Asking About Religion

Charles Kadushin

Introduction

A respected guide to practical questionnaire design observed in 1982 when discussing asking sensitive questions:

Readers may wonder whether religion is a sensitive topic. For several decades the U.S. Census and other government surveys have not asked about religion because of concerns about the separation between church and state. Nevertheless, non-government survey organizations have uniformly found that religion is not a sensitive topic and that reports of religious behavior are easy to obtain (Sudman and Bradburn 1983, 25)

Reports may indeed be easy to obtain, but that does not always mean that the answers are uniformly useful or easily interpretable. A review of measures of religiousness that collected over 100 scales warned that “measures of religion are likely to reflect Christian religious biases, even when not explicitly identified as measures of Christian religion” (Hill and Hood 1999). Christopher Scheitle, in his conclusion to an interesting learning module for the Association of Religion Data Archives on “Measuring Religiosity,” observes, “As you can see, religion is a complex concept to measure. It consists of different dimensions that may be correlated somewhat but are not perfectly associated with each other. Using different measures can
sometimes provide very different answers as to a person’s or society’s religiosity.” (Scheitle 2007) The problem, according to Towler (1974, 145), is that “[t]he construction of instruments for empirical measurement [of religiosity] appears to force researchers into using items drawn from a wide range of conventional orthodoxies.” In addition,

the moment a researcher uses the word ‘religion’ a ready-made set of attitudes will be thrust at him. As a rule these will be attitudes to ‘the church’, and any attempt to break through to the respondent’s own beliefs will be impossibly hampered. (Ibid.,157)

Survey research is based on the assumption that if standardized questions are put to a given class of respondents, the questions can be understood in a common framework and be meaningful to them; the respondents’ diverse answers can then be interpreted as signifying their different positions. While survey researchers formerly used their common sense and experience to develop usable questions and categories of responses (Payne 1951), elaborate forms of cognitive pretesting now seek to verify these assumptions (Presser et al. 2004).² Cross-cultural survey research remains problematic because common frameworks and understandings may vary across cultures even if the issue of translation from one language to another is put aside. If religion is considered to be a “culture,” then even within a given country there are serious cross-cultural issues when it comes to questions about religion (Warnecke et al. 1997). This is especially true if the questions trigger ready-made orientations characteristic of social institutions specific to different populations and traditions.

Many issues are involved in surveys of religious identification, practices, and beliefs, but I will limit them to three, drawing mainly on examples from differences between Jews and Christians: first, how to ascertain a respondent’s religion; second, questions about religious practices that are apparently easily understood by most
respondents but have different theological implications, depending of the faith of the respondent; and third, questions about “belief” in God. Theology is a complex subject and, since most of us live within a system that offers to give significance to life, we are all amateur theologians just as most people are amateur sociologists or psychologists. This tendency leads many survey experts into making mistakes.

**Which Religion?**

The first issue is the effect on the responses and resulting analyses of the way a survey determines which “religion,” if any, a respondent identifies as her or his own. To begin with, the very concept of religion is a relatively recent (if we grant that however defined, religion has been part of the human experience for millennia) Western philosophical one, though the origins of the term are clouded in mystery. The *OED Second Edition 1989* (Oxford University Press 1989) gives this etymological note:

> [a. AF. religiun (11th c.), F. religion, or ad. L. religi n-em, of doubtful etymology, by Cicero connected with releg re to read over again, but by later authors with relig re to bind, RELIGATE (see Lewis and Short, s.v.); the latter view has usually been favoured by modern writers in explaining the force of the word by its supposed etymological meaning.]

Given the ambiguities of “religion,” most surveys adopt the term as undefined but differ considerably in how the question is asked and in what detail. The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies has gathered over 150 high recent quality surveys in the United States covering the years 2000 to 2008 that ask about religion. They seem to break down between an open-ended
question "what is your religion, if any"? with responses then coded into categories, or two closed-ended versions, one such as "What is your religion, is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or something else," with variation in terms of what options they provided and whether Protestant was broken down into sub-groups such as Baptist, Presbyterian, etc. The second closed-ended option, more infrequent, is to leave out the word religion. Rather than "what is your religion, is it ...", the surveys ask directly for affiliations: "Are you Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, etc. ...". A few surveys ask about church attendance before getting into specific affiliations.

