Does anyone know whether our own religious liberty department is weighing in here?)

Should parents be forced to get medical care for their children, even if it is against their religion? Oregon lawmakers are about to rule on the topic.

From the dean of evangelical homileticians, Haddon Robinson, "My Theory of Homiletics." Quote: "Those who have studied and practiced public speaking over twenty-five hundred years have agreed that the most effective way to structure a speech is to build it around a single concept."

Are the things discussed in small groups protected by privacy laws? Apparently not. Quote: "Small groups are not private for legal purposes. Anyone present can be compelled to tell what happened. There is nothing you can do to prevent this possibility."

Sam O'Neal has had in the past year had a good series on learning styles: a concept many of us learned years ago, but well worth going through again.

A church takes a hit and comes out fighting: a great piece on church conflict from Leadership magazine. This page adds an analysis of church conflict detailing attack and escape reactions.

**To the Point**

Opera is when a guy gets stabbed in the back and, instead of bleeding, he sings.
- Ed Gardner

What we think, or what we know, or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.
- John Ruskin

Humor is also a way of saying something serious.
- T. S. Eliot

Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.
- Oscar Wilde

I always wanted to be somebody, but I should have been more specific.
- Jane Wagner

The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.
- Lily Tomlin

We are inclined to believe those whom we do not know because they have never deceived us.
- Samuel Johnson

Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.
- Martin Luther King Jr.

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.
- George Bernard Shaw

Imagine if every Thursday your shoes exploded if you tied them the usual way. This happens to us all the time with computers, and nobody thinks of complaining.
- Jef Raskin

**News, Ideas & Reminders**
- A must-watch video, by Richard Hammar: the top 5 reasons churches end up in court! (The top one had better scare you.)

- Humor, from bluefishtv: starting a shallow small group. Quote: "Some people say we're superficial. But hey, the word super is in superficial!"

- Previous resource links:
  - Andrews Study Bible
  - Branded Faith, by Rajkumar Dixit
  - Matt Gamble, VagaBondServant ministry
  - The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  - iFollow website
  - Dissertation on house churches from Milton Adams
  - NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
  - A way to block time-wasting web sites

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.

Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.


Andrews University Music & Worship Conference. Mar 24, 2011 - Mar 26, 2011, Andrews University, 100 US 31 Highway, Berrien Springs, MI 49104. The eighth annual Andrews University Music and Worship Conference. If you're interested in exploring worship and worship music in ways that are theologically profound, practical, and inspiring, you will definitely want to join us. Sponsored by the NAD Church Resource Center and Andrews University's Department of Music, Department of Christian Ministry and Center for Youth Evangelism. Phone: 800-968-8428 x4 or 269-471-8352. For more information, email: worshipconference@andrews.edu.

United Youth Congress 2011 - iServe. Apr 6, 2011 - Apr 9, 2011, Orange County Convention Center, 9860 Universal Blvd, Orlando, FL 32819. Youth, young adults, youth leaders and parents/chaperones are invited to attend. We will have inspiring worship, training seminars, service projects in the community, an evening at Universal Studios, Saturday night concert, recreation, and much more! This package includes hotel and meals. For those who do not want hotel and meals, click here. For Sabbath Only, click here. Phone: 800-732-7587. For more information, email: events@adventsource.org.

Parents, Educators, Supervisors, & Ministry Leaders Invited to Attend IGNITION. Discover key principles for working and ministering with today's young adults at IGNITION Summit, April 4-6, 2011, Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX. Dr. Tim Elmore, president of Growing Leaders, will be among the featured presenters. To register and for more information, follow www.IGNITIONblog.wordpress.com.

From Walt Williams, Andrews University InMinistry Center Director, the list of Spring 2011 InMinistry intensive classes for each union - April 3-14

STANDOUT. Apr 15, 2011 - Apr 17, 2011, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. STANDOUT is a spiritual retreat for high school students, hosted on the campus of Andrews University. Throughout two days of spiritual exercises and group activities, we'll challenge you to tap into the amazing power of God so that you will STANDOUT and set your faith in motion! Phone: 269-471-6372. For more information, email: standout@andrews.edu.


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Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
I went to hear Ted Wilson and got hit in the mouth

by Jared Wright on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 at 12:19am

I went to hear Ted Wilson and got hit in the mouth (2) http://www.facebook.com/notes/jared-wright/i-went-to-hear-ted-wilson-a...
This is my mouth. Someone decided to hit me in it today. That is all.

Female voice: Well I was OK until all this.

(voices)

Me: (here I check my mouth and find it is bleeding) Hm...

Person: No, this IS the right place for it. This is the right place for it! You needa read your BIBLE! Ya?

Pastor: Wha...wha...what about Phinehas?

Person: Is that the right place for it? That APOSTASY? Write that in your paper. You want my name?

Me: Sure.

Person: [shouting unintelligible]

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The whole altercation took exactly one minute. Initially, I was too stunned at what just happened to react much. The man was ushered outside, and I am told that the female heard in the recording escorted him away.

So that's why I have a bloody mouth.

This is my mouth. Someone decided to hit me in it today. That is all.
Can Civilization Survive Without God?
A Conversation with Christopher and Peter Hitchens

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life invited brothers Christopher and Peter Hitchens to address the question of whether civilization needs God.


Peter is the author of four books, including The Abolition of Britain, a major seller in that country, and the recently published The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith, which he wrote to counter Christopher’s book God Is Not Great. A British journalist, author and broadcaster, he currently writes for The Mail on Sunday, where he is a columnist and occasional foreign correspondent. He is a contributor to (among others) The Spectator, Prospect, Standpoint, The Guardian, The New Statesman and the American Conservative. Once an atheist, he attributes his return to faith largely to his experience of socialism in practice, which he witnessed during his many years reporting in Eastern Europe and his nearly three years as a resident correspondent in Moscow during the collapse of the Soviet Union. This year, he won the Orwell Prize for Journalism for foreign reporting.

View video highlights from the event.

Speakers:
Christopher Hitchens, Author, Contributing Editor to The Atlantic, Columnist for Vanity Fair
Peter Hitchens, Author, Columnist for The Mail on Sunday

Moderator:
Michael Cromartie, Vice President, Ethics and Public Policy Center

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Peter Hitchens’ Opening Remarks
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On the Brothers’ Relationship
Christopher on Prayers of Support
On Nietzsche and Human Will
On the Separation of Church and State
Where Does Morality Come From?

LUIS LUGO, PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE: Good afternoon and thank you all for coming. And a special thanks to Christopher and Peter Hitchens for being with us today. I m Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. We are a project of the Pew Research Center, which is a nonpartisan organization that does not take positions on issues or policy debates — not even on the question of the existence of the Almighty. This event is part of the Pew Forum luncheon series in which we bring together journalists and important public figures for serious discussions on topics at the intersection of religion and public affairs.

Our format at these events is really very, very simple. We ask our guests to speak for about 10 minutes or so. Then we invite the rest of you to join in the conversation. I should point out that this event is on the record and we are taping it. And our friends at CNN, as you can see, are also videotaping it. So just be aware of that.

At this time, I would like to introduce Michael Cromartie of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, who is an advisor to the Pew Forum. Mike did all the heavy lifting in pulling the panel together, and so for that, he gets the privilege
of moderating this event.

We have a few out-of-town journalists listening in via conference call, and I would like to welcome them as well. Those of you on the call who would like to take part in the discussion — and we encourage that — please e-mail your questions. We'll make sure to work your questions into the queue.

Again, it's great to have all of you here and via phone with us. We welcome you to the Pew Research Center. Mike, over to you.

MICHAEL CROMARTIE, ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY CENTER: Thank you, Luis, and welcome, ladies and gentlemen. If you have a bio right in front of you, which I know you do, I am not one of those moderators who then turns around and reads that bio to you. I think that you know why you're here. You know both these men by reputation, and their biographies are in front of you. What I would like to do, though, is just give an anecdote or two about our speakers.

Christopher, as many of you all know, has a new book out now called *Hitch-22: A Memoir*. I went back and looked at some reviews of the book, and I thought I would try to find something in the reviews about Christopher. In *The New York Times*, the reviewer highlights Christopher's great capacity for friendship. He's very moved by the fact that in this autobiography Christopher has such wonderful things to say about his lifelong friends. In fact, the reviewer says, "He is also devoted to friendship. *Hitch-22* is among the loveliest paeans to the dearness of one's friends ... I've ever read. The business and pleasure sides of Mr. Hitchens's personality can make him seem, whether you agree with him or not, among the most purely alive people on the planet."

Then in another review in *The New York Times*, the reviewer says this: "The truth is, by Hitchens's standards, his examination of how he and the left parted company is surprisingly unstrident and nonpolemical. It is, in fact, almost melancholic. He's not claiming with his typical adamantine force that the balance sheets work out. And perhaps the strongest theme in *Hitch-22* is just this — that sometimes the balance sheets are an unholy mess."

"By the time he got to Oxford, he was quite accustomed to 'keeping two sets of books,' passing out leaflets at car plants by day and racing off in fancier dress to the Gridiron Club by night. Christopher Hitchens may long to be a cogent man of reason, and he can certainly be a pitiless adversary. But he knows there are two sides to any decent match, and it's touching in *Hitch-22* to see how often he'll race to the other side of the court to return his own serve, which may explain why, though he tries to be difficult, he's so hard to dislike."

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you someone who, even when you disagree with him politically or religiously, is so very hard to dislike. Christopher?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Oh, is it my turn already?

CROMARTIE: You're on.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I want to say that I was very impressed while reading Peter's latest book — to which I commend your attention — to see that he had written a particular — (audio break) — long before he can have read a book I hope you will also all be reading, which is Diarmaid MacCulloch's extraordinary history of Christianity. I don't know how many people here have tried it yet. But it's really an admirable, beautifully written book.

It's argued from the viewpoint of a fairly faithful Anglican, whatever that may turn out to be. It's written, anyway, from a Christian perspective and with an absolutely extraordinary control of scholarship and prose. One of the things it says — very sobering for a Christian reader, I would suppose, to read is this:

There used to be a word which could be used unironically, and it was used, really, until not much more than a century, a century-and-a-half ago. People could say, and mean what they said when they said the word, Christendom. There was a Christian world. It had been partly evolved, partly carved out by the sword, partly defended by the sword, at some points giving way, at other times expanding. But it was a meaningful name for a community of belief and value that endured for many, many centuries — and has many splendors to its name.

And it's all gone; no one could use that term now without either great nostalgia or some degree of irony. It's all gone for the reason — MacCulloch gives exactly the reason Peter gives in his book. It destroyed itself, Christendom, and it destroyed itself by the tremendous criminal act of urging its members to kill each other in the outbreak of the Great War, as it was then known — but it wasn't known that it would lead to a huge and even worse part two — in 1914, where the king-emperor of the British empire, who was also the head of the Church of England, and the Russian czar, who was also the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and you follow the road —
There's a partial exemption to be made here for the French empire, which didn't precisely go to war in the name of its religion. But all the others did, and they leveled Christian civilization, European civilization, to a point where we still have no idea how much we've lost and how greatly our development as a species and as a society has been retarded. Out of the ruins of it, and striding across those poisoned ruins, came the great totalitarianisms that very nearly put an end to what remained of what could be called, by then certainly not Christendom, but of European and Russian civilization.

So this discussion that we're having is by no means a new one and doesn't involve such a new thought. We've had to wrestle for a very long time with the idea, what will we do about civilization; what will we do about values, ethics, morals; how will we teach them; how will we learn to live with one another in the absence of any real religious authority, any credible one, any one that's worthy of the name, worthy of respect? This absence has been felt for a very, very long time, long before I was able to start writing about it.

I would just add, because I think it's of extraordinary interest, that most of those empires have since passed away. Some of them won the war, nominally, and some of them lost it, nominally. They've more or less accepted the implied defeat in the long run, but two of them are in a rather sinister way, in my judgment, in the process of recrudescing — the Ottoman Empire, the caliphate, which very ill-advisedly went to war on the side of Wilhelmine German and Austro-Hungarian imperialism, throwing its own empire into the ring and declaring a world jihad from the throne of the caliph himself in Constantinople, making it obligatory on all the faithful to kill at least two nonbelievers as long as those nonbelievers were not German, Austrian or Hungarian, since it was the German, Austrian and Hungarian treasuries that were actually paying for the promulgation of this jihad.

Not only did the caliphate lose the war, but it lost its caliphate; it was dissolved by Mustapha Kemal [Ataturk]. But it's interesting, it's one of the two that's trying to come back. Now you can go to a meeting in Kensington in London, if you wish, or on the Left Bank, or in the Kreuzberg in Berlin, and you can go to the caliphate club. It'll be quite well attended; there'll be quite a lot of people who say that the only salvation of humanity, the only true morality, the only real faith will come when all the Muslim umma is once again united — in fact, somewhat expanded, to take in, for example, Spain and other territories lost in previous combats.

It's a real movement, and we're going to live with it for the rest of our lives. And those who think that faith-based is the prefix to something positive have a lot of argument, I think, ahead of them when they confront people who really mean it like that.

The second of the two empires that took part in this hecatomb of civilization in the name of their own religion, I mean the Russian one, shows real signs also of imperial nostalgia. No one here, I suppose, will have forgotten the moment when George Bush first met Vladimir Putin, who had chosen for the day to decorate his chest with his grandmother's ornate Russian Orthodox crucifix, enough for the president to be convinced and to say that just to look into those beautiful limpid eyes was enough to see that he was a person of deep spirituality and sensitivity.

I think, by the way, in a fairly strong field, that one of the stupidest things any president has ever said. But now you don't have to use much of your imagination when you see at the inauguration — when Putin wants to make someone prime minister, and when he says, how he can make himself czar again down the road — all these inaugural ceremonies are attended by black-cowled patriarchs swinging their incenses, demanding and getting in return privileges over other churches and other religions in Russia, restoring the same political and clerical balance, roughly, that did underpin Russian absolutism and autocracy until the great catastrophe of 1914.

And that's coming back, too, and I think we don't pay anything like enough attention to this fusion of traditional great Russian chauvinism and police regime with the clerical bodyguard and prop and stay and ally that it’s appointed for itself. But now it goes without saying that I’m speaking to the question of, how compatible is civilization with religion?

But so far, those are the only two empires that do show this sign of religious revival. It's equally true to say that in huge parts of what we might call the industrialized modern world, tens of millions of people, in effect, live in a post-religious society. It's hard to argue, I think, that they lead conspicuously less-civilized lives than their predecessor generations, than the ones of 1914 or 1939.

We haven't yet conquered the problem of alienation or of anomie or of spiritual waste or of the fear of death. That has to be worked on. And we have a problem with moral relativism, that religion in its — inaudible — supremacy equally failed to solve. But I don't think it's really true to say that we live less-civilized a life than those of our predecessors who felt that there was a genuine religious authority that spoke with power.

It's actually more than half a century since George Orwell wrote that the problem of civilization would be exactly this. He said, how will we now inculcate ethics, teach morality, to the people, to the majority, in the absence of a spiritual authority that commands respect and that has innate presence, that has the respect? With this decline in the authority of religion, how shall we teach ethics and morals?

It remains a very, very good question. I'd pause to mention that George Orwell himself, a very convinced atheist with a very strong and rooted respect for liturgy and for scripture and for tradition, made quite a good shot, in living his own life and evolving his own writing, in showing how, in fact, it is possible to lead an ethical existence without supernatural support or any appeal to it. But that might be choosing a rather too-favorable example to my own argument.

The truth is that if we just look at our own society, what do we really find? I was very interested to see the recent findings of our hosts today about how much Americans really know about their own religion — how few Catholics really know what the sacrament is, for example, how very few Protestants know who Martin Luther was, how very few — I was very surprised by this — how very few Jews appear to know that Maimonides was one of them — a Jew, as you will — and so forth.

But it shouldn't really have surprised me, I don't think. Thomas Jefferson said in what I used to think of as a disastrously non-prescient letter — I think it was to his nephew, Peter Carr — that there isn’t a young American born today who will not die a Unitarian.

Well, that’s one of the things T.J. didn't get exactly right. But if you go around the public halls and the provincial theaters, as I do whenever I can, and engage with belief and the believers, you'll find to an extraordinary extent that a kind of ethical humanism with a vague spiritual
content is extremely commonplace. I can take 10 bucks off most Catholics by asking them the difference between the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth. I’ve known all about how to do that long before Pew alerted me to the opportunity — (laughter).

There are people who combine a sort of Anglicism with a kind of Buddhism — it’s not at all uncommon — or Hinduism. I would say that the American Jewish population is in its majority effectively post-religious. It has, I would prefer to say, transcended its monotheism and become an ethical humanism. Certainly in the Reform, and to a great degree the Conservative congregations, that’s already the case, and everybody knows that on non-scriptural but, as it were, moral matters the American Catholic community has what is called by them a cafeteria Catholic, or an à la carte manner to it. In other words, it picks and chooses what might or might not be convenient to believe.

This is shallow, to be certain, and it’s thin, but I’m not sure if it isn’t preferable to a more decided, enforced orthodoxy, in connection with which, because I know I’m trespassing on your time, I’ll try and put it in the form of a question. It’s a thought experiment, if you like, which I’ll leave you with. Notice how in your daily newspaper intake, media intake, the much-maligned word secular has acquired on some pages of the newspaper, namely the international ones, almost the character of a positive. It has lost its pejorative character almost entirely.

In other words, suppose you were to read today that the new prime minister of Iraq was the leader of a secular force that didn’t have any religious allegiance. Would you be, A, terribly upset, B, enormously relieved or, three, thrilled beyond measure? (Laughter.) Ought you to be thinking this, those of you of faith?

