

Objections to Christianity

Group 7

5/23/2013 5:00 PM

San Francisco CA

(0:00:00.0-0:06:02.2) INTRODUCTIONS . . . INTRODUCE YOURSELF.

Jared: I've been in San Francisco about ten years. I have one roommate. Grew up in a Christian household, would say I stopped believing ten years ago.

(0:06:23.3) I'LL ASK YOU WHY YOU STOPPED BELIEVING LATER, OKAY?

Jared: Yes.

(0:06:27.8) WHAT DO YOU DO?

Jared: I work for a mobile company in advertising.

Mike: I'm a self-employed computer consultant and a musician. I've lived in San Francisco for way too long, fifteen years or so. Originally from the East Coast. I live with some roommates. I have two roommates and a couple of houseplants. *(Laughter.)*

(0:06:57.1) WHAT KIND OF MUSIC?

Mike: Mostly guitar. I play a little bit of everything, but mostly guitar.

Trevon: I've been in San Francisco for eight years now, I think. I'm losing track of time. I was living in France before, so I was really exposed to the whole Christianity and Catholicism and all of that. Before that I was in Iran, so I was born there. Was raised, went to school public—actually, public school at the beginning, but then private. We had to do the whole religious praying and all that, but I was never religious ever since. I understood everything. I'm working at UCSF as a researcher and that's it.

(0:07:54.1) YOU GO HOME TO?

Trevon: I live by myself.

(0:07:58.3) NO ANIMALS? NO PLANTS?

Trevon: Had that for a while.

(0:08:02.0) DIDN'T SURVIVE?

Trevon: Plants, no. Animals, too much work. *(Laughter.) (One respondent agreed.)*

Chris: I live here in the city with my girlfriend and our cat. I'm a freelance writer. There's someone at the door.

Male Respondent: Just have one more person (0:08:21.5 *inaudible/cross-talk*).

Male Respondent: Could we have water? Or could I get a water by chance? I know (0:08:26.8 *unclear*).

(0:08:28.5) CAN WE GET ANOTHER WATER? HOW ARE YOU?

Male Respondent: Hi, sorry (0:08:32.1 *unclear*).

(0:08:37.8) TRAFFIC?

Male Respondent: Yes, I mean.

Male Respondent: Yes, I work two blocks from here, so it worked out.

(0:08:52.0) YOU HAVE THE CAT AND THE GIRLFRIEND. YOU'RE A FREELANCE WRITER AND?

Chris: And I grew up in upstate New York in an Irish Catholic family. I'm baptized. I took first communion, and then just fell out of the church from there for no particular reason really. I've been living out here for about six years.

(0:09:13.2) DID THE WRITING BRING YOU HERE?

Chris: No. College brought me here.

(0:09:19.7) COLLEGE BROUGHT YOU HERE?

Chris: Yes.

(0:09:20.7) WHAT KIND OF WRITING?

Chris: I studied journalism and I've been doing that mostly. But to make money, I do business writing, writing documents and tenders, contracts, things like that.

(0:09:37.9) YOU DO THAT TO EARN, BUT THE OTHER SIDE OF YOU FREELANCES?

Chris: Freelances.

(0:09:43.2) THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE SOUL IS?

Chris: Yes, well, I just published a magazine last week, so I'm trying to start my own publication.

Jimmy: I'm a PhD student at UC Berkeley in environmental economics. I moved to Oakland last year, but I've lived in San Francisco, the Bay Area. Grew up in the Bay Area, moved to LA for college, came back, and I've been in the Bay Area in San Francisco proper for five years. On the side, I make electronic music and I throw what you might call dance parties in the city, but it's more performance for electronic music.

(0:10:43.4) IT SOUNDED LIKE DANCE PARTY WAS ABOUT TO COME OUT?

Jimmy: It's confusing, given the direction of popular music lately, which has become a very broad—and it is a very broad genre of music, but people dance at the parties. *(Laughter.)* When you say dance party, a lot of different things come to mind.

(0:11:05.6) IT'S AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION.

Jimmy: Yes, it is.

(0:11:08.2) YOU GO HOME TO?

Jimmy: I live by myself in a studio. I have some plants. *(Laughter.)* That's about it. It's easy. They're succulents, you know.

(0:11:19.3) THEY ARE EASY.

Jimmy: Yes.

Thomas: Thomas. I live here in the city with my wife and a couple of roommates, a dog, some fishes. I work in a high-end body shop for cars, fixing cars all day. What else? I'm from the East Coast, New York to be exact. I came here since right before 9/11.

(0:11:48.2) REALLY?

Thomas: Yes.

(0:11:50.0) I'M AMAZED HOW MANY PEOPLE CROSS TO THE NEW COAST.

Thomas: Yes. It's a lot more kicked back out here. It's laid back.

(0:11:57.4) IS UPSCALE BODY SHOP CUSTOM WORK OR WORK ON HIGH-END VEHICLES?

Thomas: High end.

(0:12:06.8) IF SOMEBODY DENTS THEIR ROLLS, YOU GET TO FIX IT?

Thomas: Yes. Mainly Porches that we do. *(Laughter.)*

Daniel: Sure. I'm from New York. I've been here for about twelve years. I'm single. I quit my job last week.

(0:12:37.2) WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

Daniel: I was experience director at a design agency. I'm just taking the summer off, I think.

(0:12:49.6) RENEW, RIGHT?

Daniel: I hope so.

(0:12:55.0-0:14:04.2 MODERATOR CONTINUES INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION)

(0:14:04.2) WHAT IS YOUR FIRST REACTION WHEN YOU HEAR SOMEONE TALK ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: I'm curious what the discussion is going to be about in general. I guess I have lots of thoughts about Christianity and religion.

Male Respondent: I thought of politics immediately.

(0:14:27.1) SOMEBODY ELSE?

Male Respondent: Red states.

(0:14:30.9) SAY WHAT?

Male Respondent: Red states.

(0:14:31.6) RED STATES? WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

Male Respondent: Conservatism.

(0:14:55.8) WHAT WORD DID YOU USE?

Male Respondent: I just said conservatism, but—

(0:15:01.4) I HEARD SOMETHING ELSE?

Male Respondent: I said politics.

Male Respondent: Close-mindedness.

Male Respondent: Gay marriage.

Male Respondent: Just to be different, I have to say that I have a good friend who is an old school Social Justice Catholic. Until I met him I would've been coming up with all these myself, and now all I can think of is it's complicated. *(Laughter.) (Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I had a lot of the same negative feelings associated with Christianity until I went to USF, which is a Jesuit school now. That's given me a new look on the role that religion can play in people's lives and the good it can do as opposed to the nasty things it can do to people.

(0:16:06.3) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: Mythology.

(0:16:36.3) MYTHOLOGY IN TERMS OF?

Male Respondent: In terms of the same thing as the Norse myths or the Greek myths. Every culture has its mythology. That's ours.

(0:16:47.1) SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

Male Respondent: I like Christianity better than a lot of other religions. I feel like it's more open than a lot of other religions and more . . . But I think in the same way it's open, it feels less real in terms of it just constantly adapts to what—

(0:17:09.7) WHO ADAPTS TO IT?

Male Respondent: Youth and people are doing. It's almost not trying to stay with its own ideals; it's just trying to appeal to the masses.

(0:17:19.5-0:17:53.4 MODERATOR REVIEWS MIX OF RELIGIONS IN ROOM.)

(0:17:53.4) SOMEBODY ELSE ON CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: I think it's a synthesis for me.

(0:17:58.0) A WHAT?

Male Respondent: A synthesis, based on other religions. Because I studied—at Cal I took Ancient Religions of Iran, and basically the whole thing about how it started . . . not how it started, but the source as far as it you go back. The more you read and the more you see Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism—which was the first one—these are very similar in terms of telling their stories, their myth, and how everything comes down and who has some kind of contact with the supernatural power and becomes all-knowing and all good. I think it's a good synthesis of the old religion and how it was refined and changed and called a new thing.

(0:18:48.6) CHRISTIANITY ENDED UP BEING THE NEW THING FOR THIS REFINEMENT?

Male Respondent: Yes, and then after Islam came and they said, "Okay, this is more complete. This is what you should adopt. Blah blah blah."

(0:19:01.1) YOU GOT THAT HERE?

Male Respondent: Yes.

(0:19:03.1) AT SCHOOL HERE?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: I don't know. I think—I have a pretty pessimistic view of the role that religion plays and, as a social scientist, see it as serving two purposes historically. One, explaining the unknown, the supernatural sense, and then the other, giving people a moral compass that otherwise they might not be

able to navigate the world's more complicated issues with. But I think in our modern times, it becomes less and less relevant. But that being said, I've met a lot of Christian people who I think it provides a lot of fulfillment with them, within their family and community. And actually some of the biggest issues I've had with them with politics, with political issues where I would like them to divorce the two—like their voting habits from their religious beliefs, I feel like religion holds them back. I believe there's a lot of social collateral to them denouncing their religion. The person I'm talking about in particular would be like—I've had Mormon friends. I've had Evangelical friends. Then I have friends who I would call those louder versions of Christianity that would say there's a lot of ways to embrace teachings of Christianity without being so . . .

(0:20:33.4) LOUDER VERSIONS?

Male Respondent: . . . severe.

(0:20:39.6) WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

Male Respondent: Catholicism with that.

Male Respondent: Yes, Catholicism is much more of the church than Christianity is, outside of just the sense of community and liking to have that thing to go to and people to meet and talk to and share some sort of similar natures with. But when I think of the church, I feel more Catholicism than Christianity.

Male Respondent: Power.

(0:21:26.8) POWER IN TERMS OF?

Male Respondent: Just the idea. I think of Catholicism and know there's the pope. When I hear the church, I think of that kind of faceless bureaucracy that's just out manipulating their message in a way to attract as most minds as possible and generate as much money from poor people's pockets as they possibly can.

(0:21:54.5) MORE PEOPLE MEANS MORE MONEY?

Male Respondent: It means more money. It means more power, more political power, more influence on the world.

Male Respondent: It's hard to criticize the church. You can criticize government and politics all you want, but people are scared to criticize the church, religious people.

(0:22:10.5) WHAT CAUSES THAT?

Male Respondent: Their fear of God, so they're scared to question it.

Male Respondent: I don't have that reaction. If I think of the priest that I had growing up, or if I think of the church in my community, I don't think that. I only think of those words, the church, brings it to that realm of bureaucracy.

(0:22:35.5) YOU SEPARATE YOUR EXPERIENCE FROM 'THE CHURCH'?

Male Respondent: 'The Church,' like capital T, capital C. Yes.

Daniel: I think there's the organizations that are about hierarchy, like the Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, the Scientologists, or whatever. There's organizations that are very leadership and hierarchy driven. Then I think there's other Christian organizations or denominations that are less like that. I associate the word 'the church' when you refer to the church as the former, where there is a leader and they're giving—deciding things. Then there's more of a grassroots church, which is community based, I guess.

(0:23:34.8) TELL ME ABOUT A CHURCH EXPERIENCE THAT STANDS OUT VIVIDLY IN YOUR MEMORY.

Male Respondent: We had a nun. I can't remember what her name was, but my brothers and I would call her Sister Talks-a-Lot because she would talk all the time. This was when I was very little, four or five years old. I remember that was the way that my brothers would connect in their resistance of going to Sunday school, picking on this nun when we rode home. (*Laughter.*) In terms of actual memory in a church, I can't really think of any.

(0:24:15.2) CHURCH EXPERIENCE THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND?

Male Respondent: My grandmother passed away and she was a pretty believing Catholic. I come from a German, part-Irish family that . . . I never went to church. I was never baptized. I never went to Sunday school. I don't think I spent—I didn't know it, but I went to a sports camp once that was religious. (*Laughter.*) When I got there I—

(0:24:41.7) YOU DIDN'T KNOW IT?

Male Respondent: I was confused, because we took breaks from the sports and then we went and started talking about Jesus and I was like (*laughter*), "I didn't see that coming." But it wasn't so bad, it wasn't a bad experience. Anyways, after my grandmother passed, I decided to go to Midnight Mass because, actually, I had gone to Midnight Mass once with her before she passed and it was like this. As I say, I have a pessimistic view towards organized religion, the church. There was this really intense moment of spirituality in the ceremony of it all and the pomp and circumstance where I kind of forgot about all the other political qualms I have with Christianity. But it also had to do with the pastor at the time—or the priest, I guess, he thought . . . He was very all-loving and "love thy neighbor" and very generous. Then he was replaced the year after with a very fire-and-brimstone guy, who was saying if you're only here once . . . "If this is your one time here a year then you're doing it wrong," and so I didn't go back after that. That's really the only and major church experience.

Male Respondent: I had that exact same experience at a church recently after my grandmother died also. I went to Midnight Mass as well. I started . . . actually, I remember crying in the church. It was weird. I felt like this strange connection with my grandmother and every other member of our family who has ever lived because the Parsons have always been Catholic for as long as we have record of them.

Male Respondent: Would going to the Temple be—

(0:26:33.0) ABSOLUTELY.

Male Respondent: We do this once a year thing for Asians, or Buddhist at least, and it just kind of like blesses you for the year pretty much. It's different. Sort of same idea as other religions, but just in a different way since you do have a God and you just do your praying and all that and your wishes for the year. Of course, you contribute to whatever money you want to contribute. Same idea, I would say. It's pretty amazing because some of the temples they have in Southern California, they're just huge, bigger than the one that we have up here. I would try to take some pictures even though you're not allowed to. It's amazing. It's gold Buddhas and all that.

(0:27:31.6) IT'S BEAUTIFUL.

Male Respondent: Yes, beautiful.

Male Respondent: Is that the one, it's a . . . not Divisadero, but—or Turk—what is the Buddhist temple that you're—

Male Respondent: Turk and Divisadero—

Male Respondent: Yes, it's similar to that but a lot, maybe five times bigger I would say.

Male Respondent: Okay.

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: I remember when my parents split when I was younger, eleven; they had a lot of mutual friends in the church. Because my mom was the one that (*coughing*) initiated the divorce, she was excommunicated from all friends because God doesn't believe in divorce.

(0:28:02.0) FROM ALL FRIENDS OR FROM THE CHURCH?

Male Respondent: All of her friends in the church.

(0:28:05.1) ALL OF HER FRIENDS IN THE CHURCH?

Male Respondent: She lost all of her friends in the church.

(0:28:09.5) REALLY?

Male Respondent: Yes.

(0:28:11.5) YOU REMEMBER THAT?

Male Respondent: Yes.

(0:28:13.1) DID SHE TELL YOU?

Male Respondent: Yes. She was pretty sad about it. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: Tough for me to even pick one out because I've had such varied experience with religion. I was raised reformed Jewish. I went to Hebrew school every Saturday for four or five years in elementary school. Then we got a new Rabbi. I say this to people and it sounds like a joke, but it's not. We got a new Rabbi who was so reformed that he didn't believe in God and my parents said, "Well, maybe that's a little too reformed." They sent me to a Hasidic Hebrew lessons for about a year and a half. My bar mitzvah was full-on, as religious as it gets, Hasidic, which was a much different experience. I prayed privately every night between about the ages of eleven and twenty-two, I want to say, eleven and twenty-one, something like that. My older generations of my family, my great-grandfather, who I knew really well, we had him for a really long time, was orthodox. My grandfather's whole generation was conservative, and every Jewish holiday was spent six hours sitting in shul, listening to Hebrew that I didn't even understand, *(laughter)* just because it made grandpa happy. Actually, if I was going to pick one thing out, it would probably be that because towards the end of his life . . . I was just telling somebody about this. Towards the end of his life, just from years of Hebrew school, I can follow along Hebrew. I know what the letters sound like. I just don't know what the words mean. I looked over while we were in the middle of one of these lengthy conservative services and he was on the wrong page. He was turning the pages at the right time, but he wasn't following the Hebrew right. *(Laughter.)* The guy had to be like eighty-seven at the time and he had been going and sitting in shul for hours and days since he was a kid. I pointed it out to him and he said, "Oh yes, I don't understand Hebrew." *(Laughter.)* It amazed me. He knew all the prayers by heart and when we had kids at the Passover Seders, if we skipped passages he'd mumble them under his breath. He knew everything by heart; he didn't know what a word of it meant. *(Laughter.)*

(0:30:18.9) DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO ADD?

Male Respondent: Yes. Same thing. I've been to a lot of Mosques and all because—since I grew up in Iran, I was there until twelve. They would take us there. It was just that you go in there and then when they're reading stuff in Arabic, because they do read all the prayers and stuff in Arabic, and talk about four-thousand-year-old stories that what happened in the battles and all and people start crying and they're beating themselves up. I'm like, "Wait a minute. What the hell is this?" It was funny to me. Then I go to France and I actually went to church once. I just went to see how it is. They had the whole ceremony of giving you a little piece of bread and wine and all of that, which was pretty nice. The priest was super nice. He knew I was not Catholic obviously, but then we sat down and they read, I guess, parts of the Bible. I would try not to fall asleep. It's just I was not into it. I couldn't focus too much.

(0:31:23.7) YOU WEREN'T ADULT THEN, THOUGH?

Male Respondent: Yes. I was in sixth or seventh grade maybe. Those were the two. It's interesting how, as everybody says, they make this whole Mosques or churches and everything so big and nice and everything. Sometimes they're made out of gold or just shiny and bright.

(0:31:47.8) BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: I don't know. It's a symbol, so they want to make it as impressive as they can. They want people to feel, "Okay, I'm part of a big thing," and feel good about it, I think.

Male Respondent: No different than going to a movie theater on a Saturday night really.

(0:32:05.9) THE SHOW?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: IMAX. Yes.

Male Respondent: It was blockbuster.

(0:32:12.2) TELL ME AN EXPERIENCE THAT YOU'VE HAD WITH CHRISTIANS?

Male Respondent: I'm confused. Growing up, I thought it was only Catholics. I didn't know about the whole Presbyterians and all those different branches. My last year of high school, I went to a Presbyterian Christian high school. Because when I got here, I was eighteen, so I couldn't attend public school for some reason. It was quite interesting. Every Wednesday, we had chapel. Somebody would come up to talk. One of the guys was in prison for about twelve years. He was a heroin addict. He gave us a talk. I was like, "Okay." That was interesting, actually, because he saw Muslim as . . . He says Christianity and he goes on Catholic as all bad, the church, killings, and all that. Then he puts Muslim up and you see a picture of Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, really nasty. Then he goes on with other stuff. He depicts everything as Iblish, but then when he gets to Presbyterian and all this, it's like . . .

(0:33:22.0) HE DEPICTED EVERYBODY IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT BUT PRESBYTERIAN?

Male Respondent: That was it. That was his way of being saved and all of that.

(0:33:31.6) HE WAS A SAVED GUY?

Male Respondent: He was a saved guy. I don't know. For me, I was confused about Christianity. How can you have all those different branches?

(0:33:43.8) WAS THAT IN HIGH SCHOOL?

Male Respondent: Yes. I was in high school. Now it makes sense kind of, but still.

(0:33:54.4) SOMEBODY ELSE?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: I don't know. I would just maybe on—is it Trevon?

Trevon: Mm-hmm (*affirmative.*)

Male Respondent: I think he brings up—it is confusing. I've had conversations, and I seek these people out because I enjoy the intellectual conversation. (*Laughter.*) I'm antagonistic at times, but I've had pretty in-depth conversations with a Lutheran recently. Like I said, an Evangelical, Episcopalian, Catholics, and it is all so varying, as I'm sure any major organized religion has sects as Islam does and different schools. I'm just confused. Are you trying to get at the . . .?

(0:35:08.0) YOU'RE CONFUSED?

Male Respondent: Then yes, I am confused.

(0:35:10.6) WHAT IS CONFUSING? WHAT IS IT LIKE TO STAND IN YOUR SHOES AND LOOK AT . . .

Male Respondent: Christian?

(0:35:22.7) CHRISTIAN, CHRISTIANITY.

