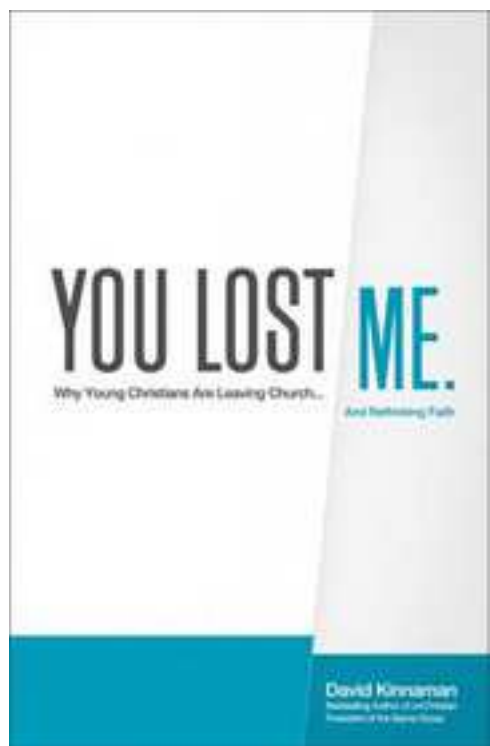


Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

February 9 2013: *You Lost Me*



I have just finished reading [You Lost Me](#) [1] (Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith) and a number of review and commentary sites. I'm not going to do a blow-by-blow recap of the book the way others, like [Sean McDowell](#) [2], a [young campus ministry leader](#) [3], another [50-year-old father](#) [4] with two young-adult daughters, and [others](#) [5].

It is enough for me to note, of the six general causes for the mass departure, one is *shallowness*, a derivative of *Biblical Illiteracy* that I have personally observed in spades, and the attendant *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*. With all the "we just need to work harder at doing what we already do" and the "we need to preach the Word better", here is a doctrinal failure, a teaching failure, a

methodological failure, a failure to be intentional about "making disciples" that can be laid directly at the feet of the contemporary Western church.

It is also arresting for me to see myself in the three groups he describes: The *Nomads* (those who have left the church but still consider themselves Christians, but in the vaguest of terms), the *Prodigals* (those who have both left the church and renounced Christian belief), and the *Exiles* (those who have retained an orthodox Christian faith but feel abandoned or cast adrift from the institutional church). By these terms, *I am an Exile!* However, the chapters describing the three groups that Kinnaman and his researchers identify from the data leaves me with a question: Given that the Nomads (especially) and the Prodigals (a smaller group) are the bulk of the large percentage of young people who hang up on the church, and given the weak claim to an orthodox Christian understanding by the Nomads and the explicit rejection of it by the Prodigals, how can we claim they were ever actually Christians in the first place? How did we harbor so many nonbelievers in our children's ministries and youth groups without recognizing them? How did so many parents miss the clues? And what does this *really* say about our institutional churches?

Part of the answer is apparently a wilfull blindness or denial. In the early chapters, Kinnaman states that there are "some faith leaders" who state that the detachment of young people is an old phenomenon, that as soon as the young people mature a bit, get married, and have children, they return to the church. I know Christian sociologist Rodney Stark takes this position. One of the review articles I found [makes the Stark/Kinnaman comparison explicit](#) [6]. Kinnaman presents the case for an unprecedented generational discontinuity involving *access* to vast realms of information via the Internet, *alienation* from the nuclear family and other institutional normalizing forces in society, and the rejection of *authority* driven in large measure by a media-cultural system that is overtly anti-Christian. The effects of these forces on the Mosaic generation, which we are already, undeniably seeing, is to prolong "adolescence" and postpone maturity and to delay or even eliminate marriage or often child-rearing. It seems foolish to think that "things will work like they always did before".