What if someone was to say a leader would emerge in Iran, an opposition leader, with genuine support among the intellectuals and — inaudible — and the downtrodden workers and peasants, who was to say, you know what? I’ve never believed a word of this story about the upcoming 12th [imam and his reappearance and his bringing of a reign of peace and redemption to the whole human race. I think that’s an absolute fairy story, I think that’s got about as much chance of being true as Santa Claus. Would you not be rather relieved to hear that there was such a person? I submit that you most certainly would.

If you heard today that Bibi Netanyahu on yet another of his fraudulent trips to Washington to humiliate our president and our Congress had dispensed with the services of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the leader of the religious partnership in his coalition, who calls for God to smite the Palestinians with a plague, for example — that this man no longer appointed the person who is in charge of housing and settlements, which a matter of fact, he does. Would you not think that was a step in the right direction? I submit that you would.

So it may be rude to leave you with a question rather than proposing an answer, but I think you’ll see why I have done so, and I now make way for a younger and more principled generation.

CROMARTIE: Thank you, Christopher. A biography of Peter is in front of you, but I would just call your attention to something that he wrote in his new book, The Rage Against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith. In April 2008, they had a debate in Grand Rapids, Mich., on the existence of God — Christopher and Peter did — and he wrote this:

“Somehow on that Thursday night in Grand Rapids, our old quarrels were, as far as I am concerned, finished for good. Just at the point where many might have expected — and some might have hoped — that we would rend and tear at each other, we did not. At the end I concluded that while the audience perhaps had not noticed, we had ended the evening on better terms than either of us might have expected. This was, and remains, more important to me than the debate itself.

“Something far more important than a debate had happened a few days before, when Christopher and I had met in his Washington, D.C. apartment. If he despised and loathed me for my Christian beliefs, he wasn’t showing it. To my astonishment, Christopher cooked supper, a domesticated action so unexpected that I still haven’t got over it.”

Edward Lucas of The Economist described Peter as “a forceful, tenacious, eloquent and brave journalist. Readers with long memories may remember his extraordinary coverage of the revolution in Romania in 1989, or more recently his intrepid travels to places such as North Korea. He lambasts woolly thinking and crooked behavior at home and abroad.”

I give you, ladies and gentlemen, Peter Hitchens.

PETER HITCHENS: Thank you. The question, first of all, is what civilization might be. I doubt whether we can agree on that very quickly, since we probably can’t even agree on how to spell it on either side of the Atlantic. I would really like to start by explaining what it isn’t and to recount some experiences of mine in places where it had ceased to be.

The first one, picture me, if you will, in a blue suit and polished leather shoes sitting on top of a pile of cargo in a retired Soviet aircraft — rather, Soviet aircraft which ought to have been retired — landing at Mogadishu Airport one winter’s afternoon shortly before sunset. I won’t explain quite how stupid I had been to get myself into this position, but I was working at that time for a daily newspaper which had accepted a suggestion of mine, unexpectedly, that I should go to Mogadishu just before the U.S. Marines arrived, as they thought, to rescue the Somalis from famine and chaos.

Arriving at Mogadishu Airport is an experience some of you may have had and some of you may not. What I can tell you is this: There is no passport control. There is no baggage reclaim. In fact, as you land, sitting on top of the baggage, it slides the length of the aircraft as the brakes go on, which has made me take aircraft safety precautions with a total lack of seriousness ever since. It’s rather enjoyable, actually, when the baggage slides down the whole length of the plane.

You’re met at the end of the runway by a man from The Associated Press who is collecting all the water and supplies for his bureau, and by about 15 young men with AK-47s, who approach you and say, do you want a bodyguard? And you turn to the man from The Associated Press and you say, do I want a bodyguard? And he says, yes you do. If you don’t have a bodyguard, you’ll be dead and stripped by morning.

So we hire, myself and my colleague, John Downing, we hire one of these — in fact, two of these bodyguards — and a car with no upholstery, and we drive into Mogadishu just in time to see the departing ranks of the gangs and tribal formations which are supposed to be
Can Civilization Survive Without God? A Conversation with Christopher ... http://pewforum.org/Belief-in-God/Can-Civilization-Survi... driven away by the arrival of the U.S. Marines. They are, in fact, going. They’re going into the sunset with their machine guns and their bandannas — they look like heavily armed rock stars — because they know that there is no point in being there when the Marines arrive, and they intend to come back later and do whatever it is they do. We circle around, looking for some time for somewhere to spend the night. And only by great good fortune, because departing around a corner, my colleague sees somebody he knows from Sarajevo, do we find anywhere to spend the night. We are allowed into a compound which has been rented by some German television people, who share with us their camel stew and allow us to sleep on their concrete floor. I go to sleep listening to the cries of dying people and the chatter of gunfire outside and hearing, in effect, what would have happened to me if I hadn’t found my way into the German compound.

The following day I find people to take me round; we’re nearly murdered on one occasion because my interpreter is from the wrong tribe. I see a scene of complete desolation. Every building has bullet holes, or indeed, shell holes in it. The main street is completely stripped bare of every feature of modern civilization. It’s just a stretch of mud with potholes in it with loping persons on it carrying weapons and no guarantee that they won’t use them on you. All the physical features of civilization and all the, as it were, intangible features of civilization — civility, safety, the ability to rely on your neighbor, the passing person, for any kind of kindness or consideration — have gone.

Eventually, with great relief, I got out of Mogadishu and I got home and was shown a few weeks afterwards a photograph of the same street which I had seen on that evening and on the following morning. Mogadishu having been an Italian colony, the street scene was actually rather Roman: pleasantly dressed people strolling along well-kept sidewalks, expensive cars gliding up and down a smooth road, telephone kiosks, pavement cafes.

The distance between that and what I saw was approximately 20 years, and it came to me and it has stayed with me ever since, whenever I walk down a pleasant street in Oxford, where I live, or indeed roam around Dupont Circle here or any major civilized city, this is not permanent. This is not here automatically. It is not as the air we breathe or the water we drink. It is as a result of certain unusual conditions which do not always exist and which have come about only for a very short period of time in a very limited number of places, and which even having been established, can come to an end.

This experience came on top of two years living in what, when I arrived, was the capital city of the Soviet Union and what, when I left, was the capital city of the Russian Federation. And there I also saw a very curious civilization which was not a civilization. That is to say, there was very little civility on the street between people. I was always struck by this. I would go down into what we’re always told in the tourist manuals is the magnificent Moscow Metro.

Because of the horrendously ruthless climate, the stations are guarded by very heavy wooden swing doors, or were in those days, and I would hold them open for people as they came into the stations behind me, and they would step back with a look of mistrust on their faces, as if I was playing a sort of joke on them. They were completely unused to the idea that anyone might do this. There wasn’t even that level of consideration. Nobody in any kind of public dealing would trust you. Almost everything had to be obtained through whispered threats and bribes.

By contrast, if you were invited into the homes of Russians, you were immediately led into a warm and entirely civilized circumstance of complete mutual obligation and trust in that very, very narrow and very, very small society. It was the family and the immediate friends where people knew whom they could trust and to whom they could show obligation and from whom they could expect it.

Now, you may say that this has to do with the climate or the economic conditions. I don’t happen to believe this, and if any of you would be kind enough to take a look at my book, I hope I have explained to some extent how this had come about. These two experiences, one on top of the other, persuaded me that it was worthwhile to think of what it was in our civilization that we ought to value.

There was one other thing, and Christopher will be slightly familiar with part of this. When we were growing up in the early 1960s and late 1950s, we lived for a short while in a very pleasant suburb of what was then the British naval base at Portsmouth. Now that we no longer have a navy, it is no longer that but it was then, and it was a very sequestled, soft, comfortable, safe place in which we could wander about unsupervised for hours. Our parents could send us off and not worry about what would become of us. I can’t imagine, actually, anywhere more typical of English suburbia at the time.

While I was in Moscow, I had access to an immensely elaborate precursor of the Internet, the wire services that my newspaper received, one of them being the Press Association, the domestic one. And I was astonished one evening to be reading the wire services and to see the name of this suburb, Alverstoke, come up in a story. In that story what had happened was that somebody had been involved in an altercation with a group of people going past his front yard who had been kicking his garden fence in. As a result of trying to tell them to stop doing this, he had been kicked to death. And I thought: Alverstoke — kicked to death — what has happened to the country that I grew up in?

When I got back, I found that there was more and more of this sort of thing going on. Any of you who are interested, I urge — I haven’t got time to go into the cases now — to Google the cases of two people, one, Fiona Pilkington and her daughter, strangely named Francecca, and the other, a man called Garry Newlove, Garry with two R’s, and you will see that in large parts of England, particularly in the poorer parts, the behavior of individual human beings towards one another has sunk to levels not far distant from the Stone Age.

Mr. Newlove did very much as the person in Alverstoke did. There were people misbehaving in the street outside, and he went and remonstrated with them, and they beat him to the ground — and this phrase occurs very often in newspaper reports in Britain — they then kicked his head as if it were a football until he died.

In the case of Fiona Pilkington, her daughter was disabled and not very well-favored to look at, and as a result, they were ceaselessly persecuted by their neighbors. Their house was pelted with eggs and flour; they were shouted at and screamed at until their lives became a total misery. Mrs. Pilkington eventually snapped under this pressure, took her daughter with her out into the country, set fire to the car and burned them both to death in a hideous murder and suicide of a type which I hope is unimaginable to any of you but which seemed to be a reasonable conclusion to her troubles.

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In both cases, they found it almost impossible to get the attention of the authorities, though, of course, after the events became highly public, the authorities began to take some interest and notice. But in fact, this kind of thing is so common at a low level in the grimmer suburbs of English cities that it is actually normal for a lot of people.

This was not the case until quite recently. How has this decline in civilization come about? Well, I think it has come about at least partly — and I'm not a single-cause person — but at least partly because there is no longer in the hearts of the English people the restraint of the Christian religion, which used to prevent this sort of behavior.

I think it would be completely idle to imagine that the two things were unconnected. I haven't come here to say that civilization's impossible without religion or indeed without Christianity. There are non-Christian civilizations. There are civilized countries which aren't really based upon religion at all, such as Japan, which I think any visitor there will agree is an intensely civilized place.

But the extraordinary combination, which you in this country and I in mine used to enjoy and may for some time continue to, of liberty and order seems to me only to occur where people take into their hearts the very, very powerful messages of self-restraint without mutual advantage, which is central to the Christian religion.

Without that, you reach a kind of, what I term, practical atheism, which is not a term which would be used by the people who actually engage in it because they probably could neither spell nor pronounce atheism, but which does seem to me to be a fair summary of the way in which people behave. If we can agree even to begin to agree here that there might be some truth in any of that, then some discussion can take place.

What I've found objectionable about a great deal of the attack upon religion that's been taking place on both sides of the Atlantic in the English-speaking world in the past few years has been the dismissal and the contempt and the scorn and even what seems to me to be the dislike expressed over and over again for the Christian faith and for the good things that religion does and the unwillingness to accept that there are any of those good things, that the turning of the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just is something which could conceivably be obtained together with liberty by some other method.

I don't think that's true, and I think in a serious argument about it, then the atheists would need to concede that it wasn't entirely true, and in conceding that, might be willing to hold the argument on the currently narrow field from the one where they currently hold it. I'll leave it at that.

CROMARTIE: Thank you. Thank you, Peter. Christopher, well, we'll get you in, in a minute. Peter David?

PETER DAVID, THE ECONOMIST: Peter, if I could respond to what you just said. You gave two very telling examples of societies or places where there has been an utter loss of moral compass. One was Mogadishu and the other was your former suburb in Portsmouth. But what struck me is that in the Portsmouth case you seem to argue that it is secular values or at least the loss of religious values that is at least partly to account for what had happened, whereas I would have thought that Somalia was quite a pious country, albeit not a Christian country.

PETER HITCHENS: The point I make about Somalia is, actually, here is a place where civilization was and is not. To go into the history of the foreign interventions in Somalia which largely led to that is a different issue. The only point I was making here was that civilization can cease to exist when forces either from inside or from outside can bring it to an end.

I think almost certainly in the case of a country such as Britain or even possibly the United States the threat is much more likely to be internal. But the questions which really arise here are: What is the source of authority? Why should people behave better than they need to? Why should there ever be a situation in which the strong should be under the control of law? Why should law ever, ever trump power in any system? And why should that restraint exist?

Why should people be brought up to have manners and to show restraint and civility to others? How is it going to happen that they will do so? And if it ceases to happen, how quickly will you reach the stage where it will be wiser to stay inside your house at night than to go out, which is pretty much the state that we were in, in the 13th or 14th century?

What I often get in response from people when I say that things are getting pretty bad in Britain is, well, if you look at the records of Oxford in the 14th century, it was just as bad as it is now. I say, yeah, absolutely. But we have had an interval between now and the 14th century when we thought we were making progress, and now we're traveling rather rapidly backwards.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Just — only on the Hitchensian stuff, if I may, because otherwise that precious fragment might get lost. Say, of course, that law is being reestablished in parts of Mogadishu. Already, the law is called shari'a; the people enforcing it are called the al-Shabab. They know exactly how much people want government rather than anarchy, and they've had a plan for this for a long time. Anarchy is originally part of that plan, by the way. Create the anarchy first, then people will call for your law. That's how the Taliban took power. This is just another way of rephrasing the problem of the faith-based.

As to my memories of Alverstoke, I have to say I'm shocked to hear that story, even at this remove. Even in those days, we knew we were lucky. Our parents would not have said you can go into Portsmouth and hang around the railway station or the docks any old time of day or night. No, in fact, we were constantly being enjoined to beware of the rough and the lumpen element that was noticeable in English life.

Then there were cities where you couldn't even imagine, where everyone — your school friends — would talk about, do you know what happens in Glasgow on the housing estates? This is in exactly the '50s and '60s when the authority of the Church of England was much greater than it is now. Glasgow, you'd get your eyes cut out with a broken bottle if — inaudible —particular students looked at you. It was partly true. Glasgow, the most religious city in the country, where people would kill you over what kind of Christian you were, as a matter of fact.

We hadn't then realized how bad the situation was in Northern Ireland, where constant violence, incivility, sadism, combined with all the things that go with clerical rule and politics — backwardness, stupidity, unemployment, low standards of education and hygiene. The place
Can Civilization Survive Without God? A Conversation with Christopher Hitchens http://pewforum.org/Belief-in-God/Can-Civilization-Survive-Without-Go...

PETER HITCHENS: May I make a brief riposte? Part of the problem that we had with the rough parts of town was — I'm afraid that our mother, particularly, was a bit of a snob. I do remember one occasion. We had the groceries delivered and in the box which had come from the grocers was a jar of peanut butter, which I seized on and began to eat before — my mother was out when the delivery came. When she came back, she said, what's this? Peanut butter? We don't have that in this house! And she rang the grocers and demanded they come and take it back and forbade me to eat any more because it was not the kind of thing that the children of a naval officer ought to eat.

When we lived in an even more salubrious part of the country, on the edge of Dartmoor, there was a small estate of prefabs inhabited by people who were known as the rough boys, with whom we were not allowed to associate. I don't think the danger from them was actually very great. The main danger was we might have picked up their accents.

I do think that the other thing Christopher does tend to do is to surge off into the wider and more political side of this matter. Yes, of course, the Northern Irish problem and indeed in Glasgow a similar problem of Protestant and Catholic sectarianism is, was and, I fear, for many years will be great. But in terms of the lives which people led, the way in which they behaved towards their neighbors, the way in which children were brought up, the manners which people displayed, I don't think you will find that the effect of Christian upbringing was small in the 1950s or 1960s.

What's happened to Northern Ireland and indeed to Scotland and indeed the whole of Britain in that period is the invasion of trash culture and the collapse of all that kind of teaching. And there's an enormous amount of protection racket, gangster-ish thuggery there carried on in the name of religious factionalism, but not, I think, generally by people who are enthusiastic churchgoers or ever were.

There is this problem with the utopian view of the world, which I don't share, that you do like to concentrate on the big things. Can we bring democracy or civilization to X? Can we defeat such and such all around the world rather than can we actually construct, in the square mile around where we live, a civil society in which people can live in freedom and order? Which seems to me to be, actually, just as important if not more so and often rather harder in execution than launching missiles or sending armies to the other side of the world with dubious consequences.

BRADLEY HAGERTY: Well, not by NPR standards.

PETER HITCHENS: Yeah, but with the BBC, unlike your own wonderful organization, if you're me and you're interviewed by it, you know you've got 15 seconds before they interrupt you. So you've got to be quick.

BRADLEY HAGERTY: What was interesting about listening to this kind of three-way, as we would call it at NPR, is that it was really fairly acrimonious. I didn't hear a lot of brotherly love in that. It was hard to detect that. I'm just wondering if there has been a change in the way you all view each other, view your arguments about, say, the existence of God or life after death, that kind of thing, the necessity of religion to have a moral civilization. Has any of that tenor changed since, Christopher, you have been diagnosed?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I don't think my own tenor has changed. The relationship I have with Peter is very well encapsulated in the fragment of his book that Michael read at the beginning. I mean, if you want to know, if anything, my contempt for the forced consolation of religion has increased since I became aware that I probably don't have very long to live. But it's not a thing I want to make a particular point on in this argument.

BRADLEY HAGERTY: If I could just follow up with one thing. There's been a fairly public discussion of the fact that you have sometimes been offended but sometimes warmed by the fact that people are praying for you or thinking of you. I'd like to ask you to elaborate on that last statement about your contempt because in my reading of what you've said recently, it seemed as if perhaps you were cheered a little bit or warmed by some expressions of belief.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Well, you have the floor and you're insisting, so in spite of my reluctance — obviously, expressions of solidarity are very welcome and very touching to me in whatever form they take. I do resent, always have resented, the idea that it should in some way be assumed that now that you may be terrified, say, or miserable or, as it might be, depressed, surely now would be a perfect time for you to abandon the principles of a lifetime.

