

APATHEISM: ENGAGING THE WESTERN PANTHEON OF
SPIRITUAL INDIFFERENCE

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Introduction

A few years ago, while living in Cambridge, England, I made a habit of meandering through the narrow, winding streets of the revered university town to soak in its rich heritage and architecture. On one such occasion, passing through the Market Square, I took notice of a Muslim missionary passing out some material. Most of his pamphlets made it into the hands of passers-by, but quickly ended their journey in the trash bin. Week after week, I watched the dejected man try in vain to spark any meaningful conversation about spirituality. After a few months, on one particularly soggy afternoon, I felt compelled to buy him a cup of coffee. I offered him the drink, to which he happily accepted. He asked me why he had received my kindness. I replied that Jesus would have done the same thing. “So, you’re a Christian?” he asked. I confirmed his suspicion. “Well, then, you know my pain,” he replied. Not believing that we had much in common when it came to converting people to Islam, I was a bit confused by his response. I asked him what he meant. “These people,” he said with a sigh, “they care nothing of God or spirituality. They are spiritually apathetic, totally indifferent to the biggest questions of life. They simply do not care. How can that be?”

He was right; I had experienced the same thing. Just a month earlier, after at a public lecture, I was privy to a conversation in which a respected historian flippantly dismissed another lecturer’s talk on soteriology by calling it “whatever magical nonsense the Christians want to call it.” At a popular café, I once overheard a conversation between two students discussing the utter uselessness of theology, a mere psychological crutch that helped their grandparents through the war. At a book release, an author explained his unwillingness to investigate the theological implications of his work because it would “only be interesting to a few Americans,” which I

assumed was a job at the number of people in the United States who would find theology interesting.

Back in the Market Square, standing next to the Muslim missionary on that soggy afternoon, I came to the realization that spiritual indifference was not simply an isolated phenomenon in the lives of a few individuals. It was permeating an entire culture. Naturally, this is not to say that *all* Britons had abandoned their faith and cared nothing for their religious heritage. After all, for three years I participated in a local congregation that exuded all the dedication and passion one would expect from a vibrant Christian community. What I could not deny, however, was the ubiquity of spiritual aloofness. This apathetic attitude is not merely isolated to Great Britain. Upon my return to the United States, I found a similar indifference to spiritual matters, especially among my fellow Millennials (ages 18-33). Many people have cast aside theism and exchanged it not with the opposite worldview, atheism, but something far worse: *apatheism*.

What is Apatheism?

In his 2003 article “Let it Be” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, journalist Jonathan Rauch, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, offered a brilliantly pithy definition of apatheism as “a disinclination to care all that much about one’s own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people’s [religion] (Rauch 2003, 34).” Rauch described precisely the cold, spiritual apathy I had experienced in Cambridge and among my fellow Millennials in the United States. More concisely, *apatheism*, a portmanteau of *apathy* and *theism*, may be defined as the lack of reason, motivation, or will to express interest in theism.

This definition attempts to answer both the *what* and *why* questions of atheism while distinguishing it from agnosticism. Other definitions satisfy the *what* question, i.e. Trevor Hedberg & Jordan Huzarevich's (2016, 1) helpful description of atheism as "a general attitude of apathy or indifference regarding how we answer [existential questions]." Yet, this definition does not address the *why* question of atheism, i.e., why does such an attitude of apathy or indifference exist within a person? Others see atheism as a mere subset of agnosticism, i.e., George I. Mavrodes's (2005, 64) description of agnosticism as the claim that "no one ought to have a positive belief for or against the divine existence." However, agnosticism merely claims that belief in God is ultimately unknowable—thus, *a-gnostos*, or "not known"—without speaking to the usefulness of postulating God's existence or nonexistence.

British biologist Thomas Huxley (1825–95) coined the term *agnostic* to distinguish himself from those who believed they had "solved the problem of existence" through attaining a certain knowledge, or *gnosis*, of God (1910, 93). Huxley, however, neither denied nor affirmed the immortality of man and, by extension, the theistic system that immortality implies. His belief that the problem of existence was "insoluble" led to his self-description as an agnostic, but it did not lead him to express apathy toward the question of theism (1910, 93). Thus, agnosticism maintains that it is impossible to know presently whether or not God exists while atheism is the emotional and psychological response of apathy that results from agnosticism.