In a cursory search for Stark's position on "yough flight" and his evidence for it, I came across a [Wall Street Journal article](#) [7] by Stark and Byron Johnson taking the Barna Group to task for presenting a statistic on falling attendance numbers for women that conflicts with the results of an annual national survey. They mention the Barna "youth flight" position but do not deal with it directly, impugning with "guilt by association". Another blog article, an ["Open Letter to George Barna"](#) [8], takes a very emotional tone against George Barna's rejection of the contemporary institutional church and advocacy of house churches, suggests that Barna is manipulating statistical studies to support his viewpoint, and thus rejects anything he has to say. The comments to this article are a chorus of defense for the contemporary institutional church such as Luther and the Reformers may have heard.

Now, I have read Barna's *Revolution* (see my "thoughts" archive from 2008), so I am aware of Barna's anti-institutional viewpoint. However, David Kinnaman is not George Barna, and there is certainly no "abandon ship" recommendation in *You Lost Me*. Also, in the two Kinnaman books I have now read, in addition to the numbers, he includes an appendix on the study's methodology, so people who disagree with his conclusions can assess the study on its own merits. As it is, however, the evidence for greater than half the population of young people leaving the church has been established by other agencies. A former youth pastor who was also a homicide detective has [done some research](#) [9] and put together a list of resources indicating horrific numbers approaching 90% of young people - including the Ham/Beemer book *Already Gone*, the Assemblies of God, and the Southern Baptist Convention. Looks to me like it's real.

This is my root concern: *Even if it was not real*, does that justify a refusal to consider what we are doing as the church, whether it is actually effectual? From my perspective, the vast majority of the American church is satisfied with their traditional methods and shallow

teachings, *in the face of an unquestionable De-Christianization of the culture*. Currently, in the United States, in light of a recent massacre at an elementary school, the advocates of gun restriction declare that "even one child's life requires us to do something". In a similar mood, evangelicals often state, "if even one person is saved, it justifies all the expense". Well then, if even *one* of the anecdotes in Kinnaman's book represents a young soul lost by the church's Over-protectiveness, Shallowness, Anti-science (or more accurately, Anti-intellectualism), Repressiveness, Exclusiveness, and/or refusal to provide satisfactory answers to Doubts, then Something Must Be Done.

I note there is a [Christian private school](#) [10] out there that at least brought in a sociologist who presented the challenges of the Millennial generation and recognized the Kinnaman and Ham/Beemer contributions. This is the least thing that the church should do, to have an honest discussion of their cultural setting and the mindset of the next generation, and what to do about it. It is my experience that the churches I have visited or been a member of *refuse* to consider that there is any problem with how they have been doing things. If there is anything that drives me to the George Barna position of "the institutional church is incapable of reform", it is this sort of response.

.....

While I was poking around looking for stuff about the book and/or the subject, I came across this [interesting, long, and scholarly essay](#) [11] about how "post-modernism" was a brief concept between modernism and *neo-modernism* that is the real problem behind the attitude of the Mosaics and the exodus of young people from the church. Possibly. Certainly it is important for church pastors and elders to be wise men who *understand the times* and be current on such cultural trends, and incorporate appropriate strategies for young people and parents into the life of the church.

.....

1. youlostmebook.com
2. www.conversantlife.com/the-church/you-lost-me-why-young-christians-are-leaving-church
3. davehershey.wordpress.com/tag/you-lost-me
4. knowbedo.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/generation-gap
5. www.faithwebblog.com/2012/01/you-lost-me.html
6. m.crosswalk.com/church/youth-ministry/book-review-you-lost-me.html
7. online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903480904576510692691734916.html

8. teampyro.blogspot.com/2011/08/open-letter-to-george-barna.html

9. coldcasechristianity.com/2012/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity

Mr. Wallace is interesting in his own right, an atheist-turned-believer due to study of the evidence, rather like Lee Strobel

10. www.appletonchristianschool.org/2010/08

11. gospelbbq.wordpress.com/2012/02/18/neo-modernism-and-natural-theology

January 28 2013: Does the Universe Have a Mind?

