

-by Chris Lindstrom

When I first invited Karl V. Schultz to attend a Garrison-Martineau dialogue experience, his response was, "Sure! I'll try anything once." The Project returned the favor last summer when Schultz proposed doing a study of Garrison-Martineau Participants by distributing his *This I Believe* survey.

Karl V. Schultz is a retired psychologist whose career included consulting for both government and corporate clients. Over the years, he developed a series of survey forms, accompanying analysis tools and group profiles. *This I Believe* was one of those surveys. It asks questions about how we view human progress, the relationship of the individual to society, morality & outlook. We at the Project felt it could also serve as a warm-up before discussion, something to "get the brain moving", if you will.

We distributed *This I Believe* at both summer sessions and received 41 responses. Of these, 16 identified themselves as Christians, 18 as atheists or humanists, 1 as a pagan and the rest left their affiliation blank. Full results are shown at right.

When the data came back, Schultz called me and said, "I've never seen this before." The first question on the survey is "How important to you is it to put together a philosophy of life?" The second question is how satisfied you are with how you've put it together. Over the course of using this survey, this was the *first time* Schultz had ever seen a group which said they were more satisfied than they thought it was important! This was true for both believers and nonbelievers.

Normally, Schultz explained, scores on the question regarding the importance of philosophy averaged 1 - 1.5 points ahead of question two, regarding one's level of satisfaction. In two teleconference calls

SURVEY RESULTS

	Overall Average score (std dev)	Non-Believer Average (std dev)	Christian Average score (std dev)	Significance of Difference in Averages
The Big Picture				
1. How important is it for you to "put it together" -- to have a philosophy of life?	8.4 (2.1)	8.2 (1.9)	8.4 (2.4)	-
2. How satisfied are you with the way you have "put it together"?	8.7 (1.5)	8.5 (1.6)	8.9 (1.1)	-
Parts of Philosophy				
1a) People are basically selfish and do "good deeds" only out of self interest.	5.6 (3.0)	4.3 (3.1)	7.5 (1.8)	P < 0.001
1b) People basically good. Bad qualities only show up when basic needs frustrated	5.4 (3.1)	7.4 (1.6)	3.2 (2.9)	P < 0.001
2a) God is best understood as a transforming personal presence.	5.1 (4.3)	n/a	6.6 (3.8)	n/a
2b) God best understood as an enduring creative process/force in nature & history.	4.4 (4.1)	n/a	4.7 (4.4)	n/a
3a) What a person believes/one's faith is the test of one's religion.	5.5 (3.6)	n/a	6.1 (3.8)	n/a
3b) How a person lives, the way one acts, is the test of one's religion.	7.2 (3.3)	n/a	7.9 (3.1)	n/a
4a) People's different backgrounds, cultural-racial-religious, make them different.	6.3 (3.1)	5.8 (3.3)	6.5 (3.0)	-
4b) Underneath, people are very similar - backgrounds only change the edges.	7.7 (1.8)	7.4 (1.9)	8.1 (1.5)	-
5a) What is important to the individual and to society are bound to be in conflict.	4.5 (2.9)	3.9 (2.8)	4.9 (2.9)	-
5b) In the long run, what is best for the individual is also best for society.	5.8 (2.9)	5.3 (3.3)	5.7(2.6)	-
6a) A loyal citizen does what the government asks, even when they disagree	1.9 (2.3)	1.1 (1.6)	2.5 (2.6)	-
6b) A loyal citizen may have "higher loyalties" and oppose governmental laws.	8.1 (2.1)	7.7 (2.6)	8.6 (1.5)	-
7a) Trying to make sense out of the "birth-life-death" mystery is a waste of time.	3.1 (3.7)	5.5 (3.4)	0.9 (2.4)	P < 0.001
7b) Each person must face a "birth-life-death" mystery and sift through its meaning.	7.6 (3.2)	6.3 (3.4)	9.2 (1.9)	P < 0.01
8a) Human progress depends upon scientific know-how and knowledge.	6.7 (3.2)	8.6 (1.5)	4.8 (3.1)	P < 0.001
8b) Human progress depends on the kind of moral values people have.	7.2 (2.7)	7.1 (2.2)	7.3 (3.3)	-
9a) A satisfying life comes from learning to accept/live with tension & conflict.	7.5 (2.4)	7.7 (2.2)	7.5 (2.7)	-
9b) A satisfying life comes from understanding and resolving tension and conflict.	6.9 (2.6)	7.9 (1.7)	6.0 (3.1)	P < 0.05
10a) People are what they are and can't change, even if they want to.	1.6 (2.0)	1.8 (2.0)	1.6 (2.1)	-
10b) If people make up their minds, they can become whatever they want to become.	5.8 (2.9)	6.9 (2.5)	4.2 (3.0)	P < 0.01

where the survey results were discussed with Project participants, he raised the question of whether our scoring pattern indicated that Garrison-Martineau participants feel they have "all the answers sewn up" and are fairly closed to other ideas. Other callers suggested that perhaps dialogue with people of opposing points of view attracts people who are just very happy with their own outlook. Perhaps these scores reflect not so much closed-mindedness as a level of satisfaction and confidence which enables them to opt to participate in these dialogues.