The progenitor of atheism, *practical atheism*, has long accompanied humanity. The Psalms bemoan people—*foolish* people—who suppress their belief in God's existence to indulge in moral corruption (Pss 14:1; 53:1). These "fools" never intellectually rejected God's existence, but habitually denied his input for moral decision-making. Paradoxically, they believed in God while craving his nonexistence. Later in the West, the Enlightenment experienced practical

atheism as the outcome of a deistic theological system. In deism, where God allows his creation to self-govern and never imposes his will upon it, any ethical code must be derived from reason, not sacred revelation. Consequently, in general, Enlightenment-era practical atheism acknowledged God's existence while rejecting his ethic on the grounds of rationalism. Thus, practical atheism, unlike apatheism, has always recognized the importance of God's existence. It is *practical* atheism, not *actual* atheism (or more properly *theoretical* atheism). Practical atheists care about religion, but not enough to allow it the duty of guiding their morality. Instead, they intellectually suppress the truth about God's character to ease their guilt and nullify any moral obligation to him. Nevertheless, the Enlightenment marked a time when practical atheism took a step toward apatheism, the character of which is perhaps best summarized by French philosopher Denis Diderot's famous quip, "It is very important not to mistake hemlock for parsley, but to believe or not believe in God is not important at all" (Buckley 1987, 225).¹

It would not be until the turn of the millennium that true apatheism fully introduced itself to North America. It is likely that, among other reasons, 9/11 was a catalyst for spiritual apathy as a viable religious choice. If the terrorists cared too much for religion, which resulted in the death of thousands of victims, then apatheism would care too little for religion to prevent such an atrocious attack in the future. Rauch (2003, 34), in a bid to convert his readers to apatheism, pointed to 9/11 as evidence that religion is the most "divisive and volatile of social forces." To protect our culture against religious extremism, it must care for religion in the exact opposite direction. It must adopt apatheism as its worldview; a laudable social construct that will protect our culture against future religious extremism. So Rauch (2003, 34),

¹Such disregard for theism would later evolve into *ignosticism*—a failure to place any value on the question of God's existence—which lays at the philosophical foundation of apatheism.

Apatheism, therefore, should not be assumed to represent a lazy recumbency, like my collapse into a soft chair after a long day. Just the opposite: it is the product of a determined cultural effort to discipline the religious mindset, and often of an equally determined personal effort to master the spiritual passions. It is not a lapse. It is an achievement.

This social “achievement” manifests itself in the passionless, detached “meh” that a high school youth mumbles after being asked about her spiritual life. It is present in the option “None” that young adults are circling more frequently on surveys about religious identity. Apatheism is the paradoxical nonchalance that accompanies many people on the most important issue of their existence.

Apatheists, like atheists, deny the gospel; however, unlike atheists, apatheists lack the reason, motivation, or will to spark a conversation about spirituality in the first place. At a minimum, atheism (and agnosticism for that matter) share a mutual interest with theism—the philosophical question over God’s existence—that acts as a platform for talking about spirituality. In fact, the primary philosophical commonality between a theist, agnostic, and atheist is their shared concern for religion and interest in God. The apatheist, though, finds no value in such concern or interest, thus denying Christians access to common ground upon which they might build a case for the gospel. This is the reason why I have suggested that apatheism is far worse than atheism. Furthermore, apatheism obviously presents a challenge to the mission of the local church.