While I was poking around for background on *Freud's Last Session*, I found a jumping-off C. S. Lewis site, www.cslewis.org [1], at which I learned to my amazement that there are two C. S. Lewis societies in Arizona, [The Aslan Society](#) [2] (for the faculty and staff of ASU) and [the Arizona C. S. Lewis Society](#) [3] (a general-interest society, unfortunately but unsurprisingly also located in Phoenix, and the website is mildly hacked to redirect to an ad site after a few moments). The latter contains a link to [the C. S. Lewis Society of Trinity College \(Florida\)](#) [4], which turns out to be a general apologetics site with a strong connection to C. S. Lewis and Intelligent Design (ID). Now, I'm not a real fan of ID; I think it is a great topic - researching the formal evidence of "design" and applying it to Origins Science - but the Intelligent Designer is often not the Biblical Creator who created in the six literal days of Genesis 1. That is, it is a hotbed of theistic evolutionism. However, on this site, I found a very interesting article - [Tom Woodward's review](#) [5] of Thomas Nagel's recent book *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*.



I think I like Dr. Nagel. While he is not a believer (I have seen him described variously as "atheist" and "anti-theist", whatever the distinction may be), he is very honest, critiquing the problems of Darwinism and the unprofessional and unscientific hostility that the establishment has toward, yes, Intelligent Design. It seems Dr. Nagel is a philosopher that specializes in consciousness and the study of the mind, and recognizes that the mechanistic model of reality used by the evolutionists is insufficient to explain either. Therefore, he proposes that reality includes a core and essential component of "Mind".

When I read this, I thought: "YES! Someone else, a professional philosopher, has [my apologetic](#) [6]!"

I have been thinking: Reality is either ultimately a machine or a Person. [I don't think this is a false dilemma; I think all potential other options boil down to one or the other.] But the position that Reality is ultimately a machine is inconsistent with our experience of abstracts like Love, Honor, Meaning and Purpose, and Morality (of the Absolute, rather than Relative or Subjective, type). We as minds are foundationally *information*, as is the DNA of all living things, and *information only originates with intelligence*. The conclusion is that Reality is ultimately Mind.

So it is gratifying that a famous and respected professional academic philosopher takes the same position. Well, almost. Somehow, Nagel, even though he asserts an ultimate Mind as at least part of Reality, is still an atheist. Somehow for him, this Mind is not Person, or at least is not ultimate and perhaps coexistent with the machine aspect (in which evolution can operate). I'm not sure what his position is; I'd have to read his book... and I've already got too much to read! It is enough to mark that, in our own experience of ourselves, Mind is always connected with Person. This is where I part company with Thomas Nagel.

If Reality is ultimately Person, then an attribute of Personality is Communication with other persons. The ultimate Mind or Person would certainly communicate with us lesser, finite, contingent persons. And the best candidate for that communication, as I conclude in my apologetic, is the Bible.

.

1. www.cslewis.org
 2. www.aslansociety.org
 3. www.azcslewissociety.org
 4. www.apologetics.org
 5. www.apologetics.org/MindAndCosmosReview/tabid/193/Default.aspx
 6. dlormand.us/why_christian2.html
-

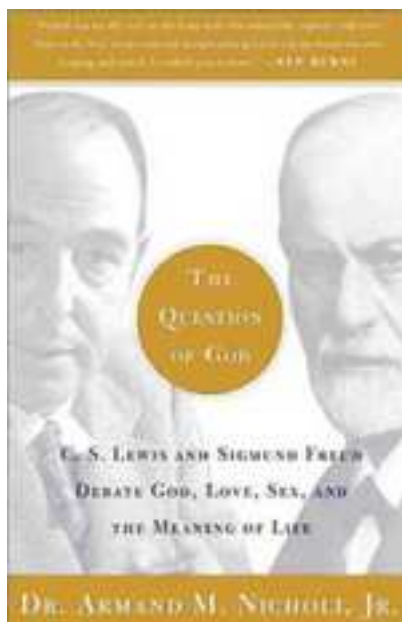
January 1 2013: Worldview on the Secular Stage