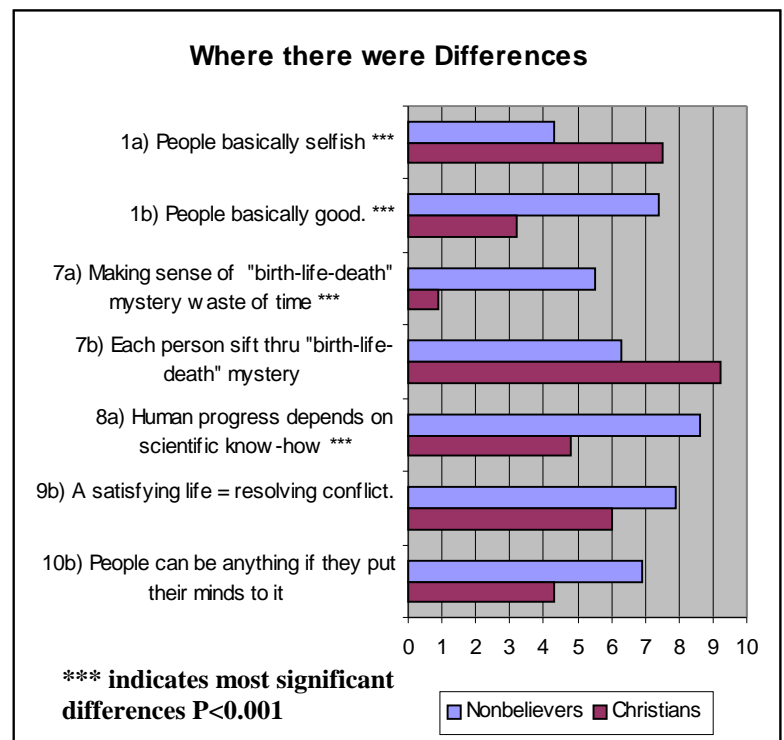
As we delve into the responses to the more detailed questions, we see immediately that in many cases, there is no difference between group profiles of non-believers (atheists & humanists) and Christian. The last column in the tabulated results on the front page shows whether there is any statistical significance to the differences between the scores of Non-Believers and Christians. Fully half of the time, there is no significance. In statistical terms, we answer similarly when asked, for instance, whether moral values are an important measure of "human progress" (8b) or whether loyal citizens must march lock-step with government (6a, 6b). This flies in the face of our stereotypes of one another -- where atheists are painted as immoral hedonists and Christians are painted as blind followers. Both believing and non-believing participants in The Garrison-Martineau Project say moral values are important and that challenging government is a viable citizen-path.

Of course, we did find some significant differences between the Christians and nonbelievers. The "P value" noted in the last column indicates the probability that the differences reported could be due simply to random sampling differences. That is, if the two groups were really one group with normal variation and we split it at random, what is the probability we would see the differences we do. Where the probability is less than 5% ($P < 0.05$) that this random selection process would produce the measured differences, we begin to think the difference might be real. When the probability is less than 1% ($P < 0.001$), we begin to think we might be onto something.

Some of the most significant differences showed up on questions 1a & 1b. Christians mostly agreed that people were basically selfish while nonbelievers disagreed. Conversely, nonbelievers felt people were mostly good, while Christians disagreed. Schultz noted that this is in accordance with orthodox Christian teachings about human nature and sin. But this leads to a chicken-and-egg question: "Do Christians tend to feel that people are basically selfish because that is what they have been taught or did what they were taught resonate with what they already felt to be true about the world?" That is, perhaps atheists leave religion when they are told that people are primarily sinful because they this idea contradicts what they know of the world. Perhaps Christians remain in religion because the teachings confirm what they already feel to be true! The significant difference on question 10b about whether people can make up their minds to be whatever they wish to be seems to echo these differences about how basic human nature is experienced.

Question 8a about human progress depending upon science also shows a significant difference in responses, with Christians mostly neutral but nonbelievers agreeing strongly. In the teleconference, participants rejected the idea that science is not important to believers but felt that perhaps science played a slightly different role in the lives of nonbelievers. Although many Christians believe that atheists leave religion when they find contradictory scientific ideas, atheist callers indicated that the opposite was true in their own experience: they first left religion then discovered science. One of pastors on the call indicated that she felt the same "growing curiosity" and fascination with science described by the atheist caller. She had not needed to leave religion to feel the call of science.

From a process perspective, one of the most obvious discoveries was that pieces of the survey were not worded properly for nonbelievers. Participants were told that they could cross out "God" and "religion" and replace these words with any words they chose. However, most nonbelievers chose not to respond to questions containing these words. We suspect something similar occurred on question 7a. When asked whether trying to make sense of the "birth-life-death" mystery was a waste of time,



nonbelievers were lukewarm on the idea. Most likely, they interpreted "birth-life-death" mystery as "just another way" for the survey to "sneak in" religion and rejected it. Or, as one conference call participant observed, "Atheists do think about death, we just don't think it's very mysterious."

We do wish to pursue some of the questions in future surveys. Do we feel we "have it all sewn up"? Why do we differ so much in our confidence in our fellow man? Obviously, we must word questions to be equally meaningful to believers and nonbelievers. In the meantime, a hearty thank you to all participants!