

First Thoughts



I am often asked what I believe to be the greatest threats to the Church, or the deceptions that we most need to be aware of in today's culture. If you asked that of a hundred people you would probably get a hundred different lists. However, I think there would be several common

threats, or deceptions found on all those lists. This month, I offer my "Top Ten List of Cultural Shifts/Deceptions"; not ranked in any particular order.

Let me know what you think of this list. I would particularly like to hear reader's thoughts on others you think should have been on the list. I'll compile your responses and report back to you.

Next issue we begin our series, "Honey, We Shrunk the Church", addressing the numerical decline being experienced by many churches and denominations in the last few years. We'll consider the reasons this might be occurring, what the numbers indicate about the future of the church, and (with your help) offer solutions.

I hope you will also share your thoughts on the relevance and the influence of the Church in today's culture, by participating in our poll at: www.crosswindsfoundation.blogspot.com.

Crosswinds continues to increase its ministry scope through our affiliated ministries. Be sure and read what God is doing through our teams in Thailand and Romania. As I reported last issue, our Romanian website is up and running and Dwight tells me the Crossties website is nearing its launch, as well.

In closing, let me share briefly with you about our newest ministry venture, Second Avenue Forums. Not long after moving into our current office on 2nd Avenue, we began a men's Bible study and named it the Second Avenue Men's Bible Study (okay, I admit it isn't very creative but there is no denying it describes the group). Shortly after this, we began another group, meeting in the evening, for men and women.

2ND AVENUE FORUMS

When Crosswinds began, Bible studies were not part of the vision; however, as these groups have continued to meet and grow, Bible studies seem to be a natural component of our mission and we have plans to grow these further. It seemed logical to group these under one area of ministry, thus, *2nd Avenue Forums*.

As we add conferences and faith-dialogues, these too will be under the 2nd Avenue Forums banner. More about this to come.

Finally, let me remind you that April marks the second anniversary of Crosswinds Foundation. We are so grateful to those of you who have prayed for us and made financial investments in this work. We have accomplished much in these past two years because of your support.

If you have appreciated this ministry and/or received some benefit from it, would you make a special anniversary gift to help us in the year ahead? Your consideration and support are most appreciated.

Blessings,

PS: Don't forget, you can now make your donations online at: crosswindsfoundation.org Just click on the "Donate" button.

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Top Ten Spiritual Truth-Shifts

By Bob Waldrep



Upon learning about Crosswinds Foundation and our mission, it is not unusual for someone to ask something along the lines of, "What do you think is the biggest cultural threat facing the church today or, what is the primary shift you see occurring in the culture?" The answer to this question is certainly important as it is a very good indicator of cultural issues we must be aware of and able to address, from a biblical worldview.

While everyone may not come up with the same answer for the number one threat, or biggest issue, I think there are several issues that would be common to most lists. Following are, in no particular order, ten cultural deceptions/shifts, that are prevalent in our society today; particularly, as relates to matters of faith.

1. God doesn't exist/isn't real/is dead.

Atheism, or the belief there is no God, continues to increase. A 2007 Gallup Poll found that 6% of Americans do not believe God exists and 8% are not sure if God exists. Similarly, a 2008 Pew Report found that 92% believe in God, with 71% admitting to being absolutely certain God exists.

Though small in number, those who do not believe have become increasingly aggressive and successful in promoting their views and agenda. This growing influence is due, in part, to their becoming better organized and marketed, and by utilizing the cultural platform given certain prominent atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, who have learned to mainstream their message through the media, public debates with Christians, and through the books they author, many of which are bestsellers.

2. There are many gods, or perhaps one God who expresses himself, or itself in many different forms.

The 2008 Pew Report found that, while 92% believe in God, 25% of this group also believes God is an impersonal force, or universal spirit; rather than a personal being as found in the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This belief in a universal spirit is more in line with the Hindu, or Eastern view of God and indicates the growing openness of Americans to ideas and beliefs promoted in eastern religions.

3. Many/all religions lead to eternal life, or to the same God - they just

have different understandings of who, or what, God is.

The increase of Americans accepting this view is quite amazing. The 2008 Pew Report found 70% of those polled believe many religions can lead to eternal life. Especially concerning is that, among those polled claiming to be Protestants, 66% agreed with this view. Among those attending Evangelical Churches, 57% agreed, and among Roman Catholics the number was 79%. Incredibly, among professing Christians, or those who identify themselves with the Christian Church, over 60% have embraced the idea that many religions can lead to God, or eternal life; thus, rendering the sacrifice of Christ as a needless act.

4. All religions, basically, teach the same truths, with a little variation.

Barna Research found that 44% of those polled believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truth. This statistic further shows Americans willingness to accept all religions as equal. Therefore, it is not important that one go to a particular religion for their "spiritual" and/or "moral" truth since all offer the same teachings.

**70% of Americans believe many religions can lead to eternal life—
66% of Protestants and 79% of Catholics, agree.**

What this statistic tells me is that 44% of the population has not read the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon. Had they done so, they would not believe they all contain the same spiritual truth. It also reveals a decreasing trust of the Bible as a source of authority and presents a corollary to this deception: The Bible is true, but no more so than the books of other religions. This is born out in the next deception.