We went to see an interesting play last weekend: *Freud's Last Session*. The concept of the play is that Freud has gotten away from the Nazis and is in a house in England, and has invited C. S. Lewis to visit him - on the pretext of discussing something Lewis had written about the poet Milton, whom Freud appreciates. They are constantly turning on the radio to follow the monumental events of the day - Britain's entry into the war in response to the invasion of Poland. The visit quickly enters into a prolonged debate about religion and the existence of God and theodicy between the atheist Freud (whose office is cluttered with little statues of figures from the world's religions) and the Christian Lewis. Behind the dialog, and flavoring it, is the advanced state of Freud's jaw cancer, the pain he suffers from the poorly fitted prosthesis, and his unspoken plan to end his own life before the cancer does. There is a point at which Freud falls into a coughing fit, with (fake stage) blood gushing from his mouth onto the towels that a frantic Lewis brings, and Freud begs Lewis to remove the prosthesis, which he does - and the man with his hands covered with his opponent's blood, sympathizing with his suffering, speaks without words of the power of his religious convictions.



A fair, even favorable treatment of Christianity. Something you would expect from the Waypoint Theatre. But this was at the Temple of Music and Art, in the heart of downtown Tucson, by the [Arizona Theatre Company](#) [1]! The audience was certainly not older church people; they were the same clientele we've seen at other ATC plays. The play's author, [Mark St. Germain](#) [2], is a noted playwright and television scriptwriter, and nothing in his background suggests that he is a believer or at all religious. So how did he come to write a play that was popular enough on Broadway that it has toured as far as Tucson, and playing to an appreciative

audience?



Mr. St. Germain had found a book. *The Question of God: Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*, written by Harvard professor and clinical psychiatrist [Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr.](#) [3], who wrote the book to capture the essence of his wildly popular class. Of course, the playwright turned the scholarly book or class notes into dramatic narrative. Still, there is something about the concept of the atheist and the Christian having a friendly yet intense



dialog about this Very Important Subject that touched the playwright, and his audiences, and the Harvard students. I have read that perhaps the main attraction is that in this discussion, there is challenge, but *no attempt to convert*. If Dr. Nicholi is indeed a servant of Christ, his best work is done by putting the arguments out there on their own merits.

But wait, it gets better. How did St. Germain find this book?

I have a new hero - Eric Metaxas, writer and part of the legacy of Chuck Colson. He came up with an idea to reach his fellow Manhattanites - [Socrates in the City](#) [4]. On a regular basis, they obtain a large lecture hall (presumably neutral ground; not a church auditorium) and put a noteworthy speaker on the stage to address a topic that touches on faith. Most of the speakers are believers, and since [Dr. Nicholi](#) [5] was on that stage, this (and other hints) suggests that he is also a believer, but if so, he keeps it under wraps in his role as Harvard faculty, as he should. Metaxas relates [the account of the origin of the play](#) [6]: Mr. St. Germain attended the Socrates lecture by Nicholi, and was so inspired that he got the book and converted it into the Broadway hit play which we saw last weekend in Tucson.



Need I say that the principle behind *Socrates in the City* is no attempt to convert? The information is put out there, the power of the authority on stage, and people leave with whatever seed is planted without the threat of the evangelical "altar call" that would have turned them away in the first place. There may be a place for a call to commitment, but it is not in a Manhattan lecture hall. And it is not in the Temple of Music and Art on Scott Avenue in Tucson.

I understand that there was or will be a [PBS adaptation of *The Question of God*](#) [7]. Nicholi and St. Germain were careful to have Freud and Lewis speak for themselves; I'm not sure the writers at PBS (as hostile to Christianity as they seem to be) will abstain with monkeying with it (hopefully, Dr. Nicholi as the author has some oversight). Still, this is amazing that something like this that puts the argument for Christianity out there has gotten around so much. All because Lewis and Metaxas (and maybe Nicholi) worked out of their *Worldviews*.

.....

1. www.arizonatheatre.org/our-shows/freuds-last-session
2. markstgermain.com
3. www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/09.19/09-god.html
4. www.socratesinthecity.com
5. www.socratesinthecity.com/speakers/armand-nicholi
6. www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/19573
7. www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod