

Apologetics on University Campuses

It is no secret that there has occurred a large shift for modern people from an underlining assumption of Biblical theism toward acceptance of naturalistic narratives. We will examine the epistemology of scientism (the rule that all truth must be scientifically known.) We will also demonstrate how science and reason actually bring us to the reality of God.

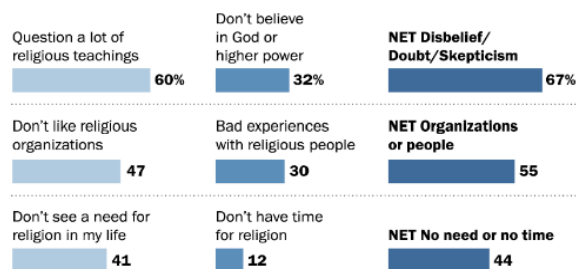
Over the last few decades, anthropologists and theologians have become aware that the modern person is more inclined to believe in a natural cause for everything than in a supernatural plan or design inherent in the universe in which we live. Statistics reveal the rapid decline of faith in North America.

Our daily news documents the resulting polarization tearing at the fabric of society. Even those today who profess to believe in God struggle, consciously or unconsciously, with the natural worldview, which has been inculcated in them since the beginning of their education and acculturation.

One does not have to work with students on any college campus for very long to realize that the secular worldview has tainted their perception of spiritual things. And those of us who have studied theology and philosophy and are strong Christians, struggle ourselves with the background noise of a secular mindset. I am a Christian Theist, so I acknowledge some confirmation bias. However, as a biology major in my 20s I came to question the main premises of macro evolution, not through any religious authority but simply by what is now called the irreducible complexity of genetics and biological systems. But the scientific establishment and the elites of our culture fight the overwhelming impression of design by sophisticated just so stories that have become accepted fact, leading people to the conclusion that “science has disproved God.”

Most ‘nones’ cite disbelief or skepticism as reasons they are not religious

% of religious “nones” who say each of the following is an extremely or very important reason for why they are nonreligious



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 31-Aug. 6, 2023.
 “Religious ‘Nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

An interview with a young man on NPR summed up this situation and illustrated for me the largest need on University Campuses. He stated, “I don’t [believe in God] but I really want to...I’m constantly struggling. But looking at the facts—evolution and science—they’re saying, no there is none.” (Simpson 2013)

In a 2019 Gallup poll to the question, *how important is religion in your life?* 25 percent answered, “not important.”

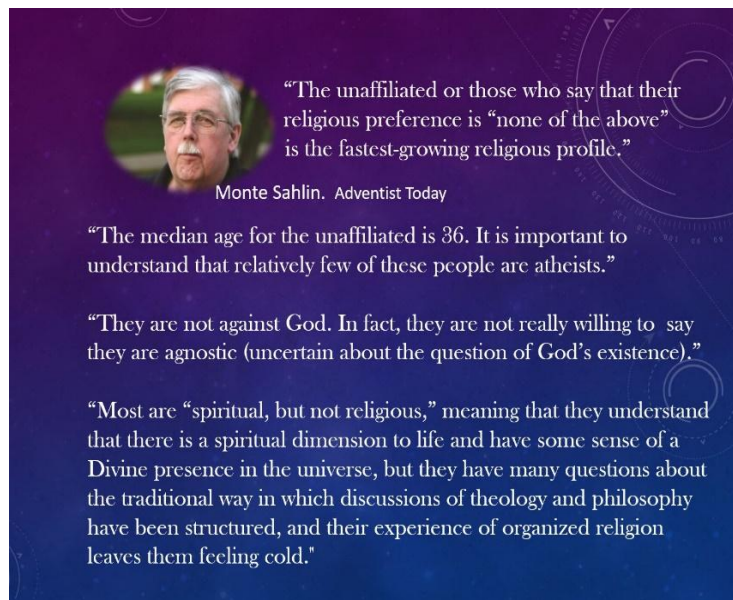
This is up from 12 percent in 2000. In the same poll, the number of those who said they had no faith has almost tripled. What is responsible for this cultural shift? One answer stated among various others is “Christians are out of step with the scientific world we live in!” This sentiment has been cited in much research. (Gallup, Inc. 2023)