Male Respondent: I reconnected with a girl recently that I had known from middle school, early high school. The years of Facebook where you are friends with people eight years later and are like, "Ah, she's cute now." (*Laughter.*) We reconnected. She's in LA. Ended up meeting up when I was down there and spent a couple of weekends together, started dating a little bit, and she's just been a reborn-again Christian. Just like ideologies have changed. Everything that governed her life was what would God want me to do, and I can't do this because the Bible doesn't preach it. It was very frustrating for me because I just want to shake her and be like, "What do you think? What do you want to do?" I don't care what . . .

(0:36:16.7) WHAT'S HER WILL?

Male Respondent: Yes. What do you feel internally? I don't care what this book is telling you to do. What do you actually believe and then go with that. Be true to yourself. Screw this whole other higher power that you think is telling you to do something. I want you to do what you feel is right. That was frustrating.

(0:36:34.6) DID YOU TELL HER THAT?

Male Respondent: I told her that. It didn't go anywhere. It wasn't going to . . .

(0:36:40.5) IT DIDN'T HELP?

Male Respondent: No. It wasn't going to work out.

(0:36:42.8) IT WASN'T GOING TO WORK OUT?

Male Respondent: No.

Male Respondent: I actually had a very similar, well, having a very similar experience. I met somebody who I've gotten along very well with in every way. I've got to give you some background. Until I met my friend, who I mentioned before, who is, in addition to being different in that he's one of those old school Social Justice Catholics, he's also just generally just this incredibly bright guy and really can voice his opinions very well and comes at things from different angles than most people. Before I met him, I was 100 percent anti-religious. Coming from having prayed every night for ten years. (*Laughter.*) I came to see religion as—for a long time I thought it was intrinsically evil, no question about it. It's a whole other conversation, how this friend got me to change my opinion on that. I do think by and large it seems to preoccupy evil people a lot. I try not to immediately judge people, because he really put the light to me immediately saying, "Well, that person's religious, they couldn't possibly have anything of value." But I met a woman recently and she said her faith was important to her and that's really the only thing I can think of that she said that put me off.

(0:38:02.2) IT PUT YOU OFF?

Male Respondent: That put me off.

(0:38:03.6) WHY DID IT PUT YOU OFF?

Male Respondent: The reason that put me off is because—well, I don't want to say it put me off. I don't judge her for it because what I understand now that I didn't used to understand is that faith and that people who have faith aren't unreasonable. It's completely . . . they're perpendicular. They have nothing to do with each other. It's a choice to have faith. I don't judge that, but I just don't know how close I could get to somebody who it—had an overarching importance to them. Just for me personally, I don't know if I could spend a lot of time with someone like that.

(0:38:37.1) IF IT HAS OVERARCHING IMPORTANCE TO THEM, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Male Respondent: I don't know. I heard her talking to one of her religious friends, one she knows from church, on the phone. She got off and said, "God bless you," or something of that nature. I'm Jewish by descent, and I'm much more accepting of religion than I have been, but I'm still . . . I'm an Empiricist. People ask me what my religion is. I'm a radical Empiricist. I have a science background. I have a science degree. It's just a diametrically opposed way of looking at the universe. In my own mind, to me it's a sticky situation because I disagree with it so strongly, but I don't want to convince anybody. I don't feel the need to convince anybody else of that. In fact, I don't want to be responsible for somebody reconsidering that. I just prefer to leave people like that. We can engage on an intellectual level, and I love talking to people about it and hashing it over, but as far as the possibility for emotional involvement, I don't know. I haven't pushed her away. In fact, I do hope to see her sometime soon, but it's on my mind. It's something to bear in mind.

(0:39:50.0) YOU SAID CHRISTIANITY TENDS TO OCCUPY EVIL PEOPLE?

Male Respondent: I do think so.

(0:39:55.0) IS THAT WHAT YOU SAID?

Male Respondent: Yes. Not Christianity necessarily so much as religion in general.

(0:39:59.3) RELIGION IN GENERAL?

Male Respondent: I think structured religion is a very effective tool for oppression and a lot of people fall for it. I'm not saying that is its primary nature or that's what it must be. Certainly there are good approaches to religion and people get good out of it, but it does also get used a lot.

Male Respondent: Yes, they scare you.

Male Respondent: Overridingly, it gets used as a power structure and as a control structure. You get people who have it in their lives not the way my friend, Dave, for instance, who I've been mentioning, who to him it's an answer to these . . . He's getting an advanced degree in philosophy right now, so he's got all of these heavy duty questions that you can trace the origins of these questions back to ancient Greece. He's got this incredible intellectual . . . Most people aren't thinking about it that much. I think it needs that much thought or something—it's not a good match for me. Let's put it that way. I don't want to sound like I'm judging it and other people, but for me personally.

(0:41:02.3) YOU KNOW YOURSELF?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: When we grew up in Christianity, they teach blasphemy is the one thing that will send you to hell. You say there's no God, so you're scared to take it to that level. I'm not really a believer, but I'm not going to go that far because I don't want to go to hell. Then finally I got a little older and started thinking for myself and just realized that I don't believe in any of this anymore. But it took a long while to get over that hump, because you're like, "I don't know if I want to go that far, because who am I screwing around with here if I'm wrong."

Male Respondent: It's a pretty severe mechanism. *(One respondent agreed.)* That's what I mean. The threat of hell to a child. *(Laughter.) (One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: It's pretty scary as a kid.

Male Respondent: It's pretty severe. That's a really good way to get people to not do certain things.

Male Respondent: I think that's why it was created. *(One respondent agreed.)*

(0:41:58.6) YOU MEAN THE CONCEPT OF HELL?

Male Respondent: The whole—yes.

Male Respondent: Just religion in general is a way of obedience structure. *(One respondent agreed.)* When political structures and government and law wasn't as prevalent as it is today and as enforceable, religion was a way to keep people in line.

(0:42:13.7) WHO CREATED THE CONCEPT OF HELL?

Male Respondent: I couldn't tell you. *(Laughter.)*

(0:42:18.8) IS IT UNIQUE TO CERTAIN RELIGIONS?

Male Respondent: Christians.

Male Respondent: Isn't it Christianity?

Male Respondent: *(0:42:21.8 unclear/crosstalk).*

Male Respondent: I think there's probably a spin-off in every religion maybe. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: When I studied—when I took that class, they said Zoroastrianism came up with two different types of gods. There was a good god, Ahura, and there was an evil god, Angra. They didn't really mention hell. There was a gateway or a bridge to a beautiful place that you would live forever. That would be heaven. They would say, "Okay, the army of evil is going to conquer earth and it's going to be miserable and blah blah blah." That might have been hell but then, when the other religions came along, they slowly came up with the ideal of hell. Hell still was present in Egypt during the Pharos time. It was present during the whole Greek *(0:43:13.4 unclear)* during the Greek Gods. It was there for a while. I think it was really expressed.

Male Respondent: The Norsemen had something like it as well.

Male Respondent: Yes, it was really expressed with a lot of images and writings and all that. Christianity, Islam, I'm not sure about Judaism, but—

Male Respondent: Not so much. I asked when I was seeing the Hasidic Rabbi, I asked him about it. He said Judaism is more . . . there's writings about just about anything you care to question, but Judaism focuses more on the here and now than on the afterlife. It doesn't really say quite so much about it.

Male Respondent: I think that hell, yes, is a harsh concept, and can be used as oppression. I don't know if there are other religions that have this same aspect of Christianity, but it can also be used as really something that's quite freeing. The idea that there is a God that loves everybody unconditionally. This is the part of religion that I always remember being told as a child. Love for other people and love for yourself as being the most important thing and, as long as you acknowledge the fact that you've done wrong, there is a power up there that's running the whole show that is going to accept you for who you are unconditionally.

Male Respondent: Unconditionally it's like— *(Laughs.)* Is that true though?

Male Respondent: Those are great concepts.

Male Respondent: No— *(0:44:48.8 unclear/crosstalk).*

Male Respondent: You confess your sins, yes. I guess loves you unconditionally based on race or religion or whatever.

Male Respondent: It depends who you ask.

Male Respondent: I don't know.

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: I'm just confused.

Male Respondent: Obviously you can talk about anything. You look at religion the same in the way that television is the same. They both have been manipulated and used to get into peoples' heads and to make them do things. Nobody sits in a room talking about how inherently evil the television set is. It's not so much about the tool. It's about the people that have decided to use it. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Yes. I don't know.

Male Respondent: Yes. I agree. It is a tool that people have decided to use it one way or the other. Then it also leaves me to believe that the tool shouldn't be available to anybody. It's too big of a powerful thing for anybody to have access to. It just should not be available for anybody.

(0:46:00.3) WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIANS?

Daniel: I think if it goes back to how hell was created. If you have this positive look at heaven where you go and what if you do something negative? Is it an automatic thing that hell was just created because . . . what's that? Something you expect from heaven, so if you do negative, you're going to expect something negative. Hell just comes up by itself, I would say. I wouldn't say anybody created it.

Male Respondent: Especially in Catholic Church. Like, "I went and murdered somebody and then I confessed at church and the priest told me to say ten Hail Marys and now I'm cool to go to heaven." *(Laughter.)*

(0:46:49.5) ONLY TEN?

Male Respondent: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

(0:46:53.5) HOW WOULD A ROOM FULL OF CHRISTIANS BE DIFFERENT THAN A ROOM FULL OF NON-CHRISTIANS?

Male Respondent: This one would be nothing but white people, I would imagine. *(Laughter.)*

(0:47:18.3) THE CHRISTIAN ONES?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: Usually probably with blond hair, I would imagine. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: There's a lot of black Baptist churches. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: It's true.

Male Respondent: My initial thought is definitely white.

Male Respondent: I'd prefer to be in this one.

(0:47:35.8) IN THE?

Male Respondent: In the non.

(0:47:37.2) THE NON?

Male Respondent: Yes. More fun.

(0:47:41.6) THE CHRISTIAN SIDE WOULD BE LESS FUN?

Male Respondent: I think it would be less fun.