The Challenge of Apatheism to the Local Church

The opening remarks of Paul’s gospel presentation at the Areopagus—the speech so often utilized by church leaders to motivate Christians to engage culture—presupposes a minimally common interest in theism. Addressing the “men of Athens,” Paul shrewdly leveraged their mutually shared belief in the existence of the divine to present the gospel by pointing to the

Athenian statue to the unknown god as evidence for their foundational conviction of God’s existence (Acts 17:22). Today, this famous Acts 17 sermon is popularly cited as a model for contextualizing the gospel in the modern world.² Yet, citing Paul’s Areopagus discourse overlooks an obvious difference between first and twenty-first-century Western cultures. While (presumably) most ancient Athenians were theists and expressed interest in religious matters, many modern Westerners—especially Millennials—are beginning to reject theism for spiritual apathy. Indeed, in certain contexts, many local churches now find themselves in an Athens without a statue to the unknown god.

This is especially true of the American context where, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center poll, the growth of religiously unaffiliated U.S. adults—or “Nones,”³ under which a portion of apatheism falls—increased from 16.1% to 22.8% between 2007–14 (Pew 2015, 4, 10). The increase of Nones, which includes apatheists, constituted the fastest-growing religious identity during the same period. Millennials represent 70% of all Nones (Pew 2015, 11), and, as sociologist Vern Bengtson lamented, their “none-ism” is notoriously difficult to

²For example, see Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul’s Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014). Daniel Strange called the speech “subversive fulfillment par excellence” and an “exemplar of the apostolic preaching to pagans” in his *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 286. K. Scott Oliphint described Paul’s address as an “instructive” model for evangelism in his *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 229. A popular apologetics-based study Bible commented on the Areopagus sermon in favorable terms, opining that Paul spoke “in terms understandable to Athenians” (Ted Cabal et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible* [Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007], 1653). A notable exception is F. F. Bruce, who observed that while Paul had enjoyed several years as a “successful evangelist in the pagan world,” he nevertheless fell into a “mood of dejection” after his *Aeropagitica* received “outright ridicule and polite dismissal.” See F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 244–48.

³The term “Nones,” not to be confused with monastic order nuns, describes religiously unaffiliated people who select “none” for their religious preference on polls and data collection. These include, but are not limited to: atheists, agnostics, apatheists, “spiritual” but not religious, and actively religious people who shy away from religious labels.

describe coherently (Bengtson, Putney, and Harris 2013, 46).⁴ Consequently, it must be noted that the percentage of religiously affiliated U.S. adults (22.8%) does not represent the nation's total population of apatheists. In fact, there are many Nones that care very much about religion, e.g., New Atheists, agnostics who study religion, and the “spiritual” but not religious. Speaking of the New Atheist movement, Bengtson rightly observed that “while some nones may simply be passively indifferent to religion, others are actively engaged against it, perhaps intensely so” (Bengtson, Putney, and Harris 2013, 146). These “intensely” active Nones who are opposed to religion are commonly—and very often pejoratively—referred to as *militant atheists*, and lay at the complete opposite spectrum of secularism from apatheists. This observation alone is enough to explain why the Bengtson lamented the heterogeneous “none” category as notoriously difficult to define. Sociologist William Bainbridge also recognized this problem when he noted that while some Nones may be atheists who hesitate to don the label for fear of reprisal from the religious community, and while other Nones may be agnostics who merely misunderstand what the term means, some Nones “may simply be uninterested in religion, having no opinions about it” (Bainbridge 2009, 320). These “uninterested” Nones are generally apatheistic.

Additionally, people can (and often do) evolve from one type of None to another without ever leaving the category, i.e., an agnostic who later self-describes as an atheist and later still may lose interest altogether, becoming an apatheist. All three sub-categories of “none”—atheist, agnostic, and apatheist—are fluid, and Nones may drift in and out of them throughout

⁴According to the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG), 22% of Millennials self-identify as “not at all religious”—more than any other cohort in the seven-generation study—while an additional 33% reported they are “not very religious (45).” Only 16% thought of themselves as “very religious (45).” These numbers paint a picture of the Millennial generation as “far less coherent” than any previous generation while simultaneously “espousing a much wider range of religious perspectives than their predecessors (46).” Perhaps this is due, at least in part, to an undercurrent of apathy: regardless of a religious opinion one way or another, does it ultimately matter what one believes or whether one believes at all?

their life. To further add to this confusion, some people that self-identify as religiously affiliated may, in all actuality, exhibit apatheistic traits. These Nones associate themselves with a religion via non-religious motivations, e.g., personal, familial, cultural, or ethnic reasons. Certainly, the latter is the case with Rauch, who self-identified as both an apatheist and an “unrepentantly atheistic Jewish homosexual” (Rauch, 34). So, while the exact number of apatheists is unknown, the recent jump in the number of Nones, whatever they may be, nevertheless indicates that apatheism is growing.