“Scientism has become the worldview that guides the moral and spiritual values of an educated person Today.” (Williams and Robinson 2014) If true, then employing science as a basis for belief in God opens a backdoor into the thinking of many students who believe science has replaced God. In reality, science is providing a guide to see brilliant design in nature. Providing books and materials that empirically support belief is therefore a critical need at universities, which at times can be hostile to faith. Given the right resources and exposure to genuine apologetic reasoning and facts, a student’s faith can become even more confident in the secular environment. “Looked at in its entirety, the college experience may actually make students more sure of their religious beliefs after they graduate.” (Burge 2022)

Students can “become more prepared to defend those beliefs when they come under serious attacks. Similarly, challenging a young person to defend their beliefs in a supportive, open environment like college may leave them better prepared to hold firm to their convictions later in life.”

The good news is that the more science discovers about the cosmos and the cell (the universe and life on earth), the more empirically verifiable and self-confirming the reality of God becomes! This study will document that fact.

Apologetic approach to ministry (the argumentations, resources, and methods of delivery) on three campuses: North Dakota State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead, and the University of North Dakota.



Young adults are failing to find satisfying answers regarding their faith. Today, our youth are more likely to grow up in an environment in which faith in a Creator God is not discussed and often openly scorned.

The good news is that the Christian faith can be objectively demonstrated to be rational by real science and through the historicist study of prophecy. Many campus ministries focus very strongly on the social needs of young adults which are extremely important. The thesis here is that the intellectual challenges that students experience are as high a priority.

Individuals must be prepared to deal with the largest contributing factor to the decline of faith in western culture-godless material science. In our schools the scenario such as this I read of in the New York Times is often a reality. A student reported his teacher saying the following in class: “Every year around this time, with the college year starting, I give my students The Talk. It isn’t, as you might expect, about sex, but about evolution and religion, and how they get along. More to the point, how they don’t. The more we know of evolution, the more unavoidable is the conclusion that living things, including human beings, are produced by a natural, totally amoral process, with no indication of a benevolent, controlling creator.” (Barash 2018) We are told that 98 percent of scientists affirm this (Rainie 2020); they’d better!

Secular Evolution is the ruling human philosophy or religion in the West. The September 2020 copy of my New Scientist claimed that the, “theory of evolution is one of the greatest accomplishments of the human intellect. Some might argue that it is the greatest. [Though] under attack from creationism and its

pseudoscientific alter ego, intelligent design, evolution has won because it is true.” (Rainie, “AAAS Scientists Survey”) The subheading of this article states, “Evolutionary science is glorious.” As I read this to my students a young man exclaimed, “It sounds like a religion!” The effusive language betrays a species of nature worship with man as God. Secular humanism, however, is ironically anti-human as it relegates human beings to minor importance as *individuals*, “distant cousins of bananas and turnips.” (Dawkins 2020)

Human identity as a special creation, made in the image of a loving Creator is being lost culturally. As Monod quipped years ago, “The ancient covenant is in pieces; man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he emerged by chance. Neither his destiny nor his duty ha[s] been written down.” (Monod 1997)

The crisis of faith that many young adults experience at university is like the realizations that came to George Bernard Shaw (2020) who once quibbled, “Evolution seems simple, because you do not at first realize all that it involves. But when its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you. There is a hideous fatalism about it, a damnable reduction of beauty and intelligence, of strength and purpose, of honor and aspiration.”

Campus ministries' purpose is to be present at our universities and colleges with resources that speak truth. We are not talking about devotional books; we are talking about hard scientific research in genetics and life sciences, astronomy and cosmology, philosophy and prophecy. The purpose of these is to counter the narrative that there is no empirical evidence that God exists and or the Jesus Christ is the son of God.