(0:47:44.9) LESS FUN BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: Because I think people would be timid. *(One respondent agreed.)*

(0:47:51.5) TIMID?

Male Respondent: These black Baptist churches, you go to them and it's just like a party.

Male Respondent: Yes, go to services at Grace Cathedral.

Male Respondent: Yes, it's an assembly of people just really having so much fun with their religion and the music is spectacular.

(0:48:09.7) WHAT'S GRACE CATHEDRAL? IS IT A NONDENOM?

Male Respondent: It's Episcopalian.

(0:48:14.0) IT'S WHAT?

Male Respondent: I think it's Episcopalian.

Male Respondent: I'm not sure what denomination it is, but they have these great big gospel services. I've been to services there. Everybody goes to see it at least once, just for the spectacle. It's this huge cathedral and they have a live band and they have really fun rocking out services.

Male Respondent: I believe if it's the Grace Cathedral that I'm thinking of too; I have a friend who used to be a minister at an Episcopalian church there. He would throw actually parties on Friday night. They had this Episcodisco. *(Laughter.)*

(0:48:43.0) REALLY?

Male Respondent: They'd have live music and you'd sit in the pews.

Male Respondent: Yes, welcome to San Francisco. *(Laughter.)*

(0:48:47.2) YOU'RE SKATING THE EDGE OF THE DANCE PARTY?

Male Respondent: It was a good time. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: I've got to say I think that's an unfair question. I think that's too broad of a generalization to have *(0:49:00.8 unclear/crosstalk)*.

(0:49:01.1) WHEN YOU THINK OF CHRISTIANS, THEY'RE THE BORING, EURO . . .

Male Respondent: Not all the time. My whole family is Christian and they'd be partying hard in the one church, but I'd still be like, "I'll see you later."

Male Respondent: *(0:49:17.2 unclear/crosstalk)*. *(Laughter.)*

(0:49:17.2) HOW ARE PERCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE WHO ARE NOT?

Male Respondent: I think it depends on what you've been exposed to. I've been to a Mormon wedding; it is very different. Everybody is timid. Nobody talks. Everybody is in their own cluster of family, I guess. I didn't know. I didn't know they don't drink, so I go up to the guy and I'm like, "Hey, is that sangria?" He goes like, "No, sir, this is just lemonade." That was it. I was the black sheep right there. *(Laughter.)* I talked to one person. The mom runs up to me and is like, "Are you a friend or foe?" It's like, "I don't know." *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: I'm a foe. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: It really depends. I mean it's like—

Male Respondent: I think *(0:50:05.3 unclear)* drink and have fun but . . .

(0:50:07.9) HOW WOULD THE TWO ROOMS LOOK DIFFERENT TO YOU?

Daniel: It's a tough question. It depends on what the connotation of the word Christian is.

(0:50:32.5) WHAT IS YOUR CONNOTATION?

Daniel: I think I need more context than that. Here, the Christians that I know in San Francisco are cool. Whereas the Christians that I know in the rest of the country are not cool.

(0:50:45.1) YOU PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIANS OVERALL?

Daniel: It's hard because there's all types. There's all kinds of Christians in this country or even in this city. I think it's almost . . .

Male Respondent: The two ballrooms would look the same?

Daniel: It doesn't even matter. No. That's the question, right? Where are these people coming from? Where are we drawing these Christians from? *(One respondent agreed.)* Is it from here? Is it from Missouri? I guess what I'm saying is that the label itself is almost meaningless. Unless we were talking about the average American Christian, which I see as . . . yes, they're white people. They're from the middle of the country. They have not very progressive views. They have probably very regressive views about social and cultural issues. I'd say they're probably less intellectual, less curious, less affluent. Those are all the things that I think about when I think about the average American Christian.

Male Respondent: I feel like Christianity suits peoples' lifestyles in America much more than most religions do. I think it's very accommodating.

(0:51:56.3) IN WHAT WAY?

Male Respondent: It's easy to be a Christian.

(0:51:57.9) HOW DO YOU MEAN?

Male Respondent: It just lets you get away with so much stuff.

(0:52:01.4) BECAUSE OF THE FORGIVENESS THING?

Male Respondent: Yes. Just so much forgiveness, it's very casual, the church services. As ritualistic as Catholic Church is or . . . it just feels very easy to be like, "I'm a Christian. I go to church every once in a while and say my prayers."

Male Respondent: Yes. Everybody in this country is a Christian. *(One respondent agreed.)* But they're not. *(One respondent agreed.)* They identify as Christian, but they're not.

Male Respondent: People identify as Christian because they want to say they're religious, or it's easier, or the people around them are Christians, so they can say they are also.

(0:52:31.0) WHAT RELIGION IS IT HARD TO BE?

Male Respondent: The strict ones. I don't know. Any one that requires you to actually do things outside just say you're a Christian.

Male Respondent: Any one that requires you to wear ritual headgear of some sort in public. *(One respondent agreed.) (Laughter.)*

(0:52:44.3) LIKE BEING JEWISH?

Male Respondent: Yes. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: That doesn't really require it except for the Hasids, but I'm thinking more in terms of the . . . not just the *(0:52:53.0 unclear)*; the Indian, it's on the tip of my tongue, turbans.

Male Respondent: Sikh? *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Yes, like the Sikhs have a hard time right now.

Male Respondent: You could half-ass any religion. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Even if you had to go. Sitting through a Sunday service at the Christian church is far easier than Catholic mass.

Male Respondent: It's difficult if you don't really believe in any of it. *(One respondent agreed.)* But if this is the way that you see the world, it's not much of an effort to put something on your head.

Male Respondent: Are we differentiating between Catholicism and Christianity?

(0:53:23.8) ARE CATHOLICS CHRISTIANS?

Male Respondent: I always thought they are.

Male Respondent: *(0:53:26.8 inaudible/crosstalk).*

(0:53:28.9) ARE THEY? ARE MORMONS CHRISTIANS?

Male Respondent: I think so.

Male Respondent: From a semantic standpoint, yes, but I guess Christianity buys you all these stereotypes in America that you very aptly listed. I would totally agree with pretty much—I have problems with citing those kinds of stereotypes and judging people based on . . .

(0:53:51.4) HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN A JESUS?

Male Respondent: I wouldn't explain.

Male Respondent: Who thinks Jesus is?

Male Respondent: Sorry, what a Jesus?

(0:54:14.8) WHAT IS JESUS?

Male Respondent: What is Jesus?

Male Respondent: Six pounds, seven ounce. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: Long hair.

Male Respondent: You look like Jesus to me.

Male Respondent: Long beard.

Male Respondent: White guy with sunburned cheeks.

Male Respondent: He's the son of God.

Male Respondent: Symbol of—

Male Respondent: Bastard born of Mary.

Male Respondent: The God that lives in all human beings that died for our sins.

Male Respondent: Historical figure that somebody made into something they're not.

Male Respondent: I'm with that one.

(0:55:00.7) YOU'RE WITH THAT ONE?

Male Respondent: *(Laughter.)* Yes.

Male Respondent: I think he was a smart man, like all other prophets.

(0:55:09.3) HE DID EXIST?

Male Respondent: Yes, I think he probably existed. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

(0:55:13.4) THERE WAS A GUY?

Male Respondent: Back in the day, you get stoned for adultery. Mary had out-of-wedlock affairs and got pregnant.

(0:55:21.6) YOU THINK HE'S FICTIONAL?

Male Respondent: I think Jesus might be a real figure in life, in history books, but the story behind him is fictional.

Male Respondent: As I understand it, a lot of historians agree that there was an actual person *(0:55:34.3 unclear/crosstalk)*.

(0:55:35.2) YOU SAID THERE WAS A PERSON, BUT HE WAS A PROPHET?

Male Respondent: Yes. That's what everybody was told in school and everything.

Male Respondent: I think he could have been a great individual, but I think Mary got knocked up and she made up a whole long story not to get stoned to death because she had sex out of marriage. *(One respondent agreed.)*

(0:55:53.2) IT WASN'T A VIRGIN BIRTH?

Male Respondent: I don't believe that. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Are you asking what we think?

Male Respondent: He was born out of wedlock, I think.

Male Respondent: I think you're going to get the same answer from everybody.

Male Respondent: I think it's all—whether he was real or not is irrelevant. The story is—*(0:56:19.1 unclear)*. It's all symbolic. It's all a symbol for whatever greater meaning you want to get out of it.

(0:56:27.8) IT'S SYMBOLIC, IT'S NOT ACTUAL?

Male Respondent: Yes, I think so. I think to talk about it in historical terms really strips the myth from a lot of the power that it has with people.

Male Respondent: I had an experience. The experience with an Evangelical guy, a guy I worked next to every day for four years. We got down to it at one point. We were talking about politics and it came around to Jesus. I was like, "Why can't you just take Jesus' teachings as good advice?" He had some good . . . *(Laughter.) (One respondent agreed.)* From the interpretation of the Bible, he had some good points—treat others as you would want to be treated yourself or there's general . . . There's some good advice in there.

Male Respondent: Some pearls of wisdom in there. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: But can you accept him as a fallible human being, too? But he couldn't because he also said a bunch of crazy stuff like, "I'm the Son of God." I've known schizophrenic people who say the same thing. He said it was impossible for him to ever accept all of Christianity without accepting Jesus as the Son of God. That was really . . . I don't know. I was shocked by that. That was something that never occurred to me before, but I think he was probably a human being who convinced a lot of people that he was the Son of God and had a lot of followers and now we have Christianity . . .

Male Respondent: I don't even think he *(0:57:57.0 unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male Respondent: Three hundred years later.

Male Respondent: I think he was really charismatic.

Male Respondent: I don't even think he was trying to convince anybody of anything.

Male Respondent: Yes?