I've always thought this to be rather a repulsive mode of approach, and there's a disgusting history of people either attempting to inflict deathbed conversions on people like Thomas Paine in their extremity or making up lies about it afterwards, as they did about Charles Darwin and many others. That I find wholly contemptible.

But it's only vestigially applied in my case; surely, I ought to think more about these things now than I would anyway. No, not at all. I've already thought about them a great deal. Thanks all the same. An interesting point I'll make — well, you be the judge of whether it's interesting or not. (Laughter.)

A point of it is this: I read a long time ago, when I was still, as far as I knew, in good health, a study of intercessory prayer, the most comprehensive one that's ever been done. And it showed, not at all to my surprise, that there's no correlation to be found between intercessory prayer and the thriving or otherwise of those for whom the prayers are designed or offered.

Except it was found that among some people who knew they were being prayed for by groups of colleagues and friends, there was a slight negative result in point of morale. If they didn't get better, they felt bad about not getting better after all the trouble that had been taken. I thought, that's interesting. And now, I realize how true it might be because I get a lot of secular encouragement.
People say, cancer picked the wrong foe in you. You can beat this if anyone can. Lots of that kind of thing, and it actually does have the effect of slightly giving me the blues because I don’t want to let people down. For whatever interest that may be, I think it shows that the psychological makeup of this is roughly the same whether you assume a supernatural dimension or not.

PETER HITCHENS: Speaking for the religious side of the argument, I also think it would be quite grotesque to imagine that someone would have to get cancer to see the merits of religion. It’s an absurd idea. I don’t know why anyone imagines that it should be so.

CROMARTIE: But Barbara, you had something more, I think, in your question about their relationship. And so Peter, can you address any of that.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I thought we’d done that.

CROMARTIE: Well, Christopher did. I didn’t know if Peter wanted to comment.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I was quoting Peter.

CROMARTIE: I was quoting him, actually. (Laughter) Yeah, I actually quoted you — I did it for you.

PETER HITCHENS: Look, one of the things that I remember discovering with the most happiness in my life, round about the age of 11 or 12, was that it was possible to disagree without anger or rancor. And in fact, it’s actually more pleasant to do so. I’ve always thought that, and I really don’t see the point in spoiling a good argument by getting angry with your opponent. And he has been my opponent for most of my life. I certainly have in the past been angry with him, but I would say that that is over.

MICHAEL GERSON, THE WASHINGTON POST: Let me ask a little more philosophical question. I’d really like to hear both brothers respond to what might be called the challenge of Friedrich Nietzsche, which assumes a large place in Christian apologetics, which is the idea that in the absence of transcendence, all you’re left with is a ferocious human will. So I just would love to hear the perspective of whether he was a crank or a prophet in these areas from both brothers.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I can rephrase the question in addressing it.

GERSON: Yeah, please do.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Nietzsche famously said that in the absence of the divine, all that there is, is the human will to power. That would be all you were left with. That’s why Nietzscheism is so often used as almost a substitute among some people I know for the work of Ayn Rand, for example. And implied in that is also that that can be admirable. I must just tell you that I was once asked by an evangelical radio station a lot of very, very polite questions about my book against God. Then at the end, they said, was I an admirer of Friedrich Nietzsche? I said, actually, I wasn’t really much of one at all.

They were clearly disappointed with this, but they went on and said, well, did I know that he’d written most of his anti-religious books in a state of — inaudible — syphilitic paralysis? And I said, yes, I was aware of that, or certainly had heard it plausibly alleged. They said they just wondered if that would explain my own — (laughter) — more recent — I thought, well, no, but thanks for the compassion.

Look, it might be that all of these questions are replacement questions. Is it not equally true to say that the religious impulse is an expression of the will to power? Who could deny it? Someone who says, I not only know how you should live, but I have a divine warrant given by anyone to do anything to anybody and has been and still is? Unfortunately, these questions are not decidable according to your state of — inaudible — syphilitic paralysis? And I said, yes, I was aware of that, or certainly had heard it plausibly alleged. They said they just wondered if that would explain my own — (laughter) — more recent — I thought, well, no, but thanks for the compassion.

If I don’t get asked the Nietzsche question, which I quite often do, if it isn’t that, it’s usually The Brothers Karamazov instead. I forget which brother it is, or maybe it’s Smerdyakov. It doesn’t matter. It says, if there’s no God, then surely everything is possible — thinkable.

Everyone understands the question when it’s put like that. But is it not also the case that with God, or with the belief in it, permission can be given by anyone to do anything to anybody and has been and still is? Unfortunately, these questions are not decidable according to your attitude toward the supernatural. These are problems of human society and the human psyche — you might say, soul — whatever attitude we take to the humanness or the transcendent.

PETER HITCHENS: First of all, just a small objection to that. It seems to me that the Christian Gospels are read any way you like, and especially the final few days are one of the most powerful denunciations of the exercise of power, of the behavior of mobs, of show trials, all the many activities of which governments and politicians get up to.

There is even in the jibe against Judas — “the poor ye have always with you” — the first skeptical remark about socialist idealism ever made in human history. So I think that you would be hard put to claim that the Christian Gospels gave you a license to order people about. And it seems odd that the center of Christian worship is someone who is indeed tortured to death by the powerful.

But leaving that one aside, I think atheists should pay more attention to Nietzsche because I think that he does actually encapsulate quite a lot of what they very, very seldom say they desire. Now, in my book I quote at length from a passage in Somerset Maugham’s book, Of Human Bondage, in which the hero decides — and this is an Edwardian person brought up in detail in the Christian faith in an English vicarage — decides that he no longer believes in God and says quite clearly, “This is a moment of enormous liberation. I no longer need to worry about things which worried me before, and I am no longer tied by obligations which used to tie me down. I’m free.”

What else is the point of being an atheist? But yet, when you actually put this to atheists, they tend to say, oh no, no, not me. I’m just as capable of following moral rules as you are, even if they are Christian moral rules. This constantly comes up and immediately swirls down the circle of the atheists’ refusal to accept that there is actually no absolute right and wrong if there is no God and that therefore, they are liberated.
Why aren’t they more pleased they’re liberated and why don’t they exult more about it? Perhaps because they don’t want to spread the idea too widely and have too many people joining in.

DAVID AIKMAN, THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR: This is a question primarily for Christopher. I think everybody around the table would agree that the presence of Taliban-type regimes or sharī’a-oriented regimes in places like Mogadishu are absolutely horrible examples of what could go wrong when people of certain kind of beliefs take power. And I don’t exclude the history of Christendom from having moments like that. Nevertheless, I want to ask, can you think of any historical period — any civilization — in which a regime that has basically eschewed the divine in all its forms has fostered a degree of civilization among human beings? And Peter, of course, you can answer that, too.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Eschew would mean to forbear from practicing or praising the teaching of religion. That’s not the sort of thing a regime can actually do. What regimes usually do typically is either coexist with religion — try to co-opt it — or, in some very extreme cases, try to do away with and/or nationalize it, as in the case of the French and Russian Revolutions, for example. You make it part of the state while repudiating much of its doctrine. We haven’t been able to run a fair test yet, it seems to me.

I mean, if there was to be a society that taught the principles of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, Baruch Spinoza — Benedict Spinoza, as he later was — Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Bertrand Russell — taught the children to learn and understand those teachings and ethics and the other things that go with them, I think it would be a bad thing.

I think the United States comes the closest to any society that we know about that decides that religious pluralism — because civilization is impossible without freedom of conscience, and therefore, it goes without saying that there has to be freedom of worship, that that’s best guaranteed by a state that takes no notice of — eschews, as you might put it, any role at all in determining religious matters.

AIKMAN: But if I may respond to that, Christopher, I think, again, it doesn’t take much looking at the founders of the United States to see that the vast majority of them believed in the practice of Christian ethics and indeed were actually believers in some sort of divinity, even if they weren’t orthodox Christians. Certainly, they were either deists or some form of Christian churchgoers. And yet, it’s clear, if you look at them, that very few of them seemed to believe that it was possible to hold together a society unless people were inspired by ethical traditions, basically, under the guise of believing in divine right and wrong.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I just disagree with you. It’s certainly not true of the two who matter most to me, or matter most to this argument, namely Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison, who together offered the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, which is almost exactly, really, the basis of the First Amendment to our Constitution, which is the relevant one.

Jefferson most certainly was not a Christian. He seemed to me to have had great dislike for it. I can’t prove he was an atheist, though I could point you to letters that he wrote that strongly suggest to me that he privately was one. It doesn’t matter. It’s interesting, but it’s not decisive.

James Madison, though he didn’t dare say so in his lifetime, didn’t think there should be chaplains in the armed forces. He didn’t think that Congress’ proceedings should even be opened by a man of God. He was an absolutist on the separation point. And therefore, in some sense, it wouldn’t matter even if he was a devout believer. The point would be the same. The separation is the important thing. And surely, I appeal to those of you who do regard yourselves as believers, it’s just as important to prevent the church being tainted by the state as the state being run by the church.

The pope is still fornicking with the emperor, as Dante puts it. Bad for both, one imagines.

PETER HITCHENS: The thing which strikes me about societies which are preferable and the societies which I wouldn’t want to stay in for any longer than I absolutely have to is that the ones which are preferable do have the rule of law. This seems to me to be the distinction between a tolerable free society and one which is not, which is the most decisive.

And I’m fascinated by the origin of the idea of the rule of law, that you could have a circumstance in which a person with physical power, with enormous wealth, was compelled by forces which he could not challenge to abide by the law, which is a thing without substance and which, in theory, he could overcome.

I think the origin of that has to be and must be the idea of an unalterable truth at the heart of the law. English judges and English law laws are always seeking in the common law — I think the same tradition exists here — to discover what the law is, and what they’re trying to discover seems to me to be based on an assumption that there is an ultimate truth about what the law should be about.

Without that, in the end, you have nothing except the variable needs of human power. It does seem to me, again, to be idle of the atheist cause to turn their back on their friends in the Russian Social Democratic Party, brackets, B for Bolshevik, which was so very much their ally to the extent that one of its earliest decrees, the Lenin-Trotsky Decree, was for the prevention of the teaching of religion in schools, and indeed outside schools. It even decreed that the word “God,” which is “Bor” in Russian, should no longer be spelled with a capital letter. It was devoted to the extirpation of religion.

In my book, which I do commend to you because you probably haven’t read it, there is probably the most thorough, concise description of the stamping out of religion by the Soviet authorities that exists in English. It took me quite a long time to compile, and I wouldn’t want it to be wasted. It completely devastates the idea that the Soviet Union was itself some kind of religious society. There were indeed toadies,
remnants of the Orthodox Church and indeed among the Jews, who went to the Soviet authorities and offered their assistance. They ended up — all of them — in prison and eventually murdered. Their assistance was not welcome because the whole basis of this regime was an absolute rejection of the idea there was anything beyond the material.

This is the thing which, in the days before the Soviet Union became unfashionable, in the days when it was admired, as Cuba is still madly admired by many people in the Western left, and as China was admired for a long time in the 1950s and 1960s, in the time when it was admired by the very people who always admire that sort of thing, whether it be the Sandinistas or whoever it happens to be, at that stage, that was one of the things they admired most about it. It's still the same; utopians always hate God.

CROMARTIE: Christopher, you had a very nice comment to say about that section of Peter's book, and I think the publisher would like to hear that quote for a future blurb advertisement. What did you just say?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: It's a very fine and muscular piece of prose, and it taught me — I thought I knew a lot about the anticlerical campaigns of the Bolshevik Party, but there's a great deal in there that I'd never read before and that I commend to you. It would be cheap to add, but I can't not do it.

PETER HITCHENS: Oh, go on.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Every country that wants to emancipate itself, develop in any way at all, eventually has to come into a confrontation with the alliance of church and state and break it. There's usually some correlation with how bad and rotten that alliance is and how oppressive and how bad the rupture is.

In America, the rupture was almost painless. It just involved disestablishing the Church of England and forbidding by law the reestablishment of another church. Hardly anyone had to suffer much more than confiscation or deportation for that.

In France, where the church was part of the whole criminal racket of feudalism and monarchy, of course, it was much more cruel and violent. In Spain, during the civil war, especially in Catalonia, people felt strongly enough actually to burn the churches. It's one of the great confrontations between my two favorite writers of the 1930s, W.H. Auden and George Orwell.

Orwell, to my surprise, didn't much mind the churches being burned. He thought they deserved it. Auden said, I couldn't live in a country where there were no churches. I just couldn't. And I realized, if it's of any interest, I would be the same. I couldn't do it, myself.

But the Russian Orthodox Church, comrades, brothers, sisters, don't forget — this is the church of serfdom and slavery and autocracy. It's the church that brought us the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. If the clerical and white side had won the civil war in Russia, our word for fascism would be a Russian word, not an Italian word.

The power of that church and its wealth had to be broken and confiscated. I don't quarrel with that. And I don't think religion should be taught in school, and I don't care whether people have enough confidence in God or not to see his name without a capital letter, as I think you can do in Hebrew.

PETER HITCHENS: But to have that decreed by the state?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Decreed by the state is another way of saying it's the law, as it is in the United States. You cannot teach religion in schools.

PETER HITCHENS: To have it decreed by the state that the word God could not be used with a capital letter?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: No. That's a bit Russian. (Laughter.)

PETER HITCHENS: When you say that you don't think religion should be taught in schools, do you think religion should be not taught in schools, which is more to the point? Do you think it should be prevented by law from being taught in schools, as these people most certainly did, and indeed taught in the home?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I think the home is exactly the right place for it, as long as it doesn't come accompanied with things like genital mutilation or being told that your neighbors of another faction are going to go to hell, or other antisocial things of that kind. Savage beatings and torturings and so on — or plural marriage or the selling of children in dowry to goat-like old uncles in Utah. The home, yes, but no further than that. I don't want to have to know what your religion is. I enjoy the study of religion. I've taken it up because I want to. I don't want to have to know what anyone else thinks. Keep it to yourself.

Shouldn't it make you happy? You have a redeemer. You have someone who offers you perfect bliss and happiness if you make the right prostrations and the right — (inaudible) —. Why isn't that enough for you? Why do I have to know what it is? Why do you have to try and spread it? I don't want to have to know.

MICHAEL BARONE, THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER: I will refrain from describing my own religious views, if any. I just want to add to what Barbara asked Christopher about intercessory prayer and so forth. Christopher, I just think what we're seeing is just an enormous surge of affection for you from your fellow citizens of all kinds of different beliefs and things that are grateful to have you as a fellow citizen and wish you well.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Well, thank you so much, Michael.

BARONE: It's quite extraordinary. In your opening remarks, you sort of sketched a world, the post-1914 world, in which there is a secular and a nonbelieving Europe and a Muslim world where there is much oppression in the name of religion. But haven't we also seen, looking over other large parts of the world, places where, in effect, we've broken the alliance of church and state in generally positive respects —
North America, Latin America, even India.

They still burn mosques occasionally and slaughter people, but not very much by their historic standards. We’re talking about half the population of the world, something like that, where we really have societies where you have people of these different, often strong faiths, sometimes naïve and ignorant of fine points of dogma, as you make clear, but also managing to live pretty peaceably with one another.

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Just to take the Muslim world for example, I would say it’s almost a graph. You could do it practically as a function: How secular is this Muslim country and how prosperous, how open, how democratic is it, and how happy are its people?

It’s like a function. Indonesia, yes. Partly, I think, because Indonesia was more converted than conquered by Islam. Some of it was conquered; mainly it was spread by conversion. But Turkey, because Ataturk, in my opinion, was an atheist. He didn’t have to be to be a secularist, but it helped.

I believe he was one. He really was prepared to shoot and hang mullahs if they got in his way of modernizing the country. And he managed to do for Turkey in a few years what it might have taken centuries to do. We’re now worried it might be undone or be in the process of being undone, but Turkey’s an exemplary country, given that its majority population believe what they say they do in private.

Tunisia would be another example of one, the least religiously dominated — the religious party’s under very careful control, not to say oppression. A society nearly as qualified as Turkey to join the European Union. It works pretty much all the time.

Jimmy Carter, in his book on the Camp David process, says that the reason Israel is in trouble is because it strayed from the path of the prophets. So you have to imagine that there are people who think that if only Israel was more religious, the Camp David process would be more —

I only say that because sometimes I read things I can’t imagine why people believe them. Surely the only chance for a settlement in the region is the triumph of secularism. And though countries like Holland may be unexciting in certain ways, the prosperity and happiness of the Dutch surely has a great deal to do with the fact that it’s been a refuge from Christian religious intolerance since the 17th century. The work of Spinoza and Descartes wouldn’t be possible without that kind of secularism.

So I rest what I think is a fairly persuasive case.

**SALLY QUINN, THE WASHINGTON POST:** This seems to be my month for atheists. I spent a lot of time interviewing Christopher earlier, and then a week before last, Richard Dawkins and today, Sam Harris. Sam has just written a book called The Moral Landscape, and I’m fascinated by the issue of morality because there is this notion that you can’t be a moral person unless you are a religious person —

**PETER HITCHENS:** No, there isn’t. You keep saying that; that’s not the point. Where do you derive your morals from?

**QUINN:** No, I didn’t say you —

**PETER HITCHENS:** It’s not — of course you can be a moral person, but where are the morals from that you’ve actually recognized as morals?