This presents an emerging and unique challenge to the local church in North America; a challenge that may not be receiving adequate development and implementation of strategic responses at a lay level. Under the umbrella of secularism, we tend only to think in terms of atheism and agnosticism, both of which typically provide an audience that is interested in religion. Apatheism, while closely related to both atheism and agnosticism, does not care to join the conversation. Secularism is a “Triple-A” worldview of atheism, agnosticism, and apatheism. Our missiological strategies toward secularism and the Nones must include all three.

The Pantheon of Apatheism

Carrying on the theme of Paul’s Areopagus sermon amid the Greek deities, we must first recognize that the West has added new gods to its pantheon. Unlike the gods of old, these new gods demand no attention and require no consideration. In fact, they would prefer you not care for them at all. They are the Pantheon of Spiritual Indifference, the polytheistic representation of apatheism, and of the numerous deities represented in the apatheistic pantheon, we will explore three in particular: *Inratio* (the apatheistic god of a lack of *reason* to believe), *Incausam* (the apatheistic god of a lack of *motivation* to believe), and *Involuntas* (the apatheistic god of a lack of *will* to believe).

Inratio: The Lack of Reason to Care

Inratio, Latin for *no reason*, is the patron god of those who express spiritual apathy due to their lack of *reason* to care. Often, their apathy toward religion is fueled by confidence in secularism, which is the great success that the New Atheist movement has enjoyed in the post-9/11 milieu of skepticism toward religious belief. In the existential vacuum created by Salafi jihadism, New Atheism quickly rallied to offer the alternative to the *something* people were looking for—*nothing* at all. Yet, unlike the hot-blooded, pugnacious attitudes that so often accompany New Atheist approaches to interreligious dialogue, worshipers of Inratio are completely indifferent and aloof to religion. In stark contrast to their atheistic kin, Inratio worshipers happily spend American currency without giving thought or care to the contested phrase “In God We Trust” that greets them each time they open their wallets. They could care less when politicians ask God to bless the nation or when celebrities thank him in their pursuit of accolades. It does not matter if someone believes or disbelieves. What matters is that *it does not matter*.

For these apatheists, Christianity is not something to be rationally considered because, at least externally, Inratio worshipers are completely satisfied with the secular worldview that their god represents. Secularism is unassailable, verified by science, and bolstered by all the scientists and philosophers they most respect. Their worldview has been baptized in the waters of what German philosopher Max Weber (1864-1920) called *entzauberung* (“demagification”), which has enabled them to trade superstition and mysticism for science and rationality as tools for understanding the world around them. Perhaps they have never even considered an alternative, rival worldview, but neither do they believe their worldview is susceptible to critique. Secularism simply *is* the way things are. There is no more reason to justify logically the

fundamental truth-claims of secularism as there is to justify logically why one plus one equals two. Secularism is the ironclad worldview that every human is born into, only to have the various forms of theism added later through tradition, childrearing, or spiritual exploration and study.

Religion is seen as a crutch, a handy psychological tool that previous generations utilized to make sense of the world around them. However, given scientific advances, religion has exhausted its usefulness and is no longer needed. In fact, having no reason to desire a religious affiliation communicates confidence in this fact. If religion is a crutch, then only the weak need it. Inratio worshipers are strong, having cast aside the crutch, and are stronger than their atheist and agnostic kin who still feel the need to continue talking about the crutch. In a culture that rewards the confident and punishes the humble, there is a sociological incentive to distance oneself from religion. Our culture values Nietzschean individualism—where the self is the sole motivating power—as the peak of human prowess to boldly navigate the intimidating waters of existentialism. Thus, worshipers of Inratio are completely satisfied with secularism and have no reason to care about religion. They certainly lack both the motivation and will to care as well. Additionally, they view their atheistic and agnostic kin who participate in religious discussion as simply wasting their time.