Sadly, the reality of the supernatural is no longer the worldview of the academic culture; "Educated people" understand that everything is relative; one cannot trust anything and no solid reason to believe anything is the common assumption. "Your truth my truth." This is why many young people are simply opting to be "nones"! (Lipka 2015) We are all existentialists now; "condemned to be free" (Sartre 2021); that is, free to find purpose in a life without transcendent purpose. The result is the rise of mental illness young adults are experiencing Today.

Apologetics Ministry

Since science is the new scriptures, then opening science up and removing the materialism to let science speak, is a helpful way to approach opening secular minds. In truth the beginning of science was all about a "designed" universe; this

was the impetus that birthed science. As Loren Eiseley states, “it is the Christian world which finally gave birth in a clear, articulate fashion to the experimental method of science itself a created product of a transcendent Creator. Thus, the world is open to exploration and discovery.” (Mazlish 1972)

The “religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.” (Einstein 1973) In the modern era, Albert Einstein articulated it best: “The harmony of natural law reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.” (Kaiser 1997) This statement is the heart and soul of apologetics ministry. Explore science deeper and one will find God.

Young adults know enough about science to be dangerous, but not enough to protect themselves from secular misrepresentations. The German physicist Werner Heisenberg (one of the fathers of quantum mechanics) put it poignantly, “The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.” Original German translation: “Der erste Trunk aus dem Becher der Naturwissenschaft macht atheistisch, aber auf dem Grund des Bechers wartet Gott.” (Heisenberg 2007)

The word *Apologia* comes from Peter's first letter, where he enjoins that believers "must always be ready to give a ἀπολογία—a logical answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that is within them." (1 Pet. 3:15) In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul notes that part of the Gospel ministry is to address the attacks against faith: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obedience to Christ . . ." (2 Cor. 10:5). Paul made it a practice of going to where people were and reasoning with them about who Jesus is. He went to the Synagogue every Sabbath and "reasoned with them," mentioned in Acts 17:2, 17; Acts 18:4, 19, and Acts 19:8-9. The Synagogue, for the Jews, was the place for the discussion of truth. For the Greeks, it was the Agora (marketplace)! For our day, the university (and tic toc) are the marketplaces of ideas where people are and where we must set up shop.

Inoculation against the materialist contagion is as simple as looking at all the evidence! Apologetic ministry attempts to give students a shot of *all* the facts. Looking deeper into it, into the known facts about the amazing sophistication and irreducible complexity of genetics and living systems, one must say, "fearfully and wonderfully made!" Sharing the facts for the evidence of God is spiritually enriching for those trained to share it and for those who receive it! "He that waters waters also himself." (Prov. 11:25 KJV)

I will close with an example of what confused reasoning and snobbish engagement students often receive when asking questions about science and wanting to go deeper. When I first became a chaplain at North Dakota State University I was attending with a group of professors and students at a Free Thinkers Forum on campus and shared my perspective after a bashing on creationists. I brought up a few points on questions and mentioned Intelligent Design to eye rolls and groans, when a Psychology professor chimed in to explain that I obviously was subject to “evolutionary conditioning” myself. Apparently, I had a “design detection hyper circuit problem.” The good professor explained to me that seeing design in many cases (my case) is a by-product of evolutionary development (Dawkins 2006), which might have served a useful purpose at one time (Boyer 1994), but now could not be trusted. “Pattern recognition, you see, he went on, “was especially important to our survival in the bush. ‘Is that a lion in the trees over there or is it a termite hill?’ It’s important to know. So, Darrel, it is not your fault you think you see ‘design’ in nature; you are over-sensitized by selection to see patterns in things, but we are not living in the bush anymore.” Translation: Grow up! Evolve dude! “We must beware of our tendency to see ‘design’, or it might trick us.”

This was his actual argument to which half the room nodded in profound agreement. My attempt to go deeper with my friend’s own assumptions failed. My

colleague was assuming that we could trust our minds when seeing evolution in a mindless evolution, but we could not trust our minds when seeing designed engineering and purpose. Of course, this can only be true if one assumes the truth of mindless evolution, which cannot objectively know because as atheist Steve Pinker states, "Our brains are shaped for fitness, not for truth." (Pinker 2009).