Male Respondent: It might have happened just out of by accident. Who knows? *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: There's a school of thought that says that Paul was trying to start a religion and was the one who actually, after everything, was the one who actually started it all. *(One respondent agreed.)* Built him up into something holy as opposed to just a teacher, one of many who were around at the time. I don't know. I can't speak with authority on that but—

Male Respondent: Imagine all the books we have today. If one of them survives in a cave somewhere and people find it thousands and thousands of years later, they'll be like, "This is f***** crazy." *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: It would be a new one. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: The Twilight Bible. *(Laughter.)*

Daniel: I think most people in this room, but also in my cohort, believe that yes, there was a guy that probably existed at some point in history. We have pretty good evidence that there was a guy. I think that's maybe a common . . .

Male Respondent: Yes, I'm sure he was a great dude.

Male Respondent: *(0:59:06.2 inaudible/crosstalk)* these days.

Male Respondent: Look what happened to Reagan. People dream about him as this amazing political figure. That was thirty years ago and now . . .

Male Respondent: Yes, my grandma's got pictures all over the wall of Reagan. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: It's easy for people to get behind the notion of a human being. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I don't think back in the days that he actually did write any books. I know for Islam they wrote the Quran two hundred to three hundred years later *(one respondent agreed)* based on what . . .

Male Respondent: Yes, it was about three hundred *(0:59:36.4 inaudible/crosstalk)* years later. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: The person who learned it first and transmitted, you could change so much.

Male Respondent: Yes. Have you ever played telephone? *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: That's . . . yes.

(0:59:51.5) SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ARE SAID ABOUT JESUS THAT YOU DON'T BELIEVE?

Male Respondent: Most of them.

(0:59:57.0) MOST OF?

Male Respondent: The whole miracles and all.

(1:00:00.0) HE WAS A GUY AND . . . ?

Male Respondent: I believe that.

(1:00:05.1) YOU DO?

Male Respondent: Yes. From part of the way that I was brought up to see the world.

(1:00:14.3-1:00:38.6 MODERATOR DISCUSSES ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.)

(1:00:38.6) DANIEL GAVE A NICE PROFILE OF THE AVERAGE CHRISTIAN?

Daniel: Is the average American.

(1:00:40.4-1:00:52.8 MODERATOR RECAPS WORDS RESPONDENTS USED TO DESCRIBE CHRISTIANS.)

Daniel: Yes, a lot of people just don't think about it. I grew up Christian. It wasn't really until twenty-two or twenty-three and I was living here, and friends I had here actually started questioning me about things. I actually had to think about it and respond. Once I started thinking about it and responding, I didn't really know how to respond because I'd never really thought about it. Then they were challenging me about my beliefs, which made me completely rethink everything. I think it's just so easy for people to be taught something and just to go along with it and never really question it just because it's easy because no one questions them about it and they don't have time to question themselves about it because they don't really care. I think it's easy for people to be taught one thing growing up and then continue along that path. Not that that's everybody, but for me, that's how it was until I questioned it for myself.

(1:01:47.2) WHAT ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY DO YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE?

Male Respondent: The opulence of the church is troubling.

(1:02:10.5) YOU SAID OPULENCE?

Male Respondent: Yes. The wealth of the church is a little *(1:02:14.4 inaudible/crosstalk)*.

(1:02:14.5) THE REASON THAT THE WEALTH OF THE CHURCH IS NOT SOMETHING THAT YOU'RE HAPPY ABOUT IS?

Male Respondent: First of all, it seems to contradict what they're teaching about. Jesus talked about how difficult it was for a rich man to enter heaven, so it seems hypocritical. Even nowadays, of course, you hear a lot of talk from religious sources about charity and helping the poor and yet somehow this organization has managed to accumulate more wealth than any other group on earth.

(1:02:43.8) HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE ACCUMULATING IT AND NOT DISTRIBUTING IT?

Male Respondent: You can see. One of the nicest buildings that you see around are churches. Look at the Vatican's priceless art treasures. These are physical things that you can . . .

Male Respondent: (1:02:56.4 unclear/crosstalk).

Male Respondent: . . .that you can see.

Male Respondent: It's probably mixed. I'm sure you're getting some people that are distributing but a lot of people don't.

Male Respondent: I don't see how there could be the most effective . . . If really their interest was in distributing charity, how they would wind up with a priceless art collection and all this and the gold and the fancy buildings on big expensive plots of real estate in major cities?

(1:03:19.9) WE WERE TALKING ABOUT THAT EARLIER TODAY, BEAUTIFUL CHURCHES?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: It's still a human institution, though, which means there's going to be fallible individuals involved in it. You're going to get corruption. But there are some churches that do good, and there are some churches that don't. I just don't like it because I feel like it tells people how to think and they don't think for themselves.

(1:03:40.4) THEY TELL THEM WHAT TO THINK?

Male Respondent: Yes. I just want people to think for themselves.

Male Respondent: I also agree. Alan Watts has a book called *The Wisdom of Insecurity* that I really like.

(1:03:54.3) SAY THAT AGAIN?

Male Respondent: Alan Watts.

(1:03:56.1) THE NAME OF THE BOOK IS?

Male Respondent: *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. He talks in there about how if you look around at the world, it's transient, and nothing is reliable, and things are out of our control, and they change and there's all this sadness and we can't control things. What do we do? We invent a heaven that is infinite and infinitely happy and doesn't change. It seems to me just from personal experience that a lot, not

everybody I know, but a lot of people who I've known who are religious cling to it because they claim it must be true because they themselves can't handle the possibility of there not being anything after death, for instance. It's something I've heard people say. They can't stand that idea.

Male Respondent: It's a scary thought.

Male Respondent: It is a scary thought for a lot of people and I can't judge them too harshly for not liking it, but at the same time I see it as a little bit of a weakness of character to think that the universe . . .

(1:04:50.7) HOW DOES THAT CORRELATE WITH CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: That's more of religion in general than specifically Christianity. That's nonspecific. That's pretty much (1:05:01.7 *inaudible/crosstalk and trailing*).

(1:05:04.7) WHAT IS THE OBJECTION AROUND POLITICS?

Male Respondent: You vote based on a religious prior that affects the way other people live their lives, or that refutes something that's scientifically . . . The recent backlash on science against global warming—

Male Respondent: Evolution.

Male Respondent: Specifically evolution, things like that . . .

(1:05:42.9) HOW IS THAT RELATED TO THE CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: I've read a lot of articles about how Evangelical groups are actively teaching young people that these things are not to be true even though the greater Western academic (*laughs*) institution believes these things to be true via a lot of vetted logical arguments.

Male Respondent: Overlooking—

Male Respondent: No, no, no. It's just Christianity blocks a lot of these reasonable arguments as—I see Christianity. And again, sorry for the argument's sake in me wants to qualify all these things and say Evangelical Christianity seems to do a lot of this. But I've met other Christians who don't, who also have these backward things.

(1:06:34.1) ARE THEY TEACHING THEM IN THEIR SCHOOLS?

Male Respondent: I think it's homeschooling, but I think it's also just inundating your youth with these fears of homosexuality, fears of science and global warming, that it's not happening. These kinds of conservative political views that are, I think, separate from a red state Republican thing, but I think it's been very intelligently commandeered by the Republican party. I think that they know how to appeal to certain voter blocks such as . . .

(1:07:13.1) DO THEY SHARE THE VOTER BLOCKS WITH THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?

Male Respondent: It's just another form of control of politics.

Male Respondent: I don't think there's anything about Christianity as a faith that results in these things intrinsically, except maybe gay marriage. The Bible does say being gay is a sin. I think that's the only one. There's not really anything in the Bible that says you can't believe in global warming, that you can't have a socialist government that takes care of the poor. Actually, the Bible says to take care of the poor. There isn't anything in there that says you can't have science or discover things or be curious about the world or have vaccines or whatever. *(One respondent agreed.)* I think there's actually very little about Christianity itself that has these offensive political consequences. It's just the people.

Male Respondent: That's a good point. People are just taking it there *(one respondent agreed)* for one reason or another.

Male Respondent: What is the religion if it's not the people who are acting it out? *(One respondent agreed.)* Like I said, I have friends who are less loud about this and they totally agree with the science and they see Christianity as this wonderful tool to teach people how to give and be charitable, but there's also these people out there who are weaponizing it, like you were talking about, that treat it . . . *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I think religion is a control system. *(One respondent agreed.)* That's how it evolved and that's why it exists is because it was useful to society; not a person but society. Like it was useful to say let's not eat pork because it's going to make us sick, so now we have a rule that says we can't eat pork or shellfish or whatever. There are people using that today to further their own agenda, but I think the system itself exists because it was evolutionarily useful from a cultural standpoint. I don't know where that leaves us. You can approach Christianity or any faith however you'd like. I don't know where that leaves us.

Male Respondent: We are a Christian nation, I guess, and the reason why Christianity plays such an important role in politics is because it's played an important role in the old money in this country and it's mostly Christian. Mostly white Christians go to Ivy League universities in DC or around the country. I think it's just the way things have gone and I think that's why you can go on television and say president Obama is a Muslim and that's a comment that gets a very strong negative reaction out of people, because the White House and politics has been tied up with Christianity for so long that any sort of outside religion coming in is threatening to the people who run the show.

Male Respondent: But it's so variable too, because Romney is a Mormon. People were saying there was no way a Mormon would ever be in the White House, and yet that almost happened.

Male Respondent: Yes, but it didn't.

Male Respondent: I don't think that's actually about the religion. It's about the people using it to further their goals. I don't think the rich and powerful in this country are actually Christian.

Male Respondent: Most of the founding fathers were Christian and warned about the dangers of Christianity. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Mitt Romney is one multibillionaire out of many. I don't have hard evidence saying X amount of millionaires are Christian, but it's just . . .

Male Respondent: I think the people in power aren't motivated by religion or by faith. I think they're motivated by power.

Male Respondent: I think they use it. I'd say that's not true.

Male Respondent: You mean in using religion to make political decisions or . . . ?

Male Respondent: Yes, specifically about politics. The political system here is not actually about faith. It's not about what people believe.

Male Respondent: Yes, it's all about power and money, I think. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: But I think that faith plays a really important role in that. There are groups in DC that have tons of power and they're specifically pastors and different . . . I don't know what the exact terminology is. Priests or whatever in Washington, DC, who do have the ear and the pockets of very influential politicians. *(One respondent agreed.)* You can read articles about this in the *New Yorker* and the *Times* and things like that. Christianity isn't firmly entrenched in Washington, DC. It does play a role in what gets done in this country.

Male Respondent: You had Rumsfeld putting on military briefs to Bush, putting Bible quotes on the cover and references in his briefs about the Iraq war.

Male Respondent: That's not a new thing. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I think a lot of that is for show, though.

Male Respondent: Yes, I don't know—I don't buy that it's . . .

Male Respondent: I don't know because those were . . . I guess they knew they'd come out in public eventually, but those were basically just daily briefs for the president. Those were *(1:12:34.6 inaudible/crosstalk)*.

Male Respondent: Or just a way of manipulation from Cheney, too—or Rumsfeld or whoever you were saying. *(One respondent agreed.)*

(1:12:41.6) GIVE ME ANOTHER ELEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY THAT YOU FIND LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE AND WHY IT BOTHERS YOU.

Male Respondent: Really, I do, I agree with Jared because it takes away—the one thing that really stood out to me was the whole stem cell research. There is so many things we could do with this. My research

is on cancer and we use, sometimes, stem cells and all of that to engineer cells and do different things with it. Although now I do see (1:13:19.0 unclear) discovered how to turn just normal skin cells into stem cells and use it as a therapeutic way to treat people. If you still take embryonic stem cells, the potential of using it in many, many different ways is tenfold higher. Just because of religion that says as soon as the egg and the sperm get in contact, the process starts, then that's a living person that stopped the whole thing.

Male Respondent: I do have a problem with it. It seems to me like you see a lot of these—my religious friends tell me it's not rank and file Christians, it's the people you see in the media. But either way, my perception is that the Christians that you see in the media don't seem to be content living by their spiritual beliefs. They want to pass secular laws to make sure that everybody in the country has to live by their personal spiritual beliefs. This I have a big problem with for reasons like this. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Separation between church and state just doesn't seem to be honored. *(One respondent agreed.)* I did a really passive aggressive thing I think with Prop 8. *(Laughter.)* I wrote an appeal on Facebook just to—not denouncing any personal view on homosexuality that anybody might have, but just asking that they would appeal to if you believe in racial equality, if you believe in separate but equal, and the notion that marriage is a social institution and not a religious institution anymore. Like if you grow up a little kid and you aren't religious you still say, "I'm going to marry somebody." You don't say it regardless. Anyways, I wrote this very tactful, in my opinion, and then I tagged a bunch of Mormon people. *(Laughter.)* Just to start a conversation and it was pretty—I got defriended by *(laughter)* old Mormon friends. *(Laughter.)* It was an important issue *(one respondent agreed)* and, at the time, the Mormon Church was pouring tons of money into TV ads to convince people that they should pass this law largely because of tax exemption reasons, but really to impose something that would not affect any of their homes. It would not affect anybody in their . . . Maybe it would be a social validation that would lead to people questioning these things, but it's . . . *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I think you hit the nail on the head right there. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: There was a funny video going around on Facebook recently where this guy goes up to interview everybody. He's like, "Do you believe gay people are born or taught? Born or learned? Nature or nurture?" The majority of them are like, "I think it was taught and learned." He said, "It's a conscious decision?" They're like, "Yes." He's like, "At what age did you decide to be straight?" They're all like, "Uh. Well. I don't really remember. I probably can't say." He's like, "Do you think it's the same way for gay people?" They're like, "Yes, probably." Okay, there you go. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I think that Christianity's connection with politics is troubling. I would prefer probably that the US was in reality, there was that separation between church and state that we talk about. But I think that asking people to separate their faith from the way that they vote is like asking this table to turn into a chair. It's just not realistic.

Male Respondent: That's not the task. What bothers me about faith and religion and Christianity isn't that you have a faith conviction that you want to live your life by; it's that you don't. Because the Bible says a lot of things that people don't practice anymore or that today, currently, the Christian church does not advocate for, but yet it's like this one thing about gay marriage. That's the one thing that they currently advocate for, but they don't advocate for you're supposed to stone people if they get divorced, or you're supposed to not . . . Eating shellfish is a sin. All these other things . . .

Male Respondent: They pick and choose. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: There's no legislation to ban people from eating shellfish, though. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: That's what I mean. It's like it's not about people living their faith. I'm not asking people not to believe what they believe. It's asking them to . . .

Male Respondent: Be consistent?

Male Respondent: I think the thing that bothers me most about Christianity is the . . . I guess I called it the lack of curiosity, but it's more like the . . . It's not anti-intellectualism, it's like—it's the—like the way I see Christianity and faith is like . . .

Male Respondent: It's *(1:18:05.5 unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male Respondent: It's for people who want a shortcut. They want the answers rather than having to think through the hard questions themselves. I know that's not true for everybody.

Male Respondent: They're idiots? Is that it?

Male Respondent: No. *(One respondent agreed.)* It's not. It's not about intelligence.

Male Respondent: It's putting morality for dummies on the surface level. People who want to pay enough attention who you were talking about. People who get a PhD in religious studies or something like that. I think these are incredibly deep topics, but I think for thousands of years it was morality for dummies. That's really abrasive, but that's . . .

Male Respondent: Yes, if you could take it . . .

Male Respondent: You don't think it's asking a lot of people to really take time out of their day when they're trying to go to work and raise their kids to sit down and really . . .

Male Respondent: No, it's . . .

Male Respondent: Ponder the teachings of Christ and really think about how . . .

Male Respondent: That's why it's a shortcut. Because people are busy.

Male Respondent: It's more broad than . . .

Male Respondent: They want to be told what to do. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I think you can do the same thing and take time out and ponder life and how things are going and the teachings of individuals as opposed to Christ. I think you could do the same thing in your life but not do it with religion.

(1:19:11.7) YOU SAID IT WAS BROADER?

Male Respondent: Mm-hmm. *(Affirmative.)* It's just more broad and there's no rule to it, I would say, or more people would choose it, I guess. Right?

(1:19:28.1-1:19:43.8 MODERATOR DISCUSSES NATIONAL STUDY ABOUT WHAT ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY ARE OBJECTIONABLE.)

Male Respondent: I could say it's funny that we have seven dudes in the room and nobody said abortion either. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: I was thinking about that.

Male Respondent: I didn't want to interrupt. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: Abortion *(1:19:53.6 inaudible/crosstalk).*

Male Respondent: Abortion is a big one.

Male Respondent: I was thinking it, *(1:19:57.7 unclear)* tip of my tongue.

Male Respondent: Especially when you get into parts of abortion where you know your kid is now going to have Down's Syndrome. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: Life begins at conception. *(Two respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: *(1:20:07.2 inaudible/crosstalk).* *(Two respondents agreed.)*

(1:20:10.6) CONCEPTION?

Male Respondent: Yes. He mentioned conception.

Male Respondent: I'm ready to have a kid, but now I know my kid is going to have Down's Syndrome so do I abort and wait for the next one? *(One respondent agreed.)*

(1:20:21.0) WHY DOES THIS CONCERN YOU?

Male Respondent: Because there's too many kids being born that shouldn't be born.

Male Respondent: For me, it's not that it concerns me as a tenet of Christianity, so much as they want it to be a tenet of my life too, and they want to enforce that through our secular government. That bothers me.

Male Respondent: Yes. I don't know how much people give stock in it, but the book *Freakonomics* talks all about after Roe v. Wade was passed, there was a huge crime influx in the '90s, and basically at the year that most kids would have been sixteen to twenty-year-olds after Roe v. Wade, crime completely plummeted across the board all over the states and no one really knew why. They associate it with abortions because a lot of at-risk individuals at fifteen, sixteen, seventeen that shouldn't be having kids—and most of those kids grow up to be at-risk youth—were now having abortions, and we weren't getting those same individuals running around.

(1:21:47.7) THAT TAGS BACK TO CHRISTIANITY?

Male Respondent: Yes. Just because, if abortion wasn't legal, then you'd have all these people that shouldn't be having kids having kids.

Male Respondent: I think the people who feel it's their campaign—it feels, at least from what you see in the news, people campaigning against it are largely Christian, at least in the United States.

(1:22:11.9) PEOPLE CAMPAIGNING FOR GAY MARRIAGE ARE SOMETIMES WITH A GROUP.

Male Respondent: Sure, but the groups that the people are with on the opposite. The groups on the opposite end, though, are coming together as a group based on common alignment of thoughts that they've come into their own free will. The other group is, "This is what we read and this is what somebody told us, so we're going to organize based on it." These other people are a collection of individuals that believe the same thing on their own will. I think those groups are different than the other groups.

(1:22:48.7) THE CHRISTIAN GROUPS CAME TOGETHER BASED ON A SET OF BELIEFS?

Male Respondent: Yes.

(1:22:58.2) SAME THING, RIGHT?

Male Respondent: Yes, but one was entered into upon free will and one was entered in because that's what you were told.

Male Respondent: One was entered in because people wanted certain rights for themselves. The other was entered in because it was written in a book two thousand years ago. I don't see those as having equal footing.

Male Respondent: Just briefly, it's like a plurality thing. Abortion is complicated and you can cite economic statistics, maybe, that suggest crime goes down if we—maybe society is better off with abortion. Maybe people's individual rights aren't particularly invaded upon with abortion. Certainly

there's arguments to a notion of pro-life that maybe people have—will socially plan better. But I guess Christianity and again, religion in general, but Christianity sometimes in particular on this issue, feels like it refuses to acknowledge even any of those other things as caveats. Religion as a mechanism doesn't allow you to. That's the problematic part with any kind of these things, any kinds of the issues I guess, but that one in particular. That one is like . . .

(1:24:16.3) WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ALL OF THIS?

Sherman: I agree with Jimmy. Mostly when I hear abortion shouldn't be allowed, there's always the religious reason behind it because they see conception as a form of life. If you think about it, it's just a bunch of cells up to a certain point. When you get a heartbeat and when the brain starts forming, fine. We could define that as maybe life. I think individuals should have the right to think for themselves.

(1:24:58.4) THEY DO HAVE THE RIGHT TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES?

Male Respondent: And not being told . . .

(1:25:01.5) ARE THEY BEING TOLD?

Male Respondent: If you take again the average American Christian or average anybody—Iranian, French, or anybody else—if they don't think—If they've been taught ever since they were kids and then when they grew up, "Okay this is bad. You're going to go to hell and you shouldn't do it," of course, they're not going to do it because they didn't think for themselves, "What does it mean? What is a cell? What's life? What would happen if I do? What would not happen if I do?" Again, the same thing. (1:25:38.0 unclear) many other genetic disease that you could prevent by doing abortion.

(1:25:48.0) YOU FEEL THAT THOSE WHO AREN'T BLINDLY CHRISTIAN ARE A LITTLE MORE EVOLVED?

Male Respondent: I think the key point is to think for yourself. You could be Christian or any other religion. You could believe hardly in anything you want, but if you think for yourself and if logic is there for you to actually sort things through, then that's fine. But then again—

Male Respondent: Yes, just want to—

(1:26:24.1) ARE YOU IN THE HOT SEAT?

Male Respondent: It's just like . . .

(1:26:26.4) IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, SAY IT.

Male Respondent: I don't feel like I'm being attacked by anybody, but this whole idea of thinking for yourself and people who are Christian can't think for themselves and if you decide not to follow any religion at all, you're suddenly more of a free thinker, I think is just false.

(1:26:54.4) THAT'S SOMETHING YOU DON'T AGREE WITH?

Male Respondent: There are lots of things that influence the way that people think. A lot of people that I've met, not necessarily in this room right now, but other people I've met who are very anti-Christianity, anti-religion, they tend to just repeat things that they hear Stephen Colbert say on television. I think it's .

Male Respondent: It definitely goes both ways.

Male Respondent: It's good to recognize the fact that you can never really be quite sure where your own free thinking starts and where you've been influenced by some other thing in your environment. *(One respondent agreed.)*

Male Respondent: I'd like to respond to that comment too, because, speaking as an atheist, I tell this to people all the time. I would really much rather share a dinner table with some of my Christian friends than with what I call those smug atheists. *(Laughter.)* I really don't like that. I don't like that thing where it's like you look at people like Hitchens, I want to say. I don't even listen to these guys, so I'm not even sure of their names because I can't stand that superior attitude. I really do think it's a choice and it's a personal choice. Again, the only place I have the problem is, for instance, looking at the abortion issue. This person believes in abortion. This person doesn't. If we make it illegal, neither of them can get an abortion, but if we keep it legal, this person could have their abortion and this person cannot have abortions. That's why I have a problem with this person's view and not this person's view.

(1:28:19.6) YOU WANT THE OPTION?

Male Respondent: It's just who is imposing what on whom. You do hear things like arguments I totally disagree with. For instance, if a Christian employer pays into a health plan that covers abortion, that their religious liberties are being violated. I can argue for hours that that's not a correct statement. But that aside, in the simplest case, yes, I have a big problem with just people telling other people that you have to do it my way. *(One respondent agreed.)* I could do it my way even if you got your way, but I'm going to make you do it my way. I don't want to even adopt a tone. I don't like the implication that I think that I do—personally in my own opinion, yes, I think my way is best. I think most people would say that, but I wouldn't go out and try to lure that over somebody. I respect it as a choice, the choice to have faith, because I do believe it's a choice. I don't believe you're born with it. I respect that and I try to treat people with respect for having made that choice. I just don't like that kind of statement.

(1:29:23.1) WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN?

Male Respondent: From my understanding, it is the notion that it's the duty of a Christian, or at least some Christians feel it's their duty to convert others to Christianity.

(1:29:42.8) SOMEBODY ELSE?

Daniel: I used to be one.

(1:29:46.7) DID YOU REALLY?

Daniel: Yes. I was religious when I was younger.

(1:29:50.7) IT WOULD BE ‘REALLY RELIGIOUS’?

Daniel: Yes, I was super religious. That’s what the Bible says to do. Yes, I was super religious. Yes, that’s what the Bible says to do. If you’re not doing it, you’re not following what the Bible says. You’re supposed to try to convert the whole world.

(1:30:02.2) SOMEBODY ELSE?

Male Respondent: Quarterback at the University of Texas. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: Yes, I don’t know. It’s the new breed, the new breed of Christianity that I feel like is probably the most troubling of any kind that I’ve encountered so far.

(1:30:32.7) TROUBLING BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: Like I said, this guy I work with, I actually was really good friends with this guy and I got down to bare bones. It was really one of the most bizarre relationships I’ve ever had in my entire life. I guess what it is, is you have the organized religion that’s very centralized, and you have maybe somebody at the top who has worked their whole life to get to the top and maybe has some kind of greater understanding of the scripture, or at least they spent a lot of time with it. But Evangelical Christians, I feel like the notion is it democratizes it to a point that you have to distill it to these very simple ideas, these very simple . . . “Global warming is bad,” “I’m going to homeschool my kids because they’re teaching evolution in grade schools.” These very one-dimensional ways of thinking. That’s really scary to me because people can’t think for themselves with these child toy–like ideas of what religion is.

(1:31:46.1) EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN?

Male Respondent: No idea, to be honest. Not much experience with Evangelicals, so I couldn’t even . . . I think of people riding the bikes with the white shirts and the ties. *(Laughter.)*

Male Respondent: Bible thumpers.

Male Respondent: That’s the Mormons.

(1:32:00.1) WHO SAID BIBLE THUMPERS?

Male Respondent: I did.

Male Respondent: Don’t they have blue churches? Is that a thing?

(1:32:14.3) BLUE CHURCHES?

Male Respondent: Does anybody know?

Male Respondent: Mm-mmm. *(Negative.)*

Male Respondent: Really, really classy churches. There's that one, is it Joe Olson's church where it's like—

Male Respondent: No, no. That's Scientology.

(1:32:24.4) JOEL OSTEEN?

Male Respondent: And Mormon temples. But the Evangelicals that have glass. There's big-screen TVs in front of every pew because (1:32:34.8 *unclear/crosstalk*).

Male Respondent: They're modernized too.

Male Respondent: I guess it's changed definition since I was a kid.

Male Respondent: Yes?

Male Respondent: Well the connotations are more today.

Male Respondent: Like Steve Martin in *Leap of Faith*? Nobody saw that?

Male Respondent: (1:32:47.3 *unclear/crosstalk*). (Laughter.)

Male Respondent: I don't think, just your comment, I don't think it's necessarily a new trend. (*One respondent agreed.*) You look at the centuries of missionaries going out and slaughtering the natives or the Inquisition or what have you—I don't think it was technically what Evangelical means, but (1:33:06.0 *unclear/crosstalk*) in the same breath.

(1:33:18.0-1:34:18.6 MODERATOR READS HANDOUT ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY.)

(1:34:18.6) DANIEL, LET ME KNOW IF THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU RECALL.

Daniel: Things change. For every person, there is a different flavor.

(1:34:37.0) WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THE CONVERSION CONCEPT?

Male Respondent: I think that that's psychologically manipulative. That's part of the power structure right there. (*One respondent agreed.*)

(1:35:17.7) PSYCHOLOGICALLY MANIPULATIVE IN THAT . . . ?

Male Respondent: That's an exclusionary inclusionary cult like tactic. It has no practical meaning in any sense of the word that can be detected, but it makes people feel that they belong now.

(1:35:30.4) TAKE IT A LITTLE FURTHER.

Thomas: Yes, it's trying to lock you in there. It's getting out of the whole Christianity feel there.

(1:35:45.2) TELL ME ABOUT WHEN THEY LOCK YOU IN.

Thomas: Just by born again. It's like what? *(One respondent agreed.)* Because when you're born again you have to do it over again and believe only in that particular . . . ?

Male Respondent: You're locked in for life. *(One respondent agreed.)* This is it.

Male Respondent: It's getting out of the subject of being a Christian.

(1:36:07.0) TELL ME IF IT FEELS LIKE IT'S PUSHING AGAINST CHRISTIANITY.

Male Respondent: My view of a Christian is more open to do, nothing like conversion I would say.

(1:36:32.0) THAT'S WHY IT'S THE EASY RELIGION, RIGHT?

Male Respondent: Yes.

(1:36:33.7) SERIOUSLY?

Male Respondent: Yes. *(Several respondents agreed.)*

Male Respondent: The majority is, yes.

Male Respondent: Evangelical Christianity is like response to easy Christianity, in my opinion.

(1:36:46.0) WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ACTION?

Male Respondent: The first part is okay.

(1:36:56.9) WHAT PART DIDN'T WORK?

Male Respondent: Telling people about Jesus. There's nothing wrong about social justice. There's nothing, I guess, wrong about it, telling other people what you believe. I guess it just depends on the way in which you do so.

Male Respondent: What does social justice here mean in this context? I'm curious.

Male Respondent: I find that I'm a little surprised to hear social justice mentioned actually with Evangelicals.

(1:37:19.6) BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: Because social justice is generally connected with social programs, political liberalism, and things like that. My understanding was that Evangelicals are usually politically conservative, so I find that *(1:37:34.4 unclear/crosstalk)*.

Male Respondent: Maybe their form of social justice.

(1:37:34.4) MEANING NOT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Male Respondent: They're not in favor of what I would traditionally think of as social justice.

Male Respondent: Yes, social justice to me is the notion of critical theory and people who have been mistreated because of their race, because of their gender, because of their sexuality. Social justice aims to rectify a lot of historical injustices that have taken place. I don't believe Christians have been slighted very much, so I have a tough . . .

(1:38:08.2) WOULD THEY BE HELPING THOSE PEOPLE?

Male Respondent: I have a tough time believing that they even have a perspective from which they can enact a social justice agenda.

(1:38:17.8) WHAT COULD THEY BE DOING?

Male Respondent: Maybe giving to poverty, but giving to some kind of charity like that, but I don't trust the use of that phrase very much. If you want to tell other people about Jesus that's fine, but I don't know. It's weird. I've never seen that before (1:38:46.8 *inaudible/crosstalk*).