5. The Bible is not God's word but just another book.

The 2007 Gallup Poll found that 21% of Americans now believe the Bible is comprised of fables and only 32% believe it is the actual Word of God. Similarly, a Barna poll in 2004 found that while nine out of ten Americans have a Bible, only 60% believe it is accurate in all the principles it

teaches (a 2008 poll by Barna revealed this number had dropped to 50%). While a majority of Americans still believe there is "truth" to be found in the Bible, most want to pick and choose which portions to accept.

6. Jesus was a great teacher or prophet, but he was not God in the flesh.

This is a fairly commonly held view due to the growth of other religions, (such as Islam which teaches Jesus was a prophet but not the son of God) and new spiritualities based on eastern religions (such as New Age proponents which typically hold to the view that Jesus was a great teacher, often called the "Way-shower") In fact, almost all religions and spiritualities accept that Jesus was a real person and was, at minimum, a religious leader; however only in Christianity is it taught he is God.

A 2008 American Religion Identification Survey found that, while 86% of American adults identified themselves as Christians in 1990, in 2008 that number had dropped to 76%. It is only natural that as the number of those identifying with the Christian faith declines, so will the number of those who believe Jesus is God.

One should also keep in mind that even among those identifying with the Christian faith there are adherents who do not hold to a biblical view of Jesus' identity. For example, in a 2006 poll, Barna found that 44% of Americans believe Jesus sinned while on earth. Naturally, if Jesus had sinned, he could not be God.

7. The universe and man came about through evolution.

That the world and all that is in it was created by God was once almost universally held by Western cultures. However, since the so-called "Scopes Monkey Trial" was decided in 1926, it has become an increasingly and hotly debated subject.

A 2007 Gallup Poll found that 18% of Americans believe evolution is true. An additional 35% believe it is probably true. This same poll found that 39% believe creationism is definitely true, with an additional 27% who believe it is probably true. This means Americans are almost evenly split on this topic with 53% willing to, at least, consider the possibility of evolution and 65% willing to consider the possibility of creationism.

8. When a person dies they come back again as another person, or thing, through reincarnation.



Several different polls consistently find that somewhere around 27% of Americans embrace a belief in reincarnation, a belief commonly found in eastern religions. This is not surprising considering 25% of the population has also embraced an eastern view of God as an impersonal force, or spirit. A Harris poll in 2003 revealed that, as alarming as this statistic is, more troubling is that this belief is held by 40% of millennials - those in the 25-29 year old age group.

9. Man can save himself, or participates in his salvation through good works.

A core belief of the Christian faith is that, apart from God, man is without hope. The gospel as handed down by Christ and the Apostles is that salvation is the gift of God and cannot be earned by works. Barna found that 55% of Americans believe a good person can earn a place in Heaven (a view held by 61% of teens). In fact, the poll found that only 28% believe it is impossible for someone to earn a place in heaven.

10. There are no absolute truths.

Perhaps this is the greatest of all lies as, once one embraces it, all the other deceptions become possible since it makes each person his own determiner of what is true and what is not. How prevalent is this belief in our society?

Based on the 2008 Pew Research Report

on Religion, it may not, at first blush, seem to be all that common. That polling found 79% of Americans believe there are clear and absolute moral standards. That sounds pretty good for the culture. However, when this number is broken down it is quite revealing as to where Americans find the basis for moral truth.

According to Pew's findings, when asked where they most look for guidance when it comes to questions of right and wrong; 29% of Americans said religious teachings and beliefs; 9% said philosophy and reason, and 5% said they turn to scientific information. Over half of those responding (52%) said they determine moral truth on the basis of practical experience and common sense; in other words—self.

This is similar to the findings of a 2009 Barna Report in which only 34% of adults believe moral truth is absolute and unaffected by circumstances. Like the Pew report, which found that only 41% of Protestants and 22% of Catholics said their primary influence is religious teachings and beliefs, Barna found only 46% of born-again adults said they believe in absolute moral truth. Shockingly, in 2002 Barna found that 75% of millennials and 83% of teenagers said that moral truth depends on circumstances.

Without question, the polls indicate it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the beliefs of those who claim to be Christian from those who do not. In fact,

a large segment of those claiming to be part of the Christian church no longer hold a biblical worldview. If the church is going to make a difference, we must be alert to these, often, subtle shifts in the culture and commit to hold fast to the teachings of Scripture.

There is only one God. He is real and personal; the creator of all that is (Gen 1). Salvation/eternal life comes only through Him, not through religion or good works (Col 1:15-23; Rom 3:28; Eph 2:8-10) and man gets only one life in which to make a decision to trust in Him, or not; "man is destined to die once and then comes judgment (Heb 9:27). Truth is absolute and is found in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God become man and identified himself as the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him (JN 14:6). This Jesus has been revealed in the Bible—the Word of God—which is trustworthy and reliable for instruction in right and wrong.