Incausam: The Lack of Motivation to Care

Incausam, Latin for *no motivation*, is the patron god of those who express spiritual apathy due to their lack of *motivation* to care. Often, their spiritual apathy is fueled by impatience. This is not necessarily a unique problem to any specific generation; yet, because of advances in technology, Millennials are particularly prone to impatience. As digital natives, they were born into a world where many tasks are accomplished instantly, requiring only a little amount patience and effort. Unlike generations before them, where hours in a library might be

required to find the answer to a difficult question, today a simple search engine query for any topic, including religion, will yield the same result in seconds. This trend is only moving toward faster and easier access to information.

Consequently, religion seems like an outdated and tedious medium for answering existential questions. Most religions have sacred texts that, at best, are centuries old and require the reader to have at least some kind of historical framework to understand them. Furthermore, the texts are typically much larger portions of information than Millennials are used to consuming. If an idea cannot be communicated in a 250-character microblog post or in a fifteen second GIF or five-celled comic meme, then it will likely not receive an immediate audience among Millennials. This is especially true of Christianity and the way the faith is presented. Regardless of the simplicity of the gospel, the message itself is often shared in a manner that assumes the hearer knows what it means to be “born again” for the “justification” of their “sins.” It takes time to understand these terms, the gravity of their reality, and the character of their messenger. If time is a commodity in the modern world, then its cost might be too high for some individuals to invest in spiritual matters. Thus, some worshipers of Incausam lack the motivation to care about spirituality due to the perceived sacrifice of time and effort required to understand a worldview other than their own.

Involuntas: The Lack of Will to Care

Involuntas, Latin for *no will*, is the patron god of those who express spiritual apathy due to their lack of *will* to care. Often, their spiritual apathy is caused by a fear of what they may uncover if they were ever to step outside the boundaries of secularism. They were perhaps raised in a religious environment only to throw it off later in life for one reason or another, e.g., rational, emotional, or moral reasons. Simply because they are now secular does not mean they

have no reason or motivation to exhibit interest in religion. Quite the contrary, perhaps they have felt the desire to explore beyond the boundaries of secularism after noticing inconsistencies or shortcomings in their non-theistic worldview. Yet, because adopting a religious worldview—especially Christianity—forces the individual to change at a fundamental level, they are unwilling to yield to their desire of exploring spirituality. They do not want to learn because they are afraid of what they will find. So, they remain indifferent to religion as a self-defense mechanism to protect their autonomy.

Arguably, worship of Involuntas is merely an evolved form of practical atheism from generations past. However, whereas practical atheism recognized the importance of religion without *wanting* to acknowledge that fact, worshipers of Involuntas *do not* recognize the importance of religion and, likewise, do not *want* to acknowledge that religion may have importance. Previously, in a world without widespread secularism, the practical atheist practiced his autonomy within the confines of Christianity or deism. Today, because secularism has grown in popularity, an Involuntas worshiper may practice his autonomy outside the confines of any theistic belief whatsoever. Any intrusion of religion into his worldview constitutes a threat to the moral and ethical autonomy that secularism offers him. Thus, worshipers of Involuntas choose to remain in secularism by denying themselves the *will* to leave non-theism despite any real *reason* or *motivation* to explore theism.