Here are some examples:

- ABC News/Washington Post asks open ended: “What, if anything, is your religion? [Do not Read (list of religions)]” and uses this follow-up: “[IF RELIGION is “Christian”] Is that a Protestant denomination, or not?” but also asks a “Born Again” or “Evangelical” question. (ICPSR Q 911)

- The General Social Survey (GSS) offers alternatives in the question itself: “What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?” and follows up with “IF PROTESTANT: What specific denomination is that, if any? (PROBE FOR EXACT DENOMINATION)” and “IF JEWISH: Do you consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or none of these? (PROBE FOR EXACT DENOMINATION).” (ICPSR Q 104 RELIG)

- Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey begins its series of questions on religion by asking “What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim,
Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?” (Pew Forum 2008)

- The European Social Survey after an exhaustive review of the literature (Billiet 2002) also settled on a two-part question: “Do you consider yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?” and if “Yes,” “Which one?” and if “No,” “Have you ever considered yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?” and if “Yes,” “Which one?” (European Social Survey, SOURCE QUESTIONNAIRE AMENDMENT 03 (Round 4, 2008/9))

- Other surveys begin with the idea that religious individuals attend some form of worship services. The American National Election Survey asks “IF R ATTENDS RELIGIOUS SERVICES: Do you mostly attend a place of worship that is PROTESTANT, ROMAN CATHOLIC, JEWISH, or what? IF R DOES NOT ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES BUT THINKS OF SELF AS PART OF CHURCH OR DENOMINATION: Do you consider yourself PROTESTANT, ROMAN CATHOLIC, JEWISH, or what? “ and follows up with “IF R ATTENDS CHURCH AND ATTENDS AS PROTESTANT OR ‘OTHER’: / IF R DOES NOT ATTEND CHURCH BUT THINKS OF SELF AS PART OF CHURCH OR DENOMINATION AND CONSIDERS SELF PROTESTANT OR ‘OTHER’: What church or denomination is that? “ (ICPSR NES 2008 V083188A: X3a.; V083188B: X3B).
The Baylor Study of Religion has a still different approach: “With what religious family do you most closely identify.” (The Association for Religion Data Archives, Baylor Religion Survey, 2005, Q 1).

The recent Panel Study of Religion and Ethnicity offered a quasi-apology in their introduction to questions about religion: “The next questions are about religious practices and attitudes. We realize that religion is important for some people and not for other people. Even if some questions do not apply to you personally, we would like to hear your opinions about religion so that we can understand how all Americans think about religion.” They began their questions by asking, “How often do you attend worship services, not including weddings or funerals?” Only then did they ask, without using the word religion, “Which of the following do you consider yourself? HAND R SHOWCARD CI_1.” The card contained:

“CHRISTIAN
MUSLIM
JEWISH
ROMAN CATHOLIC
LATTER DAY SAINTS OR MORMON
BUDDHIST
HINDU
AGNOSTIC (YOU ARE NOT SURE IF THERE IS A GOD.)
ATHEIST (YOU BELIEVE THERE IS NO GOD.)
SPIRITUAL, BUT NOT COMMITTED TO A PARTICULAR FAITH
DON’T GIVE RELIGIOUS THINGS MUCH THOUGHT

OTHER”

The various alternative had follow-up questions asking for more detail. If none of the categories fit, the survey asked “Is there some other religion that I haven’t mentioned that describes you, or are there religious practices, such as worship of ancestors, that you engage in?” Ten percent said “Yes” to this question.

The examples offered suggest that if “reports of religious behavior are easy to obtain” there is wide variation on the practices of obtaining these reports. Perhaps it is not all that easy.

Respondents may answer the question about “religion” as indicative of a general culture or ethnicity rather than a system of beliefs and practices (Voas and Crockett 2005; Voas and Day 2010; Day 2009). For example, the 2001 census of population in England, Wales, and Scotland for the first time included a question on religious identity. The options were: None, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist, Other, or a preference not to answer the question. Seventy-two percent answered Christian, but this in a country in which fewer than 7% attend church on any Sunday. In view of these findings and her in-depth interviews Day “conclude[s] that statements of religious affiliation are often expressions of social identities” (Day 2009, 99). In the United States, identification suggesting a cultural or ethnic marker rather than a religious preference is especially true of Jews. Identified Jews are much more likely than Protestants or Catholics to say they are not religious. In the GSS for 2008, 21% of Jews, 5% of Protestants, and 6% of Catholics said they were not religious. In the Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of 2007, 28% of Jews, 12% of members of Protestant Mainline Churches, and 9% of Catholics said religion was not too or not at all important in their life. In other surveys which asked for religious
preference, some respondents, whose parents were Jewish, did not answer that they were Jews by religion but, when asked about their ethnicity, said they were Jewish. The Canadian census in 2001 asked about both religion and ethnicity. Three hundred thirty thousand said they were Jews by religion, but 348,000 said they were Jews by ethnicity, or Jews by ethnicity in combination with some other ethnicity. If one excludes the Jews by ethnicity who said their religion was something other than Jewish, the combined Jews by religion and/or ethnicity in Canada was 370,520 (Shahar 2006). That is, 11% indicated that they were Jews by ethnicity but did not indicate that they were Jews by religion. The American Jewish Identity Survey (Mayer 2001) found that 28% of Jews were not Jews by religion. Finally, in Europe there is the phenomenon of “Catholique non-practicant” – someone who considers themselves part of the Catholic cultural tradition but does not actually practice Catholicism.

The growth of “secularism” in the modern world has been the subject of considerable controversy. “Secular” is a tricky concept implying a positive ideology rather than the mere absence of faith. For many respondents, however, “not traditionally religious” is a better bin. As Voas and Day note, “As religion becomes less influential in society, it is increasingly possible to have a religious identity without sharing a religious worldview. This phenomenon is first evident among minority groups; secular Jews have long been recognized as a distinct category, being culturally Jewish but not religious.” (Voas and Day 2010). Jews indeed tend to be more “secular” than non-Jews (Mayer 2001), Exhibit 9, and so may say they do not have a religion but nonetheless affirm that they are Jewish. But now “religious diversity in combination with widespread irreligion has now made self-identification as Christian meaningful. What it means may have little or nothing to do with religion, however” (Voas and Day 2010).
In sum, ascertaining what the answers might mean to the question “What is your religion?” that seemed so problematic for Jews, may be problematic for Christians as well. Those who think that counting the various religions in the United States would be immeasurably helped by having a U.S. Census include a question on religion should be careful what they wish for.

The Practice of Religion

The assumption of discovering nominal adherence to a religion is that this leads to some understanding, or at least exploration, of a respondent’s various practices and beliefs. Now we have a further issue: many concepts critical to a given religion are essentially untranslatable to another religion. A formulation of a belief or practice that is meaningful to adherents of one religion is not necessarily meaningful or equivalent to adherents of a different religion. Even within a Christian hegemony, equivalence of questions may problematic, let alone across religions with a common ancestry such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and much less across Asian religions whose notions of deities and the sacred may be quite at odds with Western religions. A few examples will illustrate these issues.

I begin with two examples on the practice of religion from the National Study of Youth and Religion (Smith and Denton 2005). I pick this study because it is methodologically sound and theologically sensitive. The two chosen examples display questions that can be readily understood by almost all teenage American respondents regardless of religious or cultural orientation, but whose theological interpretation depends heavily on the particular religious or ethnic group being studied.

The first question is: “How often, if ever, does your family talk about God, the Scriptures, prayer, or other religious or spiritual things together?” Note that in the interests of appealing to as many religions and cultures as possible, the question violates one of the cardinal rules of
survey question formation – no “ors.” So we do not know whether the answers refer to God, the Scriptures (a very Protestant formulation),\(^8\) prayer or “spiritual things” or some or all of the above.

The responses to the question, sorted by the teenagers’ religious tradition as codified by Smith in Appendix D (Smith and Denton 2005), are reported in their Table 16. My tabulation is reported in Table 1, below.\(^9\)

Table 1: Percent talk about God, Scriptures, prayer or other religious or spiritual things by Type of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reltrad variable created by Chris Smith</th>
<th>How often, if ever, does your family talk about God, the Scriptures, prayer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At Least Once per Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Protestant</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDS</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffili</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other re</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterm</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conservative and Black Protestants often engage in this kind of talk; Mainline Protestants and Catholics less so; and Jews much less so. The differences between the three groups are within the bounds of .05 percent confidence intervals (the intervals are not reported in Smith and Denton but are derived from own tabulation). Do these differences reflect less piety or theological and cultural differences? I tend to the latter explanation though the data do not allow us to check this out.