(1:38:47.2) MISSIONS FOR THE POOR?

Male Respondent: There you go. It's (1:38:49.8 *inaudible/crosstalk*).

Male Respondent: I think it's my own liberal arts school treatment of this topic, but I've never seen . . . Yes. I went to a pretty liberal art school. Social justice means a lot of things to me that maybe it doesn't. Maybe social justice means charity and stuff like that.

Male Respondent: If I could amplify and expand on what I was saying before in light of that, social justice is often remedial and politically, liberalism is more concerned with remedies whereas conservatism is more concerned with incentives just in treatment perspectives and how they treat problems. I really would wager that most of the places where there's a strong Evangelical community really are more politically conservative and, therefore, you would think less interested in the remedial aspect.

(1:39:42.0) WHICH IS WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT?

Male Respondent: Which is that social justice would apply, yes.

(1:39:46.5) YOU STARTED TO SAY SOMETHING?

Daniel: It just sounds like it does feel very much like the co-opting of that term that isn't actually . . . I don't see how that is consistent. You know what? Actually, I know churches who have been on the side of social justice and they are exceptions to the—I don't associate that with Evangelical Christianity. There are churches who fought against miscegenation laws. That's social justice. They did that. I just don't associate that with Evangelical Christianity.

(1:40:31.2) WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLE CONCEPT?

Sherman: I just don't like it. Maybe it's the books and the teachings of the enlightened French philosophers or I don't know. I don't like to have an upper authority. I think I have a brain. I can think for myself. As (1:41:00.1 *unclear*) said once, he was like "Je vis, donc je pense"; "I live, therefore I think." The Bible was nice. It was a really nice book two thousand years ago. It puts a lot of structures in everything and made society a better society so we could survive today. It might have some things that are not correct. I could think for myself. I could decide for myself. I don't think I need a higher authority to obey to. It just wouldn't talk to me. I would be more on my defensive than accepting.

(1:41:45.3) THERE'S A DISCOMFORT TO LOOKING TO THE BIBLE AS THE AUTHORITY?

Male Respondent: Yes. A higher authority, yes.

Male Respondent: It's just absolute. There's no change. There's no evolution. (*One respondent agreed.*) It is what it is and you're going to follow it. (*One respondent agreed.*)

(1:42:03.3) SOMETHING DIFFERENT ON THE BIBLE?

Male Respondent: I think whatever gets you through the night. If you want to accept the Bible as the higher authority, go ahead. (*Laughter.*)

Male Respondent: It got me from monsters under the bed when I was a kid. (*Laughter.*)

(1:42:15.4) HOW DOES THE CROSS CONCEPT FIT IN WITH THIS?

Male Respondent: It's a strong symbolic thing that brings the other three into place. It's like you're going to follow the Bible after your conversion and you're going to do these actions based on this huge sacrifice that Jesus had for you. This is what he did for you so because of that, you're going to do these three steps.

Male Respondent: Also the redemption of humanity. Do you mean we are just born as bad and evil and we have to . . . somebody gave his life up to purify us? Why? Why am I bad? I was born. I was a kid. I got raised in a good family. I'm a good person. I help other people out. I was born just evil?

Male Respondent: Yes, and if so, there's still a lot of people that are born evil. (*Laughter.*) Didn't get rid of it.

(1:43:17.6) YOU'RE SAYING THAT IT RAISES QUESTIONS OR YOU'RE CHALLENGING THE NOTION?

Male Respondent: I'm not saying it's ridiculous, but it's the redemption of humanity. Like humans are bad and evil innately. They're born as impure and bad.

(1:43:37.0) THAT DOESN'T FIT RIGHT?

Male Respondent: Huh-uh. (*Negative.*)

Male Respondent: I'm going to go ahead and say that is a ridiculous notion. (*Laughter.*) Because the redemption of humanity is a redemption from original sin, which requires the myth of Garden of Eden to be true. There's all kinds of problems with that.

(1:43:54.7) THAT'S IN THE BIBLE?

Male Respondent: Right. That's a myth. That's what I'm talking about with the Norse Gods and everything. That's a myth. We've got plenty of scientific evidence that completely contradicts that. Furthermore, we have evidence in nature from animal behavioral studies that—What do you call people being nice to each other? The opposite of (*1:44:16.3 unclear/crosstalk*).

Male Respondent: Moralistic?

Male Respondent: Helping each other is . . .

Male Respondent: Altruism?

Male Respondent: Altruism is an ingrained quality. We see it in animals. We see animals actually help each other at their own costs. It seems to be a product of evolution. But more strongly because I think that the idea of redemption of humanity strongly depends on the myth of the Garden of Eden being factually true and original sin. I happen to think that religion works really well, and maybe this is even the cause of it. Religion works really well as a metaphor for the trouble—the discrepancy between trying to live your ideals and live in reality, live in the real world, at the same time. I can run with that one for hours. (*Laughter.*) But in short, that's what I think religion really is but it's not literally true. That's as close as it comes to being literally true. It works on a metaphorical level, but needing some sort of redemption from original sin is pure myth.

Male Respondent: I don't know. I think this follows the past. It's logical, right? The Bible, the cross, great. But the emphasis on it seems to be . . . the mechanism of hell that we were talking about earlier, this seems like a guilt trip. It's like Jesus died for your sins and you owe him. This is this great act that he took upon himself and that (*two respondents agreed*) you owe your salvation to him.

(1:45:54.1) THAT'S HOW IT READS?

Male Respondent: That's a strong contract. That doesn't leave you much room for saying anything else. (*Laughter.*)

(1:46:10.7) ADDING THIS TO WHAT YOU KNEW ABOUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS, WHAT DO YOU HAVE NOW?

Male Respondent: I will do just fine without them.

(1:46:33.0) BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: Because it doesn't . . . I'm not saying they should all die. (*Laughter.*) I'm just saying I personally don't have any use for this at all in my life.

(1:46:44.3) BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: It doesn't add any practical—it doesn't add any value to me and it doesn't seem to be reflective of truth, which is really what I'm mostly interested in. It's not based on empirical data. It doesn't have anything about it that I think is useful.

Male Respondent: It just seems dangerous.

(1:47:02.4) DANGEROUS BECAUSE?

Male Respondent: Just because it's brainwashing people to a whole new level outside of what typical . . . I guess when you go back to Christianity, it takes the insulation of certain belief systems and what you need to do with your life, follow to a whole another level, which is just scary.

Male Respondent: It doesn't make sense, I would say.

(1:47:32.8) IN WHAT WAY?

Male Respondent: Why would you go against the cross and the Bible? If there's something to prove it that it's correct, then yes, I'll do it. If not, why even waste your time?

(1:47:48.2) YOU'RE SAYING THAT IT'S HARD TO ACCEPT AS WRITTEN?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: As a Catholic, a lot of the effort that gets put into religion is really with yourself. People talk about Catholic (*1:48:14.4 unclear*). It's not so much that Jesus died for humanity's sins; it's that he died for mine. To be conscious all the time and really work on living the life for myself. This, on the other hand, seems like it's really outside of the individual person. Evangelical is looking at everyone else and saying these are the people that need to be saved, almost as if they're assuming that they've already been saved themselves. Or maybe they just ignore the fact that they have a life and they play a role in what goes on in the world. They're very much concerned with other people, which I think is dangerous.

(1:49:03.2) ANYTHING DIFFERENT?

Male Respondent: Yes. I read this differently because I come from this background. This isn't about . . . this is internal. This definition is how Evangelical Christians see themselves compared with other Christians; it's not about how they see themselves compared with the world. All these things specifically are responses to other types of Christianity.

Male Respondent: Separating themselves?

Male Respondent: This is their identity. This born-again thing is (1:49:34.6 *unclear*). It's a way to . . . who is in my group and who is out of my group. Other Christians who don't believe in being born again, like Catholics, that's how they divide the groups. All these things are specific ideological—this is a manifesto basically. It has a lot of meaning if you know about Christianity or if you're a Christian. I would say Evangelicals are probably even more interested in converting other Christians, or as interested as—

Male Respondent: Non-believers?

Male Respondent: Non-believers. That's what this all reads to me as.

(1:50:12.2) OTHER THOUGHTS ON THIS? FAMOUS EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS ARE?

Male Respondent: I'm sure there are a lot of them.

(1:50:22.3) WHO IS OUT THERE?

Male Respondent: John Rockefeller. Was he an Evangelical Christian?

Male Respondent: Billy Graham.

(1:50:30.6) BILLY GRAHAM?

Male Respondent: Are the Koch brothers Evangelical? I don't know. That could be a bad association. (*Laughter.*) Watching too much . . .

Male Respondent: K-O-C-H or C-O-K-E?

Male Respondent: Yes, the two, the K-O-C-H. The Koch Industry.

Male Respondent: I don't think they are.

Male Respondent: No?

Male Respondent: No, I don't think so.

Male Respondent: Okay. Sorry. I take that back.

Male Respondent: (1:50:52.3 *unclear/crosstalk*).

Male Respondent: Libertarians.

Male Respondent: That ran all evil in the states.

Male Respondent: I don't think that they're Evangelicals.

Male Respondent: It's possible.

Male Respondent: I don't know.

(1:50:59.4) WHERE WOULD I LOOK FOR WELL-KNOWN EVANGELICALS?

Male Respondent: I think Deion Sanders is an Evangelical Christian.

Male Respondent: Is that a Baptist?

Male Respondent: (1:51:14.0 inaudible/crosstalk) around here. That was racist.

Male Respondent: He baptized players (1:51:17.8 unclear) his teammates. I don't know if he's Evangelical.

Male Respondent: Don't know.

(1:51:30.2) ANY QUESTIONS I SHOULD HAVE ASKED?

Male Respondent: No. I thought you were going to talk more about religions and differences between all religions in general, not specifically about Christianity. More of a greater discussion around just theology and religion as an idea. Maybe a shot before the discussion would be good. (Laughter.)

(1:52:07.8) ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?

Male Respondent: Is that it? Are we done?

Male Respondent: Yes.

Male Respondent: How do I get this job? (Laughter.)

THANK YOU . . .