The question is then why is my "design detector" trustworthy when I see a mind (a designer) behind the code running my computer, but not working when I see design in the more advanced code running in the nucleus of every cell in my body? Secular science renders one's perceptions *untrustworthy* when seeing intelligent design in nature but functioning fine when weaving stories of evolutionary development for the public? *Untrustworthy* when holding theistic religious beliefs because they "arise from our bias toward imputing agency," but *trustworthy* in attributing agency to chance and natural selection? No! At the bottom of the cup, we must come to a basis for rationality in mind itself! "Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so, I can never use thought to disbelieve in God." (Lewis 1946)

Secular thinking often gets stuck in looking at effects as causes --"secondary causes" as Bacon characterized them; but the goal is to move deeper to primary truths that must be true! "For while the mind of men looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them and goes no further; but when it beholdeth

the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must need fly to providence and Deity.” (Bacon 2018) Francis Bacon founder of the scientific method!

Thinking individuals, especially young people are not satisfied to “rest in second causes;” They want to go “further” and deeper. The questions we hear normally have three themes:

1. What evidence is there for God?
2. What about evil in the world?
3. How do we know the Christian God is God?

1. Briefly, our answers on evidence are:

A: The Cosmological evidence of the origin and fine-tuning of the universe.

- Everything that begins to exist must have a cause outside of itself.
- The universe [matter, space, time] began to exist.
- Therefore, the cause of the universe must be non-material, non-spatial and atemporal -outside of time, in other words - God.

B: The Design evidence from the exquisite information systems of life.

- The digital language housed in quaternary code in genomes that produce life and direct its adaptation are prima facie evidence of a brilliant transcendent mind—God.
- The incredibly fine-tuned parameters of physics that allow not only the universe to exist but exist in a highly balanced state of conditions that life may exist on our planet.

2. Our answer on evil is:

- The question of evil presupposes a good, and the good presupposes God. This is a conversation that is more philosophical than the empirical evidence of the former question, to answers to which however are just as solid.

Evil is the shadow that proves the light!

3. Our answers on why the Christian God is God:

- The answer is from God's self-revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. Through exposing and opening oneself to Christ's message in the Gospels one may feel the power and the attraction of Christ on the human heart.
- By the genuine goodness and purity of love coming from Christ followers toward others (Willard 2015) one is drawn to the reality of Jesus—fellowship with Christian Youth.
- The above two are subjective but no less powerful, however as Seventh-day Adventist we have an edge in answering this question by the study of prophecy and its comparison with the study of history elucidating the remarkable fulfillments of God's word.

These are the subjects and the conversations that our campus ministry young people are training to have with students on campuses. The books we give to students are resource materials substantiating these answers to questions and is evangelistic toward others and pedagogical for our student leaders in ministry by showing God to be relevant and reasonable to people who have faith, to those who lost faith and to whom faith has been denied by secular indoctrination or neglect.

A partial list of the free books we give to students at the Apologetics Table

I don't have enough faith to be an atheist – Frank Turk

Creation and Evolution -Dwight K. Nelson

The Reason for God – Timothy Keller

Star Struck – Dr. David Bradstreet

Man Myth Messiah – Rice Brooke

Is God a moral monster? – Paul Copan

Mere Christianity – C.S. Lewis

Beyond Imagination – Baldwin . Gibson . Thomas

Bible Readings. questions answered – Happiness Digest

Darwins Black Box – Michael Behe

Why the Universe – Hugh Ross

Seeking Allah Finding Jesus – Nabeel Qureshi

Icons of Evolution – Jonathan Wells

God's Crime Scene – J. Warner Wallace

The Mystery of Death – John Bradshaw

Darwin Devolves – Michael Behe

Live Not By Lies – Rod Dreher

Beyond Coincidence – Dr. Chuck Missler