The survey also inquired into personal religious practices, as reported in Table 11 (Smith and Denton 2005). The question at issue concerned a ritual involving candles: “Now I want to read you a list of different religious and spiritual activities. Please tell me whether you have done them during the last YEAR or not. Just yes or no…In the last year, have you [INSERT LIST A-H]: Burned candles or incense that had religious or spiritual meaning for you.” That burning candles is not considered trivial is suggested by the fact that the dust jacket for Soul Searching features a photograph of an earnest looking young woman holding a candle. Again, I report my own tabulations in Table 2 based on the Jewish oversample and the appropriate weights. These tabulations again differ slightly from those reported in Table 11 of Smith and Denton.
Table 2: Percent Who Burned Candles that had Religious or Spiritual Meaning by Type of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious tradition variable created by Christian Smith</th>
<th>Percent in the last year who burned candles that had religious or spiritual meaning for them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Protestant</td>
<td>13 100 1055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>23 100 482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>12 100 449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>35 100 811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>50 100 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter Day Saints</td>
<td>5 100 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>9 100 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions</td>
<td>19 100 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>24 100 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21 100 3367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between Jews and others are outside the confidence limits. As part of Jewish ritual, candles are lit on the eve of Sabbath, Friday night, on Festivals, and on Hanukah, though despite the wording of the question, the teenager may have observed them being lit rather than having lit them him or herself. It is not implausible, however, that half may actually have lit the candles themselves, although non-ritual occasions are not ruled out. Does this mean that the question indicates that Jews are more pious or “religious” than others? Hardly. In any case, the iconic jacket photo does not suggest any familiar Jewish ritual. Further, although the candles are likely to be lit by Jews in a family setting the ritual may not be regarded by Jews as talking about God or Scriptures (words with heavy Christian resonance) with one’s family.
In general, religious acts and rituals are central to traditional Judaism and are often practiced in the home rather than in a synagogue. The concept of Mizwot – poorly translatable as religious acts or commandments – is central to Rabbinic Judaism. The Mizwot cover a wide range from prescribing charity to the poor, funeral practices for the dead (the highest good deed since the dead cannot repay acts of “loving kindness” – *gemilut hasadim*), prayers at appropriate occasions, blessings before and after every meal, to blessings for lighting candles on Friday night, to give but a few examples. As noted, a significant portion of Jews who respond to survey questions asking for their “religion,” are in both the United States and Israel, self-proclaimed “not religious.” Especially in Israel, however, many who light candles Friday night do not necessarily consider themselves “religious” (Liebman and Katz 1997).

**Religious Beliefs**

We now turn to the difficult matter of beliefs, rather than practices. Despite Maimonides’ Aristotelian influenced attempt to systematize Jewish ideas into a catechism of 13 principles, traditional Judaism does not have catechisms, nor, in fact is there such a thing as a formal “belief in God.” Rather, Judaism emphasizes the *experience* of God. God is experienced, for example, in the ordinary ritual of reciting a blessing over bread at the beginning of every meal and is the occasion for “normal mysticism” (Kadushin 1972). The blessing is, “Blessed are thou, God, who brings bread forth from the earth.” Notice the direct, mystical “I –Thou” relationship with God, and then the interesting switch to the third person, “who brings” somehow normalizing the experience and making it an everyday occurrence.

Further, despite the tendency of surveys, even those conducted under Jewish auspices, to inquire about a “belief” in God, this is a notion foreign to traditional Judaism. Such a question is theologically incorrect for many Jews. Cohen Center surveys generally use the word
“experience.” For example, in a survey of undergraduate college students that used a random sample on eight college campuses, both Jews and non-Jews were asked, “To what extent is each of the following statements true about the way you practice Judaism (your religion)? It helps me experience G-d (or higher powers).” On a scale of one (Not at All) to five (Very Much), 48% of the Jews chose one or two whereas 49% of the non-Jews had these scores (n for Jews was 864 for the random sample of Jews and 1928 for non-Jews). The differences might have been substantial had the question rather asked about “belief” or “existence.”

The only national survey that I could find that asked about experience of G-d rather than belief in G-d was Exploring religious America: A poll conducted for Religion & Ethics Newsweekly and U.S. News & World Report by Mitofsky