Engaging the Western Pantheon of Spiritual Indifference

As it has been briefly demonstrated, apatheism manifests itself in various forms, whether it be a lack of reason, motivation, or willingness to care about religion. How should the local church engage apatheists? Let us assume that common, fundamental Christian practices for evangelism are included in any missiological strategy regardless of the worldview being

engaged. Having established the fundamentals, we must then recognize that the challenge in engaging atheism is not intellectual or philosophical, but emotional and psychological. For the more apologetically-minded Christian, the desire to engage atheism may manifest itself in the temptation to create compelling arguments to shock the atheist out of their detached, blasé daze. This will likely not work for the simple reason that religious, intellectual propositions are meaningless to a person who does not care about religious, intellectual propositions. Regardless of the persuasiveness and clarity of the apologist's argument, it will fall on deaf ears. Apologetics must play an ancillary, albeit important, role when engaging atheism.

Relatedly, as previously argued, we must recognize that we do not have common ground concerning the atheist's *interest* in theism, let alone *theism* in general. If we do not even have the common ground of interest in theism, then we must find other common ground deep in universal commonalities that all humans share. As beings created in the image of God, certain elements of the human experience space across time, culture, and worldviews. It is here in the *imago dei* where we may find a platform from which to jolt an atheist out of their indifference. While this paper does not claim to have the final authoritative answer—since I believe a multi-faceted approach is in order—it will offer one suggestion. A good strategy for engaging atheists is to leverage the untapped universal resource of human curiosity.

As evangelicals, we seem to have an underdeveloped theology of curiosity even though we are inherently familiar with its power to capture attention and carry us to the conclusion of exploration, discovery, or learning. For example, a preacher relies on human curiosity to hold his audience's attention until the conclusion of his sermon. A theology professor will employ curiosity to spark genuine interest of a topic in her students. The Bible itself is organized in a metanarrative that entices human curiosity to hear the story out from beginning to

end. Writing on mythopoeia, of which curiosity plays an important role, C. S. Lewis (1960, xxvii–xxviii) observed that;

It arouses in us sensations we have never had before, never anticipated having, as though we had broken out of our normal mode of consciousness and ‘possessed joys not promised to our birth.’ It gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives.

Narrative stokes our curiosities, it guides and shapes them, all the while bidding us toward the exploration of things about which we never previously considered or cared.

This is because we were designed with an instinctual drive to know what is around the corner, what is hidden under the rock, and how the story ends. Of course, curiosity, if taken too far, can be dangerous. Yet, according to scripture, the motivation to curiously pursue truth can be a commendable exercise. Remember Luke’s laudatory tone when speaking of the Bereans’ insatiable appetite for fact-checking the apostles (Acts 17:11). Proverbs 25:2-3 states that it is the glory of kings to search out the things hidden by God. Paul himself takes advantage of the Athenians’ curiosity by answering the long-standing question over the divine identity behind the statue to the unknown god. Curiosity, then, is a universally-experienced element within the human experience and could be leveraged for the sake of sharing the gospel to apatheists. Let us consider possible strategies for each of the three apatheistic gods previously discussed: Inratio, Incausam, and Involuntas.

Engaging Inratio

How can we leverage curiosity to engage spiritual apathy with those lacking the *reason* to care because of their confidence in the secular worldview? An obvious answer would be to poke and prod at the reasons they believe secularism is so incontestable to provoke curiosity of other worldviews. This provocation would entail walking the secularist propositions out to their logical

conclusion to demonstrate flaws in a system that is considered flawless. Here is where apologetics plays an ancillary role to curiosity.

The moral argument, for example, shows that secularism has no basis for universal human morality. If God does not exist, what objective standard exists to define good and bad, right and wrong? It cannot be the individual since morality may vary from person to person, i.e., the legalization of marijuana. It cannot be culture since morality likewise varies from culture to culture, i.e., the promotion or rejection of segregation-era Jim Crow laws among the States. It cannot be societal law since, again, morality varies from society to society, i.e., the varying age of sexual consent among different countries ranging from fourteen in Germany to twenty-one in Bahrain. What, then, is the universal standard of morality, and from where does it find its origin and sustainment?

Secularism cannot answer this question, yet it presupposes that an answer exists. Thus, the atheist may concede that another worldview might have the answer that secularism cannot offer.⁵ Once the secular worldview is shown to be susceptible to criticism, curiosity sets in. The atheist may ask: “If secularism cannot account for certain things, what other worldviews account for them?” At this moment, the atheist now has a *reason* to explore another worldview, to which a Christian can offer their faith as the solution. It is curiosity, not apologetics, that drives the atheist to explore competing worldviews of secularism.