These truths we hold to as followers of Jesus Christ. Now, we must make certain that they are, not only held in our heart but, faithfully lived out in the marketplace of ideas.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Mail, or email, us your list of what you believe to be the top spiritual deceptions in today's culture. Even if it's the same as ours we would appreciate knowing what you think.

Email: info@crosswindsfoundation.org



Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



Following is the Statistical Data Found in the "Top Ten" Article

- 6% of Americans do not believe God exists and 8% are not sure if God exists. Only 71% admit to being absolutely certain God exists.
- 92% believe in God, 25% of this group also believes God is an impersonal force, or universal spirit; rather than a personal being.
- 70% believe many religions can lead to eternal life. 66% of Protestants, 57% of Evangelicals, and 79% of Roman Catholics agreed.
- 44% of those polled believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are different expressions of the same spiritual truth.
- 21% believe the Bible is comprised of fables; only 32% believe it is the actual Word of God.
- 86% of American adults identified themselves as Christians in 1990, that number had dropped to 76% in 2008.
- 44% of Americans believe Jesus sinned while on earth. Naturally, if Jesus had sinned, he could not be God.
- 18% of Americans believe evolution is true; 35% believe it is probably true.
- 39% believe creationism is definitely true; 27% believe it is probably true.
- 27% of Americans embrace a belief in reincarnation; 40% of millennials—those in the 25-29 year old age group.
- 55% (61% of teens) believe a good person can earn a place in Heaven. Only 28% believe it is impossible to earn a place in heaven.
- 79% of Americans believe there are clear and absolute moral standards. Concerning where they find moral guidance, 29% said religious teachings and beliefs; 9% said philosophy and reason, and 5% said they turn to scientific information. 52% said practical experience and common sense.
- 34% of adults believe moral truth is absolute and unaffected by circumstances.



Crosswinds Romania

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation



CrossTies Asia

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Nelu has been teaching two classes per week at the Bible College in Timisoara on the subject of Contemporary Errors. This is a very important topic for college students in Romania; particularly those who are preparing for ministry.



Nelu Filip

In between classes he was busy traveling, teaching in Austria April 23-25 and speaking at two Pastors Conference in Arad and Deva on the topic of, "Church Leadership: Between God's Will and Men Ambitions". During the month of May, he will lead this same conference in Caransebes and in Timisoara.



Ieremia Rusu

In addition to the seminary classes he teaches, and his regular speaking engagements in Romania, Ieremia was also quite busy traveling, making trips to Austria and Germany. In Austria, he led seminars on Christian Growth and Christian Education (primarily aimed at young families). In Germany his focus was on evangelism training.

Nelu and Ieremia are also busy working on additional content for the Crosswinds Romanian website as they are responsible for writing, or translating the material that is posted there.

If you have a question about Romania, or the ministry of Ieremia and Nelu, they would welcome your email. They can be reached at: leremia@crosswindsfoundation.org

Nelu@crosswindsfoundation.org

Visit our new website in the Romanian language:



Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture

P.O. Box 12143 Birmingham, AL 35202

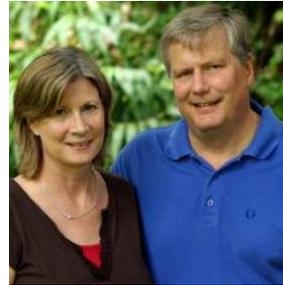
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Dwight and Mary Kay Martin

Five years ago we had no idea the impact technology could have in helping to spread the Gospel. Now we are in the middle of it all, providing technical solutions to help ministries to be more effective. A key tool we maintain is the Thai church database. Here are some ways it is being used to spread the Good News in Thailand.

Thailand Evangelism Committee (TEC)

This committee consists of the top Thai church leadership. Their Vision 2020 is to reach the whole country for Christ by planting a church in every sub-district. This is done by promoting church partnerships and providing tools, resources and encouragement to pastors. We help by providing the TEC with maps and data to help them make informed decisions.

Every Home for Christ Thailand (EHCT)

This ministry's goal is to distribute literature into two million homes per year over the next 10 years. Working with local churches EHCT provides the literature and leadership resources to help churches start daughter churches. We provide the names of churches, pastors, demographic data and maps which is used to develop a strategic plan to efficiently cover every home in Thailand.

My Hope Thailand

We have partnered with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association over the past 6 months by providing them database and call center services. We kept track of the churches and individuals involved with this project to make sure they had everything necessary. At end of the project we followed up with each church and learned that 12,000 people made a commitment to become a Christ follower.

My Hope Easter

Due to the success of My Hope Thailand, the Thai leaders decided to do My Hope Easter. This project ends next month and we are providing similar database and call center services.

Other organizations

We provide information to many mission organizations and missionaries who are looking for data to help them with their ministry projects. Using our maps and data, they can make strategic decisions in spreading the Gospel.

As you can see, we are being given the opportunity to work with Thai believers to have an influence throughout this country. Please pray for these ongoing opportunities.



In the News

We have added Religion News headlines to the home page of our website. Visit regularly for current news updates.