**QUINN:** Where are the morals from? Well, actually, I didn’t say that you said that. I said, there seems to be this notion. Both Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris — and Sam is a neuroscientist, so he’s talking about the science of the brain — talk about how they feel that morality is evolving and that we are becoming more moral as humans as we evolve. Originally, when Confucius first came up with the notion of the Golden Rule, it was seen more as an idea of practicality or pragmatism, that society was not functioning and you needed some idea that would bring people together in a community in order to keep them safe and in order to have a functional society.

As religion has taken over that role, morality has become sort of the province of religion. And now that religion seems to be questioned often these days, people are looking at morality from a different point of view and saying that religion really is not as important in terms of basing your moral positions and your values and your ethics on. But the idea is simply evolving into an idea that morality is there because it’s part of the human brain — we’re hardwired to be moral — and that we are becoming more so every day.

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** I owe a reply to what Peter said earlier about law, which could serve for this as well. I don’t know about every day, by the way, Sally, that we’re getting better and better. I’m not sure. I think there are peaks and troughs. I think we’re doomed to fluctuation in this regard.

But I think that we’re probably doomed to some kind of relativism, or perhaps better to say approximation. Who is going to tell me, here is a law that is absolutely true and will hold good for all time and has been proclaimed scripturally? We might say, thou shalt not kill. It would be probably inevitable we would have to start with that. But it doesn’t say, thou shalt not kill. It says, thou shall do no murder, and everybody knows that there is a real difficulty in deciding when killing is murder and that the situational ethics of this are very complicated but are common to all times and places.

Different standards prevail at different times, but that argument is an open-ended one and will remain so. I’m rather glad, as a matter of fact, from the point of both moral and
intellectual and ethical exercise, that you can’t just tell someone one thing, that that’s right and that’s true for all time, and there’s nothing to argue about. That’s why I object to the idea of commandments in the first place. Morality is not learned by orders. It’s acquired by experience, by moral suasion, and by comparing and contrasting different ways of resolving these questions.

There are thought crimes in the Ten Commandments. You are told you shouldn’t even envy someone else’s prosperity or property. Well, from a Socialist point of view, that says you’ve got to just lump it if people are better off than you, and from a capitalist and free-enterprise point of view, it says, it’s basically a crime to emulate — this whole spur of emulation and innovation is possibly a sin.

And anyway, it’s in the same list as murder as a crime — something you’re thinking. I don’t think that’s an absolute moral truth at all. To the contrary, I think we’d be better off without it. So where do we get it? It’s perfectly obvious that we happen to be, as other primates are, capable of and needing to make decisions about our common welfare, as well as about our own ambition. We happen to be stuck with that.

PETER HITCHENS: The question of conscience, or what Sally referred to as the hardwiring of the brain, seems to me to be one of the most fascinating, unexplored subjects in this matter, and it seems to me to be very, very hard to come up with an atheistic explanation of conscience, any more than you could have a compass without a magnetic north.

If morality evolves, then morality changes. Then the things of which we most strongly disapprove now could be things which are permitted later, in which case it’s not really morality, as far as I’m concerned. And who’s evolving it? I love that advertisement — maybe it didn’t happen here — Microsoft Office has evolved, by which they meant, we’ve gone back and tried to make it a bit better than it was and a bit more like what Apple does.

That doesn’t seem to me to be evolution as generally understood, but the word does seem to have a remarkable number of meanings. But if it evolves, then it alters, and if it alters, it’s not morality, and therefore, we can’t rely upon it. If the magnetic north kept shifting, then it would be very difficult to steer your boat or your plane across the Atlantic.

QUINN: Well then, do you need religion to be moral?

PETER HITCHENS: Yeah, absolutely. Morality is what you do when you think nobody is looking. And there’s a lot of things I would do if I didn’t believe in God.

CROMARTIE: I think both of our authors have spoken to this in their books, and so I would call your attention to their books.

TIMOTHY GARTON ASH, THE GUARDIAN: I actually wanted to follow up exactly where you left off. I think the question on the exam paper has been answered by Hitchens, P. entirely satisfactorily: Can civilization survive without God? Answer: clearly yes. You mentioned Japan; one could also say China. If the question is, can civilization survive without an ethical or moral order, the answer is, clearly no — almost definitionally. So the question is, can you have a strong, durable ethical or moral order without some transcendent or supernatural basis? That seems to me the question we’re posing here.

Interestingly, Tony Judt, shortly before he died, in the Charlie Rose interview was asked this question. He was an absolute nonbeliever, and he said, I find people, when they say they believe something, when they have a stand of principle, quite like an absolute or transcendent justification of it. It makes it easier for them to stand strongly for it.

I think the question to Christopher here is, you mentioned that we’re doomed to some sort of a relativism. You’re getting very close to someone you often criticized, Isaiah Berlin, who famously said at the end of his four essays on liberty, the challenge we face is to recognize the relativity of our beliefs and yet to stand for them absolutely.

That’s quite a difficult thing to do. How do we do that, and do you think we really can get that without what we’re going on with at the moment in Western Europe or in England, which is actually a sort of secularized Christianity, or secularized post-Christianity? I mean, your heroes, the Jeffersons, the Madisons, the Tom Paines, the Orwells. It was a sort of secularized post-Christianity.

CROMARTIE: Why don’t we gather up these final questions, and then we’ll let you all answer all of them, so take notes.

PETER WEHNER, COMMENTARY MAGAZINE: I’d like to return to the metaphor of tennis and ask Christopher and Peter to return their own serves, in a sense. To you, Christopher, what do you think is the greatest contribution of Christianity, either writ large in terms of society or writ small in terms of individual lives? And for you, Peter, what do you find is the most compelling argument that the atheists make and the strongest argument against Christianity, the ones that trouble you the most, whether science or the existence of evil?

TIMOTHY DALRYMPLE, PATHEOS.COM: This is related to what Pete just asked. It strikes me that as individuals become champions for particular philosophies, it becomes difficult to project anything that might conflict with the public persona or might conflict with an image of immaculate certainty in your own point of view. I know that heroes of faith can find it difficult to confess doubts, and I’m wondering if the same follows for heroes of nonfaith. So the question is, are there moments in which — this is for both brothers — moments in which you doubt the philosophies you have come to represent in the public mind, and if so, what brings those moments about?

SUSAN GLASSER, FOREIGN POLICY: I was interested in your discussion about Russia and the campaign to stamp out Orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, especially because of the famous moment at which Stalin backed away from his crusade against religion, which was, of course, in World War II when the threat from Germany was proving to be existential. Immediately, Stalin, in the defense of Moscow, put the Orthodox priests, such as remained, front and center once again in the effort to reorient Soviet
Can Civilization Survive Without God? A Conversation with Christopher Hitchens

So my question to you is, how does that cause you to look, perhaps in a different way, at your question between the connection to ideology and nationalism? This is not about personal morality as much, this question, but to both of you, I would be curious as to your answers as to where you see the connection between religion and nationalism to be.

CROMARTIE: OK, we have four questions on the table — more than four, but Christopher, will you go first?

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: I used to ask a question. I’ve now asked it in public, on the radio, in print, in TV debates with quite a lot of leading religious figures and thinkers. It’s simply this: You ought to be able to tell me of a moral action performed or an ethical statement made by a believer that I couldn’t make because I’m a nonbeliever. You ought to be able. Given what you think, it must be very easy for you to say, here’s something you couldn’t say or do that would be morally right or morally true. No takers; I haven’t found a single example. I’ve tried everyone now — and by the way, there’s a prize. And I’ve even entered myself for it, as I’ll tell you in a second.

But if I was to say to someone, now can you name me please a hideous immoral act undertaken or an immoral remark made by someone because of their faith — not in its name, but because of it — you’ve already thought of one. Now you’ve thought of another one, and you’ll keep on thinking of them. So I think that pretty much disposes of the question, with its implied insult, that without faith one would have no ground for, say, acting rightly when no one else was looking or answering the promptings of conscience.

Here is my attempt to win my own prize. When Lech Wałęsa was starting his work in the Polish shipyards and the Polish militia, the outer ring of the Polish army were closing in on Gdansk, he was interviewed with his then-fairly small group, and he was asked, aren’t you frightened, aren’t you afraid? You’ve taken on a whole all-powerful state and army — aren’t you scared? And he said, I’m not frightened of anything but God or anyone but God.

This came back to me. I thought, well, this meets my two criteria. It’s certainly a noble thing to have said, a distinguished thing to have said, and I certainly couldn’t have said it. So it does meet both my criteria. But it was also the slogan of Gen. Edwin Walker of the John Birch Society in a different situation — the man whom Lee Harvey Oswald took target practice on, right-wing, paranoid Crusade for Christ nutbag in the ’50s. Doesn’t sound so good when it’s said by him and it’s a summons to think of nuclear war as not too bad, for example. It’s not quite the same.

So there, I’ve partly answered the question. I hope I partly asked one. Christianity’s greatest contribution. I haven’t been asked that in those terms before, but I find it strangely easy to say what it would be from the prayers I used to intone and the hymns and psalms I used to sing and the lessons I used to read and hear. The greatest contribution of Christianity in my life is the reminder of the complete ephemerality of human power, and indeed of human existence — the transience of all states, empires, heroes, grandiose claims, and so forth. That’s always with me, and I daresay I could have got that from Einstein — I would have — and from Darwin, too. But the way I got it and the way it’s implanted in me is certainly by Christianity.

(Audio break.)

In what moments do I think, what if I’m wrong? I always think it’s probably a weakness in me because I always like to think that in any argument I can return my own serve. If I was appointed to speak on the other side of a debate, I could do it. I could make the case, say, for leaving Saddam Hussein in power in Iraq, and you wouldn’t know that I didn’t believe it. But I couldn’t do it for religion. I am one of those people whom Pascal has in mind in his Pensées, which he addresses, if you remember, to those who are so made that they cannot believe. Under no persuasion could I be made to believe that a human sacrifice several thousand years ago vicariously redeems me from sin. Nothing could persuade me that that was true — or moral, by the way. Just — I can’t — it’s — (audio break) — predisposition to faith.

And then finally, yes, of course. One of the great disfigurements of Christianity, and not just in Russia, has been where I began, with Diarmaid MacCulloch’s account of the self-destruction, self-immolation, of Christendom, its identification with Rome or Byzantium. Remember, the Crusaders first destroyed Byzantine Christianity, having more or less polished off the Jews on their way over to Constantinople before they even started murdering any Muslims.

The identification of it with kingship, with throne and altar, the absolute negation of what it teaches about the ephemerality of power. Its enslavement, in fact, to secular power is a very noticeable thing about it, and it’s very Eastern Orthodoxy used to be Eastern Orthodoxy. Now there’s a Macedonian Orthodox Church, Bulgarian Orthodox, Russian — all of them uniquely fitted to the needs of local sectarian requirements.

If anything could prove what I so much believe, which is that we are not made by God and never were and could not have been, but that many, many gods have been made by men and women and it is precisely the other way around, the basic claim of materialism — if nothing else could persuade me of that obvious truth, the behavior of religion itself would be enough.

PETER HITCHENS: First of all, in response to Tim Garton Ash. I made this concession quite deliberately about civilizations being able to exist without God. But examine Chinese civilization, a shameless police state. And examine Japanese civilization, a tremendously conformist and actually very unfree society, and compare that — W.H. Auden used to say when the Church of England destroyed the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible, why spit on your luck? And I say the same to the beneficiaries of Protestant Christianity in the Anglophone.

This tremendous civilization in which we live, which has been bequeathed to us and which in my country we’re determined not to bequeath to our own children, is the most extraordinary piece of good fortune, if nothing else. And it does seem to me derived — as I say, this combination of order and liberty almost unique in human history and unique on the face of the planet — does arise, actually, from Protestant Christianity. And it does not exist in Japan, and it never would exist in China because that force of thought does not exist there. So yes, you
can have civilization, but be careful what sort of civilization it is.

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Better than when their emperor was a god.

**PETER HITCHENS:** I’ve no doubt. But that’s not the kind of God that I worship, and I think we should be clear very much here when we discuss this that in defending Christianity one is not necessarily defending the Koran, Hinduism or many other available faiths with which I would frankly say that I disagree, and I could give you reasons for doing so.

When are my greatest moments of doubt? Often when I’m reading the Old Testament or indeed the Epistles of St. Paul. I do find them rather provoking towards feelings of, oh, no, do I really have to put up with this? But then, as you will see, I’m not terribly orthodox in my belief. I doubt all the time — endless, incessant doubt. I think that both the atheist and the Christian fear that there is a God, but the Christian also hopes that there is one.

And it was Edmund Burke, I think, who said first of all that the man who truly fears God will fear nothing else. The difficulty in the saying is the truly and getting yourself to actually believe strongly enough in the idea that you are able to put off your fear of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the secret police and the Red Army and all the rest of it, or whatever else happens to be coming down the road towards you that you’re supposed to resist and you would much rather run away from, which we all, I think — well, I certainly would. The experience is when I’ve had the chance to run away from something, I’ve always taken it.

On the question of Stalin, yes, it is absolutely true that at that moment, when the mummy of Lenin had been dispatched, I think, to Kuybyshev and the Soviet government somewhere else, and the whole thing was in headlong, total retreat and Stalin’s pact with Hitler, which Stalin had believed in long after Hitler had ceased to do so, had been shown to be wrong, but to such an extent that Stalin would not actually order his own troops into the defense of the motherland because he believed the pact was still in existence for some days.

In the case of that, yes, he did call on the church. He also called on Russian patriotism, and statues of Mikhail Kutuzov began to appear in the streets. All this was dragged out because it was a matter of total desperation. What people should observe is that as soon as the danger was over, the persecution was redoubled, and particularly under Nikita Khrushchev. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a very severe persecution of Christianity in the Soviet Union. It was purely opportunist, and it was the only moment at which they made that gesture at all.

So I don’t think it undermined — one small point I do want to come back to, by the way — Christopher was praising Kemal Ataturk for his treatment of the mullahs. And I often wonder how he views Stalin’s exactly parallel treatment of the same people in Soviet Central Asia at the same time, almost identical — ceremonies in which veils were burned in the public square, mullahs were indeed shot. Now, because that was done by Stalin —

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Only language they understood.

**PETER HITCHENS:** — was that bad, or was it OK?

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Fine.

**PETER HITCHENS:** Right, OK. I’d like to have that settled. You’re never asked anything like enough about your attitude towards the Soviet Revolution, but —

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Fine, I’m long overdue. People will be nostalgic for it before long.

**PETER HITCHENS:** I’ll bear that in mind.

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS:** Yeah, they will. Wait and see

**PETER HITCHENS:** I won’t. Was there anything else? I know it hasn’t been done for this reason, but it happened in Britain when Mr. Blair became prime minister that no one was ever able to ask him a question again, it was always three questions at once, and when he answered them, he always ignored the difficult one. So is there anything I haven’t answered that anyone feels — (inaudible, cross talk).

**CROMARTIE:** No, I wanted to say to the audience that Peter Hitchens came all the way from Oxford just to do this lunch, and Christopher came to us in between doctor’s appointments, which we’re extremely grateful for. We were afraid that this might not happen in light of the fact that we had one person in Oxford and the other person going through treatments, and so I think you should join me in thanking both of these brothers for joining us for this very special lunch. (Applause.)

*This written transcript has been edited by Amy Stern for clarity, grammar and accuracy.*
Controversies Over Mosques and Islamic Centers Across the U.S.

GRAPHIC	September 24, 2010

This map shows the locations of 35 proposed mosques and Islamic centers that have encountered community resistance in the last two years. **Click on a location for a brief overview of the project based on news reports.** In many cases, the opposition has centered on neighbors’ concerns about traffic, noise, parking and property values – the same objections that often greet churches and other houses of worship as well as commercial construction projects. In some communities, however, opponents of mosques also have cited fears about Islam, sharia law and terrorism.

While the map shows only projects that have met resistance, many mosques and Islamic centers have been built in recent years with little or no opposition. See, for example, articles in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and *the Associated Press* about newly opened mosques in Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

On Sept. 22, the Department of Justice released a report on cases of discrimination against mosques, synagogues, churches and other religious sites since 2000, when the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which protects places of worship and other religious uses of property from discrimination and unreasonably burdensome regulation, was signed into law. The Department of Justice is currently monitoring 11 cases of potential land-use discrimination against Muslims, according to *Reuters*.

**Full text PDF (13 pages, 117KB)**

Read more on: "Religious Affiliation, Muslim, Americas, Frequency of Prayer"
Currently, there are 1,897 mosques in the U.S., according to Ihsan Bagby, associate professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky. The Mosque Study Project 2000, sponsored by four Muslim organizations, counted 1,209 mosques across the country in 2000, which suggests that about a third of the mosques in the U.S. have opened in the last decade.

Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010
Controversies Over Mosques and Islamic Centers Across the U.S.

This interactive map shows the locations of 35 proposed mosques and Islamic centers that have encountered community resistance in the last two years. Below are brief overviews of each project based on news reports, organized alphabetically by state and then by city. In many cases, the opposition has centered on neighbors’ concerns about traffic, noise, parking and property values – the same objections that often greet churches and other houses of worship as well as commercial construction projects. In some communities, however, opponents of mosques also have cited fears about Islam, sharia law and terrorism.

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Location: Lomita, Calif.

Proposed by: Islamic Center of South Bay

Background: The proposal called for replacing eight one-story structures with a two-story building that would include classrooms, administrative offices and a prayer space. Some residents objected that the project would increase traffic and that such a large building would not suit the residential neighborhood. Proponents said the expansion would not increase traffic because it was intended to provide better facilities for current worshippers, not to attract new ones.

Current status: In March 2010, the Lomita City Council unanimously rejected the proposal, saying the project was too big for the area.

Source: The Daily Breeze, KPCC: Southern California Public Radio, Los Angeles Times

Location: Morada, Calif.

Proposed by: Masjid Umar Farooq

Background: In April 2009, San Joaquin County supervisors approved construction of a 13,820-square-foot mosque. The Morada Area Association, a residents’ group, filed a lawsuit on environmental grounds; an email from the group also cited the mosque’s “social and cultural implications.” Other residents supported the project, saying it could reduce illegal dumping and vandalism in the neighborhood.

Current status: In August 2010, the county Board of Supervisors agreed with the county’s Grand Jury that officials had sufficiently studied the mosque’s environmental impact and had given adequate notice of a public hearing, thus clearing the way for construction.

Source: Lodi News-Sentinel, The Record

Location: Santa Clara, Calif.

Proposed by: Muslim Community Association

Background: A Santa Clara architectural review board had previously approved the Muslim Community Association’s plan to add a 64-foot minaret to its mosque. The issue was appealed to the planning commission by a local businessman who contended that the structure would lower property values. He emphasized that his opposition was to the architectural quality of the minaret, not to the mosque itself. A few opponents of the project also voiced concerns about “Islamic domination” of America, according to a news report.

Current status: The addition of the minaret was approved in August 2010.
Source: San Jose Mercury News

Location: Temecula, Calif.

Proposed by: Islamic Center of Temecula Valley

Background: A growing Muslim community in Southern California proposes to build a new mosque with a prayer hall for 150 to 300 people near two existing churches. Opponents have voiced a mixture of objections, ranging from concerns about traffic to fears that Muslims want to impose sharia law. At a small rally in July, some protesters brought dogs in a deliberate effort to offend Muslim sensibilities. But other residents and interfaith groups have expressed support for the proposed mosque.

Current status: The city’s Planning Commission is scheduled to review the proposal in November 2010.

Source: Time

Location: Wallingford, Conn.

Proposed by: Tariq Farid

Background: Farid petitioned for a zoning variance to build a mosque on residential property. Many residents voiced concerns about traffic and parking, contending that the site should remain residential. One neighbor also expressed worries about Muslims’ treatment of women, and proponents of the project suggested that the opposition was biased.

Current status: The town’s Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously rejected the variance in October 2008, citing concerns about traffic and parking.


Location: White City, Fla.

Proposed by: Muslim Friends of Florida International

Background: A Muslim group proposed to build an 18,800-square-foot mosque on a 2.9-acre lot, part of which was zoned for religious use. Neighbors expressed concerns about the size of the facility and potential drainage problems. The Muslim group scaled back the design to 14,400-square-feet in an effort to assuage neighbors’ concerns.

Current status: St. Lucie County Commissioners unanimously approved construction of the mosque in February 2009.
Source: *TCPalm* [Feb. 16, 2009](#) and [Feb. 18, 2009](#)

Location: Alpharetta, Ga.

Proposed by: Islamic Center of North Fulton

Background: The 600-member congregation applied to replace its 2,500-square-foot mosque with a two-story, 15,458-square-foot structure and to construct a much smaller, temporary worship hall that would be converted to a community room and gym once the new mosque was built. Residents cited increased traffic and noise as reasons for opposing the expansion. Alpharetta’s City Council denied the proposed expansion in May 2010, citing previous agreements in that the congregation would not seek to expand its mosque.

Current status: The Islamic Center sued the city in June, alleging religious discrimination.

Source: *WSB Radio News*, *Appen Newspapers*, *Alpharetta Neighbor*

Location: Forsyth County, Ga.

Proposed by: Hamzah Islamic Center

Background: The proposed mosque would be 25,000 square feet. Opponents objected to the size of the building and the traffic it would bring, contending that it would not be beneficial to the neighborhood.

Current status: The Forsyth County Commission approved the plan in October 2009, noting that zoning laws allow a religious facility on the 12-acre site. Residents opposed to the project said they would appeal in court.

Source: *Forsyth County News*

Location: Lilburn, Ga.

Proposed by: Dar-E-Abbas congregation

Background: The congregation sought to expand two buildings into a 20,000-square-foot mosque and gym, along with a cemetery. Residents said the expansion would cause traffic, noise and parking problems. After the city council rejected the project in November 2009, the congregation filed a federal lawsuit alleging religious discrimination, and tensions mounted in the neighborhood, according to news reports. The court stayed the litigation at the request of both sides in January 2010 as settlement talks continued.

Current status: City leaders are updating Lilburn’s zoning laws while the city continues legal discussions with the congregation.
Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Nov. 2009, June and July 2010

Location: Des Plaines, Ill.

Proposed by: Islamic Community Center of Des Plaines

Background: A Muslim congregation that has grown over 25 years from a few families to hundreds of worshippers applied to add 23 parking spaces on its property. Neighbors opposed the proposal, saying the additional parking would ruin the aesthetics of the neighborhood.

Current status: The City Council gave the mosque permission to add the parking spaces in July 2010.

Source: The Daily Herald

Location: Naperville, Ill.

Proposed by: Irshad Learning Center

Background: A group of mostly Iranian-born Muslims proposed to build a school and mosque on a 2.9-acre residential lot. The DuPage County Board and zoning officials denied the application in January 2010 after neighbors voiced concerns about parking and late-night worship services, as well as allegations that the Irshad Learning Center had received funds from a Persian charity reportedly being investigated for funding Iran’s nuclear program. Supporters of the project filed a federal lawsuit in April 2010, alleging religious discrimination.

Current status: The lawsuit is pending, with a hearing scheduled for November 2010.

Source: Naperville Sun Nov. 2009, Jan. and Aug. 2010 (no longer available online), Chicago Breaking News Center

Location: Chicago, Ill.

Proposed by: Faizan e Madina

Background: A Chicago-area congregation sought to turn a vacant restaurant into a prayer center in the West Rogers Park neighborhood. Residents voiced concerns about traffic and the aesthetics of the facility. The local chamber of commerce opposed the center, saying it preferred for the site’s new occupant to produce tax revenue, which a nonprofit religious group would not do.

Current status: In August 2010, the zoning board denied a special use permit. Proponents decided to wait until after the holy month of Ramadan to decide how to proceed.
Location: Willowbrook, Ill.

Proposed by: Muslim Educational Cultural Center of America (MECCA)

Background: This group applied for permission to build a three-story building for a mosque, a gym and a school. At an August 2010 hearing, residents voiced concerns about drainage and traffic. Among mosque supporters at a September hearing, one proponent said the board should encourage “mainstream Muslim organizations” like MECCA. Meanwhile, the DuPage County zoning board is considering a ban on new places of worship in unincorporated residential parts of the county. Ban proponents say the timing is coincidental with three mosque proposals in the county; mosque supporters believe anti-Muslim bias is at work.

Current status: The board will hold another hearing in October.


Location: Florence, Ky.

Proposed by: Mercy Foundation Inc.

Background: The Islamic Center of Northern Kentucky proposed to move from a rented storefront in a strip mall to a new, 8,000-square-foot mosque on 5.5 acres already zoned for religious use. According to media reports, opponents set up a “stop the mosque” website and circulated fliers urging neighbors to help “stop the takeover of our country” by Muslims.

Current status: The Boone County Planning Commission approved plans for the proposed mosque in June 2010.


Location: Mayfield, Ky.

Proposed by: Somali immigrants

Background: A group of mostly Somali-born Muslims, many of whom moved to Western Kentucky to work at a poultry plant, applied to build a mosque in Mayfield’s business district. Residents and business owners expressed concern that mosque attendees would take up the limited parking in the downtown area. Some opponents said that the location was their primary concern and that they did not object to a mosque in principle.
Current status: Mayfield’s Board of Zoning Adjustment denied the permit in August 2010, citing lack of parking. In September, the Kentucky ACLU announced it would support the group’s effort to open a mosque, but it has not taken legal action.

Source: *Courier-Journal, WKMS radio, WBKO radio*

Location: Portland, Maine

Proposed by: Afghan refugees

Background: Worship at the Portland Masjid and Islamic Center, located in a former TV repair shop, was suspended for five months in 2009 because of a zoning conflict. In response, the Maine Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on behalf of the congregation. After asking the group to remove an illegally paved parking lot, the Portland Planning Board rezoned the area, allowing the mosque to operate.

Current status: The Planning Board granted a conditional use permit in July 2010, letting the group of about 15 families reopen the mosque.

Source: *WMTV, The Portland Press Herald*

Location: Walkersville, Md.

Proposed by: Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Background: The group contracted to buy a 224-acre farm and proposed to build a worship center for about 200 people, two gyms and space for tents to host as many as 10,000 people for an annual three-day convention. Facing opposition from residents who expressed fear of Islam, the Ahmadiyya community took out newspaper ads, knocked on doors and offered residents use of the gyms in attempts to win community support.

Current status: The zoning board rejected the proposal in August 2008, citing traffic and water supply concerns. Although the Muslim group did not challenge the decision, the landowner who wanted to sell the property filed a religious discrimination lawsuit, which was settled in August 2009 when the town agreed to buy the land for $4.7 million.

Source: *The Washington Post, Md. Community News*

Location: Amherst, Mass.

Proposed by: Hampshire Mosque

Background: The Muslim community in Amherst, a college town, sought to convert a former Christian school and poultry farm into a prayer and educational space. Local officials were
supportive, but some neighbors expressed concerns about possible disturbance from increased traffic, parking and lights on the rural site.

**Current status:** In June 2010, the Muslim group withdrew its application, citing difficulties securing the property from its current owners, negative comments from neighbors and possible restrictions on future expansion.

**Source:** *Amherst Bulletin* April 16, 2010 and April 30, 2010, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*

**Location:** Roxbury Crossing, Mass.

**Proposed by:** Muslim American Society, Boston chapter

**Background:** The city of Boston gave permission for a mosque and community center to be built in Roxbury Crossing in 1992. Before construction began in 2004, opponents alleged that some of the mosque leaders had ties to radical groups. Controversy continued throughout construction of the $15 million, 68,000-square-foot Islamic center, which can hold about 3,000 people.

**Current status:** The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center officially opened in June 2009, although it had been used for daily prayers since fall 2008.

**Source:** *The Boston Globe* June 11, 2009 and June 27, 2009, Harvard University

**Location:** Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Proposed by:** Masjid Muhammad Islamic Center

**Background:** Organizers hoped to purchase a former child development center and turn it into a worship space for up to 50 people. Neighbors said they preferred to see the site developed for housing and expressed concerns about parking, noise and congestion. A Muslim leader attributed the opposition to “a whole lot of fear-mongering.”

**Current status:** Although city administrators initially recommended the sale, the Planning Commission unanimously rejected the proposal in September 2010, citing insufficient parking.

**Source:** *The Grand Rapids Press* July and Sept. 2008

**Location:** Madison, Miss.

**Proposed by:** Mississippi Muslim Association

**Background:** The Muslim association requested a special exception from zoning rules to build a mosque on a five-acre residential site north of the city of Madison. Residents voiced concerns
about the impact on property values as well as questions about water and sewage systems. About 400 residents signed a petition opposing the mosque, and some were quoted in local media expressing fears about Islamic radicalism.

**Current status:** The Madison County Board of Supervisors gave preliminary approval to the construction of the mosque in August 2009.

**Source:** *Madison County Journal, Jackson Free Press*

**Location:** Northville, Mich.

**Proposed by:** Meadowbrook Islamic Center

**Background:** The Islamic center sought permission to build a parking lot on the front lawn of its building, a former single-family home in a residential area. Neighbors said they were concerned about property values, noise, traffic and overflow parking. Proponents of the mosque said that there would be no amplified calls to prayer and that the congregation had no intention of enlarging the building.

**Current status:** The Northville Township Zoning Board of Appeals voted in January 2010 to deny the proposed changes to the property.

**Source:** *The Detroit Free Press*

**Location:** Boonton, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center

**Background:** A 4,000-square-foot addition to an existing mosque was approved by the planning board in 2006, but the town issued a stop-work order in August 2008 after a resident reported that the façade did not conform to the approved site plan. An amended application was rejected in 2008, causing the group to further revise the application.

**Current status:** Construction resumed in 2008 but has “slowed down considerably” since 2009 for “lack of funds,” according to the Islamic center’s website.

**Source:** *The Muslim Observer* (based on a *Daily Record* article no longer available online), *Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center website*

**Location:** Piscataway, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Muslim Center of Middlesex County
**Background:** A proposed expansion would add a 45-foot minaret to an existing mosque, increase the facility’s size by about 38,000 square feet and quadruple its parking spaces to nearly 300. Area residents expressed concerns about noise, lights, parking and declining property values.

**Current status:** The Piscataway Zoning Board of Adjustment held hearings on the project in late 2009 but has not yet rendered a decision.


**Location:** Rockaway Borough, N.J.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of New Jersey

**Background:** Organizers converted an office building into a 14,800-square-foot mosque. Residents raised concerns at zoning board meetings about increased traffic and noise, questioning whether the site was large enough for the number of people expected to attend services.

**Current status:** The zoning board approved the proposal in January 2008. Residents filed a lawsuit to halt construction. A Morris County judge upheld the Rockaway Borough zoning board’s approval of the project.

**Source:** *New Jersey Real-Time News*, *The Daily Record* on Factiva (Factiva login required) Oct. 2007 and Oct. 2008, *The Star-Ledger* on Factiva (Factiva login required)

**Location:** Midland Beach, N.Y.

**Proposed by:** Muslim American Society

**Background:** The Muslim society agreed to buy a former convent from a Roman Catholic parish and planned to convert it into a mosque and community center. Residents opposed the sale, saying the convent had been built with donations from the parish. At hearings, neighbors also raised questions about possible terrorist connections and impacts on parking and traffic. The church’s pastor withdrew his support for the sale in June 2010.

**Current status:** The church’s board of trustees rejected the sale in July 2010. The Muslim society is facing financial difficulties as it continues looking for a new location.

**Source:** *Staten Island Advance* July and Aug. 2010

**Location:** Brooklyn, N.Y.
Proposed by: Muslim American Society

Background: A Muslim group in Brooklyn proposed to build a four-story mosque with a minaret in a residential area of Sheepshead Bay. After the city Buildings Department rejected the plan, the group scaled back the proposal and dropped plans for the minaret. Neighborhood opponents created a website and held a rally against the mosque in June, citing concerns about noise, traffic and property values as well as alleging that the Muslim American Society may have ties to terrorism. One protester was quoted as threatening to bomb the mosque if it is built.

Current status: Construction has not begun.


Location: New York, N.Y.

Proposed by: Cordoba Initiative and American Society for Muslim Advancement

Background: A Muslim group plans to erect a building of up to 15 stories to house a mosque, an auditorium, a pool and other facilities two blocks from the former site of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Some relatives of people killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and some national political figures, including Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich, vigorously opposed the project. President Obama said in mid-August that Muslims have a right to build in that location, though aides said he stopped short of endorsing the project. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been an ardent supporter of the center.

Current status: New York City’s Landmarks Preservation Commission approved the project in August 2010, but construction has not begun.

Source: The New York Times

Location: Westbury, N.Y.

Proposed by: Islamic Center of Long Island

Background: The Islamic center originally sought permission for a three-story addition to its existing mosque, along with more on-site parking. Organizers later scaled back the proposal to a two-story building. Some residents supported the proposal, saying the mosque had been a good neighbor for many years. But opponents cited possible impacts on noise, parking and property values.

Current status: A special use permit for the mosque expansion was denied in June 2010 due to an unpaid parking variance fee. The Westbury Board of Trustees said it could reconsider the application at a future meeting.
**Source:** Westbury Times Nov. 2009 and June 2010

**Location:** Sugarcreek Township, Ohio

**Proposed by:** Islamic Society of Greater Dayton

**Background:** In early 2008 the Sugarcreek Township Board of Zoning Appeals rejected an initial rezoning application for a new mosque, citing traffic and sewage concerns. Opposition to the plan was led by the pastor and members of a Baptist church. In response, the Islamic society scaled back the proposed building to 19,000 square feet and a capacity of 500 people, about half the size of the original plan.

**Current status:** In September 2008, the Board of Zoning Appeals approved a conditional use application to construct the mosque.

**Source:** Dayton Daily News Jan. and Sept. 2008

**Location:** Antioch, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Tennessee

**Background:** In September 2010, the Islamic center purchased a former movie theater and proposed to renovate it as a mosque. Some residents want the building to be used for a community college but say they would not object to having a mosque elsewhere in the community. Other residents have been quoted as saying they fear the mosque would become a training ground for terrorists.

**Current status:** The renovation is on hold as project leaders consider leasing or selling the building to Nashville State Community College. They are conducting a survey of local Muslims to help guide their decision.

**Source:** WSMV Channel 4 News, Nashville Public Radio, WKRN News 2

**Location:** Brentwood, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Williamson County

**Background:** The center applied to rezone 14 acres for a prayer space and fellowship hall with dining facilities for about 325 people; they emphasized that it would have few outside lights and no loudspeakers to broadcast calls to prayer. Opponents said they worried that the mosque’s leaders might have ties to terrorists. They also expressed concerns about increased traffic.

**Current status:** The Islamic center withdrew its application in May 2010, citing community opposition and the $450,000 cost of adding a turning lane to control traffic.
Source: *The Tennessean*

**Location:** Murfreesboro, Tenn.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Center of Murfreesboro

**Background:** Organizers plan to build a 10,000-square-foot Islamic center on a 15-acre lot to accommodate up to 1,000 worshippers. Community resistance has been vigorous. Some residents voiced fears that the growing Muslim population might try to impose sharia law in the area. Others demonstrated publicly in support of the new mosque. Rutherford County approved the proposal in May 2010; construction began in August. In September, federal investigators ruled that a fire at the construction site was arson.

**Current status:** Residents filed a lawsuit against the county in September contending that it did not give adequate public notice of the meeting at which the site plan was approved.


**Location:** Green Bay, Wis.

**Proposed by:** Islamic Society of Wisconsin

**Background:** The Islamic society sought to rezone a former bait-and-tackle store and convert it into a mosque. In August 2010, the Green Bay City Council held a hearing on the project. Most of the handful of people who spoke supported the mosque, though one Green Bay alderman suggested that Islam was at odds with “the American way of life.”

**Current status:** The City Council voted 9-3 to approve the rezoning.

Source: *Fox 11 (WLUK-TV), The Green Bay Press Gazette*

**Location:** Wilson, Wis.

**Proposed by:** Mansoor Mirza, Islamic Society of Sheboygan

**Background:** Mirza, a physician, sought a permit to rezone and renovate a former health-food store into a mosque. Many of the residents who attended a town planning commission meeting in February 2010 spoke out against the mosque and Islam in general. The pastor of a nearby church also opposed the mosque, but about 30 other local religious leaders signed a petition supporting Mirza’s proposal.

**Current status:** Renovations were approved and completed; the first service was held in May 2010.
Source: Time
Oregon lawmakers appear ready to end legal protections for faith-healing parents

Published: Sunday, February 20, 2011, 11:00 PM    Updated: Monday, February 21, 2011, 1:20 PM

By Steve Mayes, The Oregonian

Oregon lawmakers will take the first step today toward ending legal protections for parents who rely solely on faith to treat their dying children.

The bill targets the Followers of Christ, an Oregon City church with a long history of children dying from treatable medical conditions. A previous crackdown restricted but did not eliminate religious immunity from state criminal statutes.

Rep. Carolyn Tomei, D-Milwaukie, said deaths of three Followers children in recent years – all without medical intervention – prompted her to introduce the bill. "Such gross and unnecessary neglect cannot be allowed, even if the parents are well-meaning," Tomei said.

The legislation appears primed for approval. It has wide support both political parties, prosecutors, medical providers and child-protection groups, and there is no organized opposition.

"I don't think there'll be anyone coming to testify against it," Tomei said.

House Bill 2721 would remove spiritual treatment as a defense for all homicide charges. Moreover, if found guilty, parents would be subject to mandatory sentencing under Oregon's Measure 11.

Legislators and prosecutors hope the threat of long prison sentences will cause church members to reconsider their tradition of rejecting medical treatment in favor of faith healing.

"This will level the playing field so all parents will be operating under the same rules," said Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote. "It's going to make it easier to hold parents accountable who don't protect their children."
Faith healing and Oregon law

WHAT'S NEW

Current law: Oregon is the only state that provides immunity from prosecution for murder by neglect and first-degree manslaughter to those who provide care or treatment to minors "solely by spiritual means pursuant to (their) religious beliefs." Some cases are also exempt from mandatory minimum sentences.

House Bill 2721: Repeals spiritual defense in cases of homicide and criminal mistreatment of children. Those convicted of second-degree manslaughter would be subject to a minimum sentence of six years and three months.

Today's hearing: The House Judiciary Committee will meet at 1 p.m. in Room 343 of the Capitol in Salem.

Faith healing and Oregon law

Previous reforms

In the late 1990s, a series of news stories in The Oregonian documented dozens of cases of Followers of Christ children dying from curable medical conditions.

Oregon legislators responded in 1999 with a proposal to eliminate the use of religious belief as a criminal defense. But the bill faced opposition from Christian Scientists and mixed support from lawmakers.

"That was the most we could do at the time," said Kevin Mannix, a Salem attorney who then chaired the House Judiciary subcommittee on criminal law. Mannix is now president of the Oregon Anti-Crime Alliance, which supports HB 2721.

Another wave of Followers of Christ faith-healing deaths started in 2008 and received wide media attention, including television coverage on TruTV, a cable channel formerly known as Court TV.

The publicity of trials "had a dramatic impact" on the need to strengthen the law, Mannix said.

The Christian Science Church also changed its position. The continuing deaths "reached a critical mass," said John Clague, Christian Science media and legislative liaison.

"This is not about Christian Science," Clague said. "This is all coming from another denomination. We should never risk the life of a child through the practice of spiritual care."

Will a new law work?

Practically speaking, it's hard to say how the Followers will react to losing legal protections. Church leaders do not speak to the media and rarely issue statements, and the church did not respond to a request for comment on this story.

Foote has taken a dual approach in dealing with the Followers. He aggressively prosecuted parents who failed to seek medical care for their children. And he reached out, sending a letter last year inviting church members to join him in seeking a middle ground, protecting children while respecting religious practices.

The Followers appear to be divided on the issue of medical care, according to multiple sources familiar with the congregation. Some take their children to doctors but do so...
privately to avoid criticism or shunning. Some want to use doctors but fear ostracism. And some are hard-core believers who would never seek medical care.

The two most recent cases to go to trial, involving the deaths of 15-month-old Ava Worthington and her teenage uncle, Neil Beagley, clearly showed that some church members will defy the law, even if it means a prison sentence.

Ava’s parents testified that they believed their faith-healing rituals – prayer, anointing with oil, fasting and laying on of hands – were working right to the minute the girl died of bronchial pneumonia and a blood infection.

Beagley's parents testified that they never considered taking their dying son to a hospital or calling 9-1-1, even when he stopped breathing.

Ava's parents, Raylene and Carl Brent Worthington, were found not guilty of second-degree manslaughter. Beagley's parents, Jeffrey and Marci Beagley, were convicted of criminally negligent homicide last year and sentenced to 16 months in prison.

A third Followers of Christ couple, Timothy and Rebecca Wyland, were recently charged with first-degree criminal mistreatment for failing to seek treatment for a growth that covered their infant daughter's left eye and left her on the verge of blindness. They are scheduled for trial in May.

Since the Worthingtons, Beagleys, Wylands and other church members won't talk to the media, it's impossible to gauge how they and other parents have been affected by the trials.

All three couples have said that taking their children to doctors would be a sign of spiritual weakness.

Mannix, a devout Catholic, strongly defended a family's right to use prayer and faith healing but emphasized the need to protect children.

"It's not like the state is going out and trying to undermine religion," Mannix said. "(Parents) can adhere to their values as adults, but as a society we will protect their children so they can achieve adulthood and make decisions for themselves," Mannix said.

"God also gave us doctors and the capability to heal physically, and we should use those gifts."

-- Steve Mayes

TIMELINE

1995: Lobbied by the Christian Science Church, legislators introduce a religious defense to Oregon's homicide statutes, protecting parents who try to heal their children solely with prayer and faith-healing rituals. Parents who could prove to a judge or jury that faith governed their actions become immune from criminal liability, just as others can assert a claim of self-defense or extreme emotional disturbance.

1997: Again at the behest of Christian Scientists, Oregon legislators add religious shields to the state's first- and
second-degree manslaughter statutes.

**1998:** Citing legal immunities for faith-healers, Clackamas County District Attorney Terry Gustafson declines to prosecute Followers of Christ church members whose 11-year-old son, Bo Phillips, died from untreated diabetes. As he suffered for days, his parents withheld medical treatment in favor of prayer. The boy's death sparks a statewide controversy and calls for changes in Oregon law.

**1999:** After months of debate, legislators reform Oregon's faith-healing laws, eliminating religious protections in cases of first- and second-degree criminal mistreatment and second-degree manslaughter. In a compromise with advocates of religious freedom and parental rights, legislators also approve a faith-healing exemption to mandatory minimum sentences.

**2009:** Raylene and Carl Brent Worthington of Oregon City become the first parents prosecuted under the 1999 reforms after their 15-month-old daughter dies from untreated bronchial pneumonia and a blood infection. A Clackamas County jury acquits the mother and convicts the father on a single count of criminal mistreatment. Since then, charges have been brought against several more Followers, including Raylene Worthington's parents, Jeffrey and Marci Beagley, who were found guilty of criminally negligent homicide in the death of their teenage son.

**2011:** Lawmakers consider eliminating the last remnants of Oregon's religious-defense statutes.

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I'd like your opinion regarding the legality of small-group confidentiality.

by Sam O'Neal

One of the benefits of working on the team at Christianity Today International is that I sometimes get "insider information" from some of the other resources in our corporate family.

For example, the following question was recently sent to the editors over at Your Church Resources:

An issue has come up in our church about people's legal obligations regarding confidential matters discussed in small group meetings. We strive to maintain strict confidentiality on things discussed in our small group settings. We want them to be a "safe place" where people can share their troubles and not have to worry about group members spreading gossip or the information somehow ending up in a courtroom.

One woman we heard from was in a small group in another church and group members were called in to testify against her in court. Before joining one of our small groups she wanted to be assured that sort of thing would not happen.

So my question is, how private are small groups really? We typically get information second-hand and are not usually witnesses to things that happen in people's homes or in their personal relationships. So can we, should we, be required to appear in court about things we might know about from small group sessions? Are we able to assure people that our groups are in-fact safe for them? Is there any case history that addresses these issues?

The Your Church folk have already solicited an answer to these questions from attorney Frank Sommerville, which I will reveal on Wednesday. Between now and then, however, I would love to hear your opinions.

How would you respond to this pastor in need?
January 20, 2011

The Answer: Small Groups, Confidentiality, and the Law

See the response from a legal expert.

by Sam O'Neal

Earlier this week I posted a question from a pastor who wanted to know if the idea of confidentiality in small groups had any kind of legal support. (Click here to see the full question if you missed it.) The pastor was concerned because one of his group members had been forced to speak in court about something that happened in a previous small group, and the pastor wanted to assure this person that it would not happen again in his church.

Kudos to those of you who responded with your answers, because you were pretty much correct. Here's why attorney Frank Sommerville had to say in response to the pastor's query:

The small groups are not private for legal purposes. Anyone present can be compelled to tell what happened. There is nothing you can do to prevent this possibility.

Sorry.

Just something interesting to keep in mind if a potential group member ever asks about this kind of thing.

By the way, in the earlier post I incorrectly mentioned that the pastor's question came from our friends at Your Church. It was actually part of the Church Administration discussion board at Yahoo!. (If you're interested in becoming part of that group, you can create a Yahoo e-mail account and then contact churchadmin@yahoogroups.com.)

posted by Sam O'Neal on January 20, 2011 9:39 AM
Matching entries from Small Group Dynamics

Learning Styles: Kinesthetic Learners in Your Group

March 1, 2011 9:00 AM

Well, it has been very fun, but it is finally time to finish up our continuing series on Learning Styles and Small Groups. So far we have covered Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Reading/Writing Learners. Last week we got...

posted by Sam O'Neal on March 1, 2011 9:00 AM | Comments (1) | Trackbacks (0)

Learning Styles: Kinesthetic Learners

February 17, 2011 3:34 PM

It's been a few weeks, but it's time to start finishing up our continuing series on Learning Styles and Small Groups. So far we have covered Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Reading/Writing Learners. Now it's time to take a...

posted by Sam O'Neal on February 17, 2011 3:34 PM | Comments (2) | Trackbacks (0)

Learning Styles: Reading/Writing Learners in Your Group

January 13, 2011 11:28 AM

Well, it has been quite a while, but I am back after some extended travel over the holidays. I hope you didn't miss these blog posts too badly! Before we get back into the swing of things, let me...

posted by Sam O'Neal on January 13, 2011 11:28 AM | Comments (0) | Trackbacks (0)

Learning Styles: A Look at Reading/Writing Learners

December 16, 2010 2:05 PM

I hope you have been following along with our continuing series on "Learning Styles in Small Groups," because it has been a good one. We started with a brief overview of learning styles in general, and have since talked...

posted by Sam O'Neal on December 16, 2010 2:05 PM | Comments (1) | Trackbacks (0)

Learning Styles: Auditory Learners in Groups

November 30, 2010 2:12 PM
We are continuing in our ongoing series on the connection between learning styles and small groups. Today, we'll discuss the different experiences and needs that Auditory Learners commonly find in a small-group setting. (Here is our recent post on...)

posted by Sam O'Neal on November 30, 2010 2:12 PM | Comments (0) | Trackbacks (0)

### Learning Styles: A Look at Auditory Learners

November 16, 2010 9:20 AM

Next up in our continuing series on the connection between learning styles and small groups: Auditory Learners. I'll give a brief overview of Auditory Learners in this post, and then we'll discuss how they fit into a small group...

posted by Sam O'Neal on November 16, 2010 9:20 AM | Comments (0) | Trackbacks (0)

### Learning Styles: D'oh!

November 8, 2010 10:00 AM

As most of you know, we have been discussing learning styles and their impact on small groups. (Click here if you missed the Overview.) Before moving into Auditory Learners, I just realized that I made a huge omission in...

posted by Sam O'Neal on November 8, 2010 10:00 AM | Comments (0) | Trackbacks (0)

### Visual Learners in Small Groups

October 29, 2010 12:00 PM

Let's get back to our in-depth discussion on the impact of learning styles in small groups. Click here if you missed the overview of the VARK Learning Styles method, and click here to see an overview of the Visual...

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 29, 2010 12:00 PM | Comments (3) | Trackbacks (0)

### Learning Styles: Visual Learners

October 22, 2010 8:35 AM

We are in the middle of an in-depth discussion on the impact of learning styles on small groups. Click here if you missed the overview of the VARK Learning Styles method, which is the one we'll be focusing on....

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 22, 2010 8:35 AM | Comments (3) | Trackbacks (0)

### Learning Styles: Time for an Overview

October 15, 2010 3:20 PM
I meant to get to this a little earlier this week, but late is better than never, right? In any case, we are beginning an in-depth exploration of Learning Styles and how they impact both small-group leaders and small-group...

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 15, 2010 3:20 PM | | Comments (4) | Trackbacks (0)

Learning About Learning Styles

October 11, 2010 9:45 AM

I am a teacher at heart, and I've been feeling the urge lately to explore an important topic on a deeper level—with the goal of providing small-group leaders with some useful insight and good conversation. And since I have...

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 11, 2010 9:45 AM | | Comments (7) | Trackbacks (0)

A Little Help with Learning Styles

May 17, 2010 11:59 PM

I'm going to have the pleasure of attending the upcoming Community U conference this Friday and Saturday at Parkway Apostolic Church in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. This will be one of a series of conferences put on by Saddleback Church this...

posted by Sam O'Neal on May 17, 2010 11:59 PM | | Comments (4) | Trackbacks (0)
May 17, 2010

A Little Help with Learning Styles

What do you know about learning styles, and what would you like to know?

by Sam O'Neal

I'm going to have the pleasure of attending the upcoming Community U conference this Friday and Saturday at Parkway Apostolic Church in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. This will be one of a series of conferences put on by Saddleback Church this year, and you can click here to learn more about them.

What I'm most excited about, however, is that I get a chance to lead one of the conference breakout sessions this year! I've been wanting to do this for a while, and I'm super excited to have the opportunity.

But I need your help. Yes, yours. I am going to be leading a discussion on the topic of Learning Styles, and I'd like to get some opinions from our SmallGroups.com readers to help me polish up the session. Specifically, I'd like to know two things:

1. What do you already know/believe concerning the application of learning styles in a small-group environment? Are you familiar with the different learning styles present within your group members? Have you found it easy or difficult to adapt learning experiences to connect with different learning styles? Do you think worrying about learning styles within a small group is completely unnecessary? Things like that.

2. What do you wish you knew about learning styles? What are some areas that are unclear to you? Are there any questions that you would really like answered pertaining to learning styles? Or have you come across specific situations where you could use some practical tips and/or advice?

Any help you can give me will be...well, helpful. So thanks in advance!

And by the way: I believe the registration period for the Parkside conference has expired. But if you're in the Milwaukee area and want to stop by, you might want to contact Saddleback and ask really, really nicely if they'll let you sign up.

posted by Sam O'Neal on May 17, 2010 11:59 PM

Comments

Hi Sam,

I got a lot of help from Cynthia Ulrich Tobias' book 'The way they Learn'. Especially the three primary ways mankind gathers information. After reading the book I searched the Scriptures as is my wont and discovered two verses that actually mention the Visual, the Auditory and the Tactile. Luke 11:9 Jesus says, ask, seek and knock, and in 1 John 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 #1 Jn 1:1#. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

This means that the natural ways we learn are also applicable to the spirit realm. I have a teaching on this that you are welcome to access if you so desire.

Jesus said my sheep hear, recognise and understand my voice.

Jesus constantly told stories:- stories involve people hearing, picturing and sensing what is happening in the story.

Jesus constantly told parables:- Parables make people work for the explanations. That way we don't tell them
everything but help them remember by making them think about what we have said.
Jesus made up stories to suit His needs to communicate the truth to the people he met.
Love your thoughts mate, may you have a great time at the conference and may your session be the most
remembered and fruitful that people can remember!
Awesome God, dependant people! #We have this treasure in earthen vessels - Christ in us the hope of glory.#
Rob.
Magpie, Victoria, Australia.

Posted By: Rob Bailey | May 19, 2010 7:49 PM

Those are great points, Rob. I am not familiar with that book, but I will check it out.

And thanks for the good words!

Sam

Posted By: Sam O'Neal | May 19, 2010 9:55 PM

Sam,

Truly enjoyed meeting you at the conference and hearing about your ministry. And, by the way, I heard that your
session was excellent!

DG

Posted By: David Garrett | May 22, 2010 6:14 PM

It was good to meet you as well, David! It seems like some very cool things are happening at Parkside, and I had
a great time getting to know several of you. Hopefully I can come back before too long. :)

Posted By: Sam O'Neal | May 24, 2010 10:09 AM
October 11, 2010

Learning About Learning Styles

Get ready for some in-depth exploration in the coming weeks.

by Sam O'Neal

I am a teacher at heart, and I've been feeling the urge lately to explore an important topic on a deeper level—with the goal of providing small-group leaders with some useful insight and good conversation. And since I have full control over this blog, I think I will do just that. (Cue a mad-scientist kind of laugh.)

So, over the next several weeks I will be taking an extended look at learning styles and how they impact small groups. (You probably guessed that from the title of this post, huh?) Here's a tentative schedule of how the posts might shake out:

1. An overview of learning styles and the VARK model
2. Understanding Visual Learners
3. What visual learners need in a small group
4. Understanding Auditory Learners
5. What auditory learners need in a small group
6. Understanding Reading/Writing Learners
7. What reading/writing learners need in a small group
8. Understanding Kinesthetic Learners
9. What kinesthetic learners need in a small group
10. How to engage multiple learning styles in a small group

I plan on getting started later this week, but I wanted to pause a moment and open the door for any feedback you may have before I do so. Does this look interesting? Is there anything missing that you would like me to explore or explain?

Feel free to pitch in with your comments, and I really look forward to exploring this subject together!

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 11, 2010 9:45 AM

Comments

I don't typically jump in on these conversations. But this idea stirs my interest. I guess partly because this topic has not been explored much in the small group world. And typically we assume way too much as pastors about how people learn. We did a churn wide campaign that took advantage of VARK a couple of years ago and the response was great. But we've not done that much more with it. To have some principles to help steer our small group curriculum around the fact that people learn differently would be most welcome

Posted By: Scott Boren | October 12, 2010 10:05 AM

Interesting. In our Small Group Leader Training, we actually coach our leaders to blend a balance of teaching,
Learning Styles: Time for an Overview

A broad look at what Learning Styles are and the model we will be exploring

by Sam O'Neal

I meant to get to this a little earlier this week, but late is better than never, right? In any case, we are beginning an in-depth exploration of Learning Styles and how they impact both small-group leaders and small-group members.

I'd like to start with a broad overview of Learning Styles in general.

**Definition**

Learning styles refer to how a person perceives and processes information.

- "Perceive" refers to how data enters into a person's brain—meaning, sight, smell, sound, or touch.
- "Process" refers to what the brain does with that information after it has been perceived. It's how the brain interprets, organizes, stores, and uses data.

When it comes to categorizing and understanding the learning styles of human beings, there are dozens of different models that have been developed over the years (many of which are very scholarly and the opposite of user friendly). But I prefer to focus on the VARK model because it makes a lot of sense and, frankly, is easy to both understand and apply.

**Gimme a V-A-R-K!**

The VARK model of learning styles was developed by Neil Fleming, who is a professor and educational theorist currently living in New Zealand. It focuses on four distinct learning styles:

1. Visual learners
2. Auditory learners
3. Reading/writing learners
4. Kinesthetic learners

We will discuss each of the different styles in depth over the next several weeks, although you can guess a lot about each style based on the name. Also, I should have mentioned this earlier, but VARK is just the first letter of each of the four learning styles. (You already figured that out, I know.)

In addition to the four VARK styles, we will also be talking about Social Learners and Solitary Learners—a distinction that makes a big difference when it comes to attendance and participation in small groups.

**Dominant and Secondary**

It's important to note that just about everyone is able to operate in all four of the different learning styles. Chances are good that all of your small-group members will be able to perceive and process information through site (visual), sound (auditory), reading/writing, and touch (kinesthetic).

But each of us has a dominant learning style—a primary method that we prefer to use when we learn. This is the way that we unconsciously approach and interpret the world. And, as small-group leaders, this is the way that we
October 22, 2010

Learning Styles: Visual Learners

Get a detailed look at the visual learning style.

by Sam O'Neal

We are in the middle of an in-depth discussion on the impact of learning styles on small groups. Click here if you missed the overview of the VARK Learning Styles method, which is the one we'll be focusing on.

This post is focused on Visual Learners.

Gimme a V!
People with a visual learning style prefer to perceive information through their eyes. They like it when facts and ideas are organized visually into charts, graphs, diagrams, and maps. They often communicate their thoughts through similes and metaphors that rely on images—"I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs," for example.

Visual learners are also good at spatial recognition. They are aware of their physical surroundings and are able to visualize the layout of rooms and buildings. They are skilled at working with shapes and objects, even to the point of rotating and manipulating them in their mind's eye.

Visual learners often enjoy expressing themselves artistically through drawing, painting, sculpting, etc. If they are forced to sit and listen to a lecture or take notes, you may catch them doodling shapes and patterns on their paper, instead.

A Few More Clues
Here are some other cues and clues that may help you recognize a visual learner:

- If you asked a visual learner for directions, he would probably draw you a map.
- When a visual learner orders food at a restaurant, she prefers looking at the pictures on a menu, or at meals being eaten at the other tables.
- Visual learners gravitate toward books with color illustrations and complicated diagrams.
- Documents and presentations put together by a visual learner will use a wide variety of fonts, colors, images, and graphs.
- A Bible owned by a visual learner may be highlighted in different colors as a method of taking notes.
- Visual learners often use these words and phrases: "vision," "view," "I'm trying to visualize," "see the point," "draw up," and so on.

Stay tuned for the next post, where we'll discuss what visual learners need from a small group.

posted by Sam O'Neal on October 22, 2010 8:35 AM

Comments

As someone who is partly a visual learner I mentally picture what is being talked about, but in lectures or sermons I find that it helps to keep my mind on the subject by taking notes. My favorite way is with shorthand...
Exploring how they feel and what they need.

by Sam O'Neal

Let's get back to our in-depth discussion on the impact of learning styles in small groups. Click here if you missed the overview of the VARK Learning Styles method, and click here to see an overview of the Visual Learning Style.

Right now I'd like to discuss how Visual Learners are impacted within a small group.

**How They Feel**
First things first—Visual Learners don't get much attention from traditional small groups. And it starts with curriculum.

Visual Learners love looking at charts, graphs, diagrams—any kind of image that visually organizes data and concepts. But very few small-group Bible studies include anything like that. Nor do many studies attempt to structure their material in a way that is visually interesting or organized.

The primary reason for this is that small groups are almost entirely based on talking. Think about it—fellowship, discussion, prayer requests, questions and answers, and even worship are based on talking. It's all ears and mouths, with no eyes.

That isn't to say that Visual Learners in your small group don't like talking, or that they can't learn through listening, or that they don't enjoy participating in a discussion. But it does mean that they could be more stimulated and would probably retain more of what they hear if your group included a wider variety of activities.

**How to Help**
That being the case, here are some ways you as a small-group leader can make Visual Learners more comfortable and more engaged:

- **Find visual aids.** You need to make an effort to find visual aids that supplement whatever curriculum or Bible study your group is following. And if you can't find any, you can produce your own charts, graphs, diagrams—anything that puts a visual structure to facts and ideas. (Another good idea is to have your visual learners produce their own chart or diagram during the group meeting.)
- **Craft time.** Visual learners enjoy expressing themselves artistically, so add an "arts and crafts" element to your small group every now and then. Bring in crayons and colored pencils and ask the group to draw something, or bring in Play Doh and have them sculpt something. Of course, it won't help to have them create something random—make sure it is connected to the group's topic of discussion.
- **Use multimedia.** See if you can identify a movie clip or YouTube video that would effectively illustrate the concept or idea your group will be discussing. Or have your group members search for one on their iPhones during the discussion.
- **Emphasize the visual in Scripture.** There are large portions of the Bible that are very visual—especially the Psalms, the Prophets, and apocalyptic texts like Revelation. When you notice a text that is heavy on visual elements, be sure to call them out. Make the visual nature of the verses be a large part of the discussion.

What about you? What other ideas or tips have you used to inspire and involve Visual Learners in your small group?
November 8, 2010

Learning Styles: D'oh!

My apologies for being so forgetful with something important.

by Sam O'Neal

As most of you know, we have been discussing learning styles and their impact on small groups. (Click here if you missed the Overview.)

Before moving into Auditory Learners, I just realized that I made a huge omission in the earlier posts—the Learning Styles Questionnaire. I have had several people ask me things like: "I like to do such and such, so does that make me a visual learner?" But you don't have to evaluate learning styles based solely on observation. There is a simple and easy online questionnaire that will identify both your dominant and secondary learning styles.

Here's where to find it.

Use that link to identify your learning styles, and then we will get back into the discussion about small groups in a day or two.

In the meantime, please accept this video as my apology for the big omission. D'oh!
Learning Styles: A Look at Auditory Learners

A brief overview of the second VARK learning style.

by Sam O'Neal

Next up in our continuing series on the connection between learning styles and small groups: Auditory Learners. I'll give a brief overview of Auditory Learners in this post, and then we'll discuss how they fit into a small group later in the week.

(Also, remember that you can go to www.vark-learn.com to take a quick questionnaire and determine your dominant and secondary learning styles.)

Gimme an A!
People with an auditory learning style prefer to perceive information through their ears, and they often use their mouths to process that information. They like to have concepts and ideas explained to them, and they like to explain concepts and ideas to others. That's why they are big fans of lectures (both giving and receiving). They may also be gifted at public speaking.

Auditory learners thrive in discussion-based environments. They benefit from talking through what they have learned and what they are feeling, and they are generally good at listening to others. They also enjoy participating in and listening to debates.

Many auditory learners demonstrate a strong connection to music and sounds. They often have a good sense of rhythm and enjoy singing and playing an instrument.

A Few More Clues
Here are some other cues and clues that might help you identify an Auditory Learner:

- If you ask an auditory learner for directions, she will explain in detail which roads you should take and which landmarks to watch for.
- When an auditory learner orders food at a restaurant, he listens carefully when the server talks about the specials. He may also ask questions about different items on the menu.
- Auditory learners often prefer to listen to music while reading.
- Auditory learners often use these words and phrases: "I hear you," "that sounds right," "listen to me," "let me explain," and so on.

Again, stay tuned later in the week as we'll discuss how Auditory Learners typically feel in a small-group setting and what they need from you as a leader.
Learning Styles: Auditory Learners in Groups

Learn what they experience and what they need.

by Sam O'Neal

We are continuing in our ongoing series on the connection between learning styles and small groups. Today, we'll discuss the different experiences and needs that Auditory Learners commonly find in a small-group setting. (Here is our recent post on what it means to be an Auditory Learner in general, in case you missed it.)

Like Pigs in Slop
To put it simply, the vast majority of Auditory Learners love the format of traditional small groups. They thrive in it. They are excited by it. That's because traditional small groups are based around one dominant activity: talking.

And while that is a detriment to the Visual and Kinesthetic learners in your group, it makes people with an Auditory bent very, very happy. Consequently, don't be surprised if a large percentage of your group members are Auditory Learners.

That being the case, here are some activities to keep in mind for Auditory Learners:

- **Discuss, discuss, discuss.** Most small groups are based on discussion, which is a big reason why small groups continue to grow in popularity. Continue giving your people chances to both talk and listen.
- **Read Scripture out loud.** For some people, reading a Bible verse out loud is a terrifying experience. If that is true for you, it is usually not the case for auditory learners. So when your group is exploring a specific passage of Scripture, ask for volunteers to read the text out loud at least one time during the group meeting.
- **Pray out loud.** The same idea applies here. Encourage group members to pray out loud if they would like to do so.
- **Sing and make music.** Don't be afraid to give your group members a chance to verbally express their devotion to God through songs, responsive readings, and spontaneous prayer.

One Caution
Here's one final note about auditory learners: don't be too quick about labeling someone in your group as a person who "talks too much." While this certainly can become a real problem, oftentimes these "overtalkers" are just Auditory Learners who enjoy processing what they have heard in the discussion by speaking and reiterating.

So be sure to take a step back and ask yourself: "Does this person really have a problem, or is he/she just acting differently than I would?"
December 16, 2010

Learning Styles: A Look at Reading/Writing Learners

A brief overview of the third VARK learning style

by Sam O'Neal

I hope you have been following along with our continuing series on "Learning Styles in Small Groups," because it has been a good one. We started with a brief overview of learning styles in general, and have since talked about Visual Learners and Auditory Learners.

Now it's time to explore what it means to have a preference for the Reading/Writing learning style.

Gimme an R!
Remember that a learning style refers to the way a person prefers to perceive and process information. And for Reading/Writing Learners, the preferred way to perceive and process information is through...wait for it...reading and writing.

If Reading/Writing learners were assigned to learn something, they would go straight to a book and research the given topic. If they were asked to explain a concept or idea to another person, they would summarize what they have read about that concept or idea. And when they listen to a lecture or sermon, they process that auditory experience by writing down copious notes.

Reading/writing learners even turn to books as a means of artistic enjoyment and expression. They enjoy literature and good prose, and they often collect vast libraries (when they can afford it). They can write both creatively and practically, moving from a grocery list to poetry without any need to change gears.

A Few More Clues
Here are some other tendencies and preferences that may help you identify a Reading/Writing Learner:

- If you ask a Reading/Writing Learner for directions, he will often jot down the appropriate streets and turns in list form.
- When a Reading/Writing Learner orders food at a restaurant, she reads the menu and decides what she wants.
- Reading/Writing Learners place a high value on well-written quotations and clever word games.
- A Reading/Writing Learner would rather email you or text-message you than call your cell phone.

Okay, that's it for now. Check back in a couple days and we will discuss how what Reading/Writing Learners experience in a typical small-group session, as well as what they really need.

posted by Sam O'Neal on December 16, 2010 2:05 PM

Comments
Learning Styles: Reading/Writing Learners in Your Group

Our continuing series is back and better than ever.

by Sam O'Neal

Well, it has been quite a while, but I am back after some extended travel over the holidays. I hope you didn't miss these blog posts too badly!

Before we get back into the swing of things, let me give a quick review of the series we have been featuring here on the intersection between Learning Styles and Small Groups. So far we have covered Visual Learners and Auditory Learners. In my last post before Christmas I gave an overview of the Reading/Writing learning style, and below you will find some specific information on how people with that learning preference generally fare in a small-group setting.

As with auditory learners, small groups present a lot of advantages to people with a reading/writing learning style.

The idea of a Bible study or curriculum guide is exciting for reading/writing learners, as is the opportunity to study the Bible directly. These individuals also enjoy the traditional "inductive Bible study" format where they are asked to read a portion of the text, interpret what it means, and then make a connection toward application.

Reading/writing learners usually enjoy small-group discussions—especially when they are given the opportunity to recite definitions, make connections to other parts of Scripture, and dig into the study notes contained in their Bibles.

Here are some more ways to maximize a small-group experience for reading/writing learners:

* **Homework.** I know, I know. For a lot of people, homework is a dirty word. But not for reading/writing learners. They don't like making spontaneous judgments about a text and would prefer to study, take notes, and answer questions during the week in order to be fully prepared for the group discussion.

* **Reading time.** If your small group is approaching a Bible passage or a book for the first time, be sure to provide a few minutes for people to read it over more than once. Give your reading/writing learners the time they need to dig in.

* **Write on the board.** You may want to consider including a whiteboard or tear-off notepad in your small-group sessions. Ask someone to take notes during the discussion so that the primary ideas and opinions being shared are written out for everyone to see.

* **Give tests and evaluations.** Again, this will probably not be a popular feature of your group if you do it every week. But there is value in writing up a little quiz before your group begins a new curriculum series in order to see what your group members already know. And there is value in another quiz or evaluation after the series is over in order to see what they have retained. (Your reading/writing learners will also like it if you set up a game based on Jeopardy or Trivial Pursuit.)

Next in our continuing series: Kinesthetic Learners!
February 17, 2011

Learning Styles: Kinesthetic Learners

The fourth and final learning style in the VARK model

by Sam O'Neal

It's been a few weeks, but it's time to start finishing up our continuing series on Learning Styles and Small Groups.

So far we have covered Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Reading/Writing Learners. Now it's time to take a look at the final learning preference included in the VARK model: Kinesthetic Learners (also called "kinetic" or "hands-on" learners).

Gimme a V!
People with a kinesthetic learning style prefer to process information through their fingers and skin. They are "hands on" and would choose to participate in physical activities rather than listen to a lecture or participate in a debate. They learn well when they can manipulate physical objects and conduct experiments.

Kinesthetic learners usually don't like trying to explore abstract theories or ideas. They prefer to be more concrete and practical. "Practice makes perfect" would be an ideal motto for a kinesthetic learner.

Kinesthetic learners also place a high value on experience. They hold things to be more true when they have experienced them, and they would prefer others to tell stories about their experiences, rather than give opinions on matters they are not experts in.

A Few More Clues
Here are some other cues and clues that may help you recognize a kinesthetic learner:

- If you ask a kinesthetic learner for directions, she just may offer to take you to the destination herself.
- When a kinesthetic learner orders food at a restaurant, he prefers to choose something he has eaten at that restaurant before—something he has already experienced.
- Kinesthetic learners enjoy sports and other activities that allow them to engage their bodies with the world around them. Gardening would be a good example.
- A kinesthetic employee would prefer to watch his boss demonstrate what needs to be done, rather than reading a manual or listening to his boss explain the task.
- Kinesthetic learners use these words and phrases: "application," "get my hands dirty," "that feels right," "it's been my experience that," and so on.

Stay tuned for the final post in this series, which will discuss how to help Kinesthetic Learners engage and benefit most from a small-group setting.
Learning Styles: Kinesthetic Learners in Your Group

Here is the final post in our continuing series.

by Sam O'Neal

Well, it has been very fun, but it is finally time to finish up our continuing series on Learning Styles and Small Groups.

So far we have covered Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Reading/Writing Learners. Last week we got an overview of the final learning preference included in the VARK model: Kinesthetic Learners (also called "kinetic" or "hands-on" learners).

So, the only questions left to answer are: how do Kinesthetic Learners generally fair in a small-group setting, and what can group leaders do to help them get more from the experience?

A Bad Deal
Unfortunately, there are many aspects of participating in a small group that are unappealing to kinesthetic learners. First and foremost would be staying seated in the same place for a long period of time. The traditional method of "going around the circle" for prayer requests is also disagreeable for kinesthetic learners because it takes so long for everyone to talk about what's on their mind, and then everyone to pray out loud.

Kinesthetic learners can also become frustrated when a small group spends most of its time talking and discussing and debating. They want to move quickly into application. They want to get out of the living room and do something.

How to Help
Here are some ways that you can improve the experience of kinesthetic learners in your small group:

- **Service projects.** Kinesthetic learners are great for small groups because they are often the ones pushing others to "practice what they preach." They want to get out into the world and make an impact based on what the group has been learning.
- **Establish mentoring relationships.** Paul's admonition to "follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1) sounds just right to kinesthetic learners. Rather than establish some kind of amorphous accountability within the whole small group, kinesthetic learners do well when they can be in a "do as I do" relationship with another disciple of Jesus—both as the mentor and the mentee.
- **Move around.** Sitting still is not a preferred activity for kinesthetic learners, so build in some activities that provide people a chance to move their bodies. Announce a stretch break for five minutes before the discussion starts. Encourage people to get down on their knees or walk around during the prayer time.
- **Give them something to hold.** A kinesthetic learner will do much better during a "sit and talk" activity if they have something in their hands to hold, squeeze, bend, or throw. So consider making one or more of these materials available at each small-group meeting: a small ball, pipe cleaners, Play Doh, a Rubik's Cube—anything that can be physically manipulated while a person sits and participates in a discussion.
So what's going on here?" she asked standing outside the preschool building, her three-year-old daughter tugging at her hand. "My son went here too, and—well—something's changed."

"Yeah, ever since Pastor Thomas* left, and that's been over two years ago," replied another mother. "They said the preschool director decided to retire, but you get the feeling the whole story hasn't come out yet."

"A friend of mine used to go to church here, and she says the bishop may step in and do something. I think they're getting a new pastor."

"Another one? Well, I hope they do something soon, before everybody leaves. Amazing how quickly it all went downhill."

"It's a shame the new pastor—Jackson—didn't work out. The preschool's always been good."

The first woman responded. "Did you ever hear why Pastor Thomas quit? Did he go to another church?"

"I don't know. Seems there's more to that story than's been told."

Seeds of discontent

"Oh, you're from the fireworks church?" people would say, smiling, to members of Court Street Church. The congregation was known throughout the community for its big July Fourth celebration, including a parade, watermelon cutting, seed-spitting contest, and Roman candles. But it wasn't long before the fireworks weren't only overhead; they soon moved into the board room and eventually into the sanctuary. Fireworks church, indeed.

Court Street had a heart for kids, with preschool and youth programs that had anchored their thriving ministry for decades.

During the ten-year pastorate of Bob Thomas, the church enjoyed a growing reputation to match its swelling numbers. Everybody loved Pastor Thomas, a fine preacher and good administrator. The pews were full every Sunday. Court Street became the community's church and a jewel in the denomination's crown, so preserving the church and its reputation were important to the regional leaders when Thomas suddenly resigned.

"Pastor Thomas needs a break," the people were told by the head of the district. "He's overworked, and he'll be taking a month off." Then, with no explanation, the month became a permanent resignation, and ultimately departure from ministry altogether.

"We don't know what we did wrong," one member of the council said. "We were told, in effect, that we worked our pastor nearly to death and we drove him from ministry. And that's about all..."
they said.

"We wanted answers, but we got none."

So the deck was stacked against Pastor Thomas's successor. And sure enough, following a well-loved pastor hailed for his pulpit and ministry skills, and entering an environment suddenly marked by doubt and mistrust, Chad Jackson struggled to gain a foothold as the leader of Court Street.

Few, it appeared, were ready to follow.

Many, in fact, were leaving. Several hundred. Eventually, the church was one-third the size of its heyday.

Missing answers, missing peaces

"I don't seem to be getting through to Pastor Jackson," Margaret Collins confided to a few close associates. As director of Kid's Corner Preschool for many years, Margaret had built a solid program that served the town.

She had found an ally in former Pastor Thomas, and together they had accomplished what many churches wrestle with—they built bridges from the weekday preschool to the Sunday worship and drew many young families into the life of the congregation. But now, to Margaret, that seemed threatened.

"Chad thinks he's in charge of the preschool," she opined, "and he wants me to make a lot of changes—without good reason. We never get any answers around here."

When those changes didn't happen, Pastor Jackson concluded that Margaret was a stumbling block. "She just won't listen to me," he said.

In council meetings, people began taking sides. The spirit of trust was gone. The preschool was only one subject of conflict. Soon there were others. And the debates became long and heated.

"The youth minister has to go," demanded Cesar in one memorable meeting. A passionate man given to impassioned speeches, Cesar had teenagers in the youth program. He didn't like some actions of the youth leader, a recent hire who was viewed as one of Pastor Jackson's allies.

"We can't let this go on!" Cesar argued, citing a litany of perceived offenses, from the curriculum chosen, to the outings scheduled. "He isn't listening to the parents!" He punctuated his points with fist pumps on the table.

Youth ministry wasn't the only contentious area. The council of the harmonious congregation had degenerated into an entrenched, argumentative knot. Those trying to address a troubled situation felt unheard. Those supporting the pastor felt vilified. And those in the middle felt targeted from both sides. No one looked forward to council meetings ... or staff meetings ... or hallway conversations, because they all seemed to devolve into arguments.

It was in this environment that the second resignation came. Not the youth minister's, but Margaret's. And that's what started the rest of the church—and the community—talking.

"I don't know why the denomination sent that new pastor," one preschool mom said in a sidewalk interview. "Pastor Thomas could have returned after his break."

"My friends are looking for a new church," another offered. "Lots of people are. Now that Margaret has quit, we may look around as well."

"Did Margaret quit? I heard she was fired."

"Well, they're not saying much."

"Too bad," said the first mom. "This used to be a good church."
Even visitors were telling us, "something is wrong here."

"Court Street is really not as bad as you've heard," Margaret said to the bishop at a denominational event some time later. "They're good people—at heart."

The bishop's weak nod and slight smile revealed he had heard plenty.

His fair-haired child had become his problem church, producing endless phone calls and emails about the decline of Court Street Church. Perhaps that was when the bishop decided to reassign Chad Jackson, and bring in yet another pastor in less than two years. He didn't know how that decision would set off the final firestorm.

Leaders behaving badly

The bishop and the denomination's regional supervisor decided to call in an interim pastor. They also brought in a mediation team to address the conflicted situation. Paul Cornwell and Gary Wright from Peacemaker Ministries, based in Billings, Montana, visited the church and began conducting interviews with church leaders, attenders, and people in the neighborhood.

"Even visitors were telling us, 'Something is wrong here,'" Cornwell said.

"This was the most well-integrated conflict we had ever seen," he recalls. "At least 60 percent of the congregation had taken sides. And those who hadn't were still confused about the departure of their beloved Pastor Thomas two years earlier."

"Some of us had tried to move on," one council member said, "but people still wanted answers from the denomination—and we weren't getting any. They said it was a personnel issue, which meant he had to maintain confidentiality. And the church wanted answers from us on the council—and we didn't have any."

The anger and confusion continued to play out in their meetings, too. Cornwell remembers the council as "the most aggressive group I've worked with."

"Most people are escape artists, they want to get away from conflict," he said, "but not this group. They had a very adversarial style of communication." The council members had settled into their positions, and they were virtually willing to duke it out.

"We began teaching cooperative means of communication," Cornwell said. "And as we do in many consultations, we focused on the Four G's of peacemaking: Glorify God, Get the log out of your own eye, Gently restore, and Go and be reconciled."

"The intervention team spent time with church members in conflict-coaching sessions, helping people to understand how they might have contributed to the church's current situation. As a result of these conversations, church leaders identified several needed action steps."

In just a few weeks, relationships among the council members were improving. Healing was underway. Until the bishop's new appointment was announced.

Et tu, Cesar?

Pastor Gary Haskell was enjoying a successful ministry in another part of the state. After several pastorates helping troubled churches overcome their tough situations, he welcomed a peaceful, productive season.

Then the bishop called.

"Are you sure we want to go to another troubled church?" his wife said, in a tone that bordered on pleading. Any pastor and spouse would rightly be concerned about their reception in a congregation that had reportedly ended one man's ministry and left a second wounded. "Can't they find someone else to take on Court Street?" she asked. She had a point. Who would willingly accept a church with trust issues, an adversarial relationship with the hierarchy, and a combative leadership style?
What the Haskells found when they contacted Court Street was a warm reception from hurting people eager for a fresh start. And one last big fight.

"I should have said no when the chairman called and said he couldn't make the meeting," recalled the incoming vice-chairman of the council. "He said it would be a routine meeting for me to lead, no big items on the agenda."

But debate over housing the new pastor proved far from routine.

"The denomination wants us to make other arrangements for the new pastor's housing, and to allow the Jacksons to stay in the parsonage until the end of the school year," the personnel committee chair explained. "That way the kids can stay in school and not be disrupted."

"That's six months!" one exclaimed. "The parsonage is right next door. Are we going to have to see Pastor Jackson every time we come to church?"

"It's none of his business what we do here. He's done. That parsonage doesn't belong to the bishop. They can't tell us what to do."

"We have a new pastor coming," Cesar injected. "The old one has to go!" Overcome by emotion, he broke into Spanish best left untranslated.

The argument went on for hours, interspersed with angry threats, explosive outbursts, words not suited for church, and the ultimate escalation: "If that happens, I'll leave the church!"

The vice-chairman, on his first day in office, ended the meeting with a plan to reconvene the next night. In the meantime, they called the Peacemakers team. This had quickly developed into a make-or-break moment for Court Street Church.

Go to your corners

The denominational leader reported he had stayed up all night after the horrific first meeting. He was sick over the way the council had so quickly reverted to unChrist-like ways. And he was glad the Peacemakers would have a representative on scene.

"When I arrived, it was obvious that battle lines were drawn; it was a very anxious time," Peacemakers' Gary Wright said. The meeting was moved to the sanctuary, and Wright spoke first. "I felt led to be very direct, and spoke about the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5, and about seeking God's will and not our own agendas." Everyone, including Cesar, was quiet.

The turning point

The vice-chairman of the council remembers a sense of conviction as each person seemed to be weighing his own responsibility in the troubles—not only the previous night's debacle, but over the past two years. "We had a time of prayer together, and the room was very quiet. The Holy Spirit was at work!" Wright said.

When the district leader reintroduced the housing package for the new pastor and explained it in greater detail, there was a calm discussion and finally, a reasonable conclusion.

The district head agreed to find other housing arrangements for the Jacksons. The council agreed to financial concessions to make that possible. And the Jacksons moved out to make room for the new pastor's family.

The church leaders look back at that night as a turning point. The peacemaking principles were applied specifically, and angry shouts gave way to listening.

Another significant shift began that night: the church moved from counting votes to seeking consensus. "When you vote, there are winners and losers, and it magnifies conflict," Haskell said. "But in consensus-building, we discuss a matter until the areas emerge where we are mostly all in agreement. If we forget sometimes and call for a show of hands, one of the council will speak up. 'We don't vote here, we reach consensus.' It started that night."
Over the next two years, the church developed its own peacemaking team, with Cesar and the council vice-chairman leading the way. "Cesar now understands what a forceful and dynamic person he is, that his energetic and passionate personality can change friendly discussion to argument, even if he doesn't intend it that way," Cornwell assessed. "Cesar, and all the leaders, learned new ways to talk—and to listen."

Court Street's peacemaking team has now, three years later, mediated conflicts within the congregation, including one involving the youth minister, who ultimately was released. They have welcomed former preschool director Margaret into a new leadership role. And now they are joining Cornwell, Wright, and Peacemaker Ministries in consultations with other troubled churches in their state.

Unfinished business

A year after his arrival, Pastor Haskell asked the leaders of Court Street to revisit the conflict that led to his arrival. "It's not finished," he told them, "if we have not truly been reconciled to the former pastors and to the leadership of our denomination."

He urged repentance as key to healing.

"But we didn't do a lot of the things we were accused of," one person objected.

"And," said another, "we have reached out to our former pastors, but we still don't have answers to our questions."

"Even so," Haskell replied, "we have things for which we can—and should—repent. We should respect our leaders even when we disagree or don't have all the information. We must respect their efforts for everyone—staff and denomination, too."

The church's peacemaking team planned a special service and invited both former pastors, the bishop, and the regional leader to attend. "We want to apologize to you and be reconciled with you and our denomination," they were told. The pastors did not attend, but the bishop and the district head did. As did more than one-third of the current membership and some former members who had fled the conflict.

It was obvious that battle lines were drawn. It was a very anxious meeting.

"I was concerned when Cesar got up to speak," admitted Pastor Haskell. "He's a forthright guy, and he told it like he remembered it—warts and all. But he also told how he has been changed into someone who appreciates peace and wants to represent Christ well in his relationships and in the work of our church."

Haskell "stood in the gap," as the vice-chairman described it, repenting on behalf of the congregation for their estrangement from the former pastors and from the denominational leaders. The bishop and supervisor apologized as well.

"We did not realize how severe the problem had become," one said. "If we had known, we would have acted much more quickly, and we would have told you much more about what was happening."

"Those apologies went a long way in helping us heal," said the vice-chairman.

In the end, as combative leaders made peace, attendance is growing again, and the spirit of the church is renewed, by all accounts. "I'm proud that our people have become a peace-oriented people," their pastor said. "At conferences and events, I have watched them reach out to the former pastor, to the bishop and others, and to former members."

In the end, the fireworks church has become the peacemaking church.

Eric Reed is Leadership's media editor.

When It's Going Downhill
Where are you headed on the slippery slope of conflict?

When someone offends us, we often react without thinking. Picture a hill with slopes on both sides. Conflict can cause us to slide down the slippery slope on either side, and things go from bad to worse.

At the top of the hill of conflict are the peacemaking responses: from overlooking the offense, to reconciliation, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and accountability. From this high ground, the slope drops off on both sides.

One side degenerates to escape responses, ways we remove ourselves from conflict.
1. Denial of the problem or denial that a solution is possible.
2. Flight from the problem, resulting in the end of friendships, divorce, or leaving a church.
3. Suicide, the ultimate flight mechanism, removes the person from the conflict permanently.

The other side of the slope leads to the attack responses, which seek to eliminate the other party in the conflict.
1. Assault may be verbal intimidation, including gossip and slander, damage to a person financially or professionally, or it may be physical violence.
2. Litigation may be required in some cases, but it often results in damaged relationships and reputations.
3. Murder results when someone is so desperate to win, they will go to any extreme. Murder may be literal, or it may be murder in the heart, which Jesus warns is just as serious as mortal wounds.

A true peacemaker is guided, motivated, and empowered by the gospel, the good news that God has forgiven all our sins and made peace with us through the death and resurrection of his Son (Col. 1:19-20). Through Christ he has also enabled us to break the habit of escaping from conflict or attacking others, and he has empowered us to become peacemakers who can promote genuine justice and reconciliation (Col. 3:12-14).

—from "Staying on Top of Conflict" at Peacemaker.net.

The Power of Public Confession

Planning a service of healing and reconciliation

"Why dredge up the past?" some people asked—a year after the issue seemed settled—when the idea of a special reconciliation service was first floated. "Isn't all that over and done with?"

No. It wasn't.

A year after the new pastor arrived on the scene, he could still feel the effects of the rift in his congregation. "We need to repent," he advised, "even if not everyone feels they did anything wrong."

Here's what he wanted to accomplish:

1. To celebrate what God had done in the peacemaking process:

"We planned celebrative music and interpretive dance to reveal our hope of being restored to God's joy. We planned testimonies of how peacemaking had impacted individuals' lives and the church as a whole. Having confessed our sin to God, we celebrated his forgiveness!"

2. To confess the church's corporate sin to the denominational leaders:
"We realized in the peacemaking process that we had sinned as a congregation not only against God but also against our leaders."

In preparation for the service, the church’s new peacemaking team and the church council were asked to guide the process. At first everyone seemed excited about what this could accomplish. But as they worked, some became fearful. Would the people come? Is the act of corporate confession even necessary? Will it serve only to open old wounds? By faith the church marched forward.

In the weeks prior to the service, the pastor preached on reconciliation. And there was much discussion about corporate sin.

"Our desire was to take responsibility for our contribution to the church's conflict," the pastor said. "As we discussed these things, the Holy Spirit confirmed that our sin was in dishonoring those in authority, including the bishop of our state conference, our local superintendent, and at least two previous pastors."

In the sermons, he taught that sin can open the door to the enemy, and that Christians close the door through confession and repentance.

He also answered two practical questions:

1. How do I honor those in authority when in disagreement with them?
2. What effect does it have on my confession when the person I'm in conflict with doesn't repent?

The pastor concluded, "We were committed to slamming the door on this pattern of sin through specific confession of our sin, with truly repentant hearts, to those against whom we had sinned."

—Paul Cornwell is a consultant with Peacemakers Ministries and is located in central Florida.

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