Engaging Incausam

⁵It must be said that this type of apologetic reasoning should not be seen as the end goal. Remember, atheism is not an intellectual or philosophical rejection of religion, but an emotional and psychological rejection of the same. Apologetics may blaze a trail towards curiosity, but it should not be the final destination. It is a useful tool to promote criticism that sparks curiosity.

How can we leverage curiosity to engage spiritual apathy with those lacking the *motivation* to care? The problem for these apatheists is impatience, which lies in their unwillingness to sacrifice time to read scripture and hold conversations about religion. If the Bible is presented in its metanarrative form, then perhaps the hearer may be more willing to sacrifice time to hear how the story unfolds. Again, as C. S. Lewis noted, narrative stokes human curiosity, which is especially true of Millennials who grew up reading multi-volume sagas like *Harry Potter*, playing video games that placed them in the driver's seat of the story, and are currently fueling the wild success of a renewed comic book industry that commonly utilizes long, overarching narratives in its storytelling.⁶

Popular television series that have all struck a chord with this generation like *Lost*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Walking Dead* have one thing in common—a long-range trajectory from beginning to end. Even popular sitcoms, once known as being a collection of one-off episodes, are most successful with long-lasting sub-stories woven into them, such as *The Office* or *Friends*. The Millennial generation is one that appreciates good storytelling. Therefore, for many apatheists, evangelicals should present the Bible as it presents itself; a combined narrative with a single, long-ranging trajectory from Genesis to Revelation, from garden to eternal city, from wedding to wedding, from First Adam to Last Adam. In doing so, the same motivating curiosity that overcomes impatience and leads apatheists to sacrifice hours on end binge-watching a television series will likewise give them the motivation to hear the story of scripture.

⁶For example, over 50% of movie-goers who viewed Marvel's *The Avengers* in theater were under 25. See Nikki Finke, "'Marvel's The Avengers': Records & Factoids." May 6, 2012. Accessed March 15, 2016. <http://deadline.com/2012/05/marvels-the-avengers-records-factoids-267389/>. In spring of 2016, DC Comics launched an ambitious project, *DC: Rebirth*, which has been extremely successful thus far as older Millennials are returning to the comic book consumption they enjoyed in their youth.

Engaging Involuntas

How can we leverage curiosity to engage spiritual apathy with those lacking the *will* to care? The problem is that the atheist does not care to consider Christianity because they are fearful or undesirous to know its message. Unlike the rich young ruler who counted the cost of Christian discipleship and assessed it too costly for him (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-30), atheists who lack the will do not even entertain the idea of counting the cost in the first place. In this instance, curiosity can be provoked in the form of challenging them to explore that which they fear, which is especially possible if the person has a reason and motivation to care, but remains apathetic because of fear. In the same way that curiosity drives the determination of explorers in the face of fear, it may likewise spur an atheist with *reason* and *motivation* to overcome their fear and provide them the willingness to explore a worldview outside of secularism. They should be challenged with soul-piercing questions: “What are you afraid that you might find? Why do you allow this fear to arrest you? Should you not be *more* afraid of never even attempting to find what you are looking for?”

Conclusion

In conclusion, evangelical strategies for engaging secularism rightly include atheism and agnosticism but fall short of a full-spectrum when they exclude apatheism. Given the rise of the Nones, especially in the Millennial generation, apatheism cannot remain unaddressed. The local church should engage the new western pantheon of apatheism at the local church level by leveraging human curiosity and presenting the gospel as it presents itself; as one, grand narrative of redemption. This curiosity will offer an atheist the reason, motivation, or will required to spark interest in spirituality, thus offering the Christian an opportunity to present the gospel. The

Muslim missionary in Cambridge was correct in his assessment that apatheists “care nothing of God or spirituality.” Our challenge, then, lies in offering apatheists a reason to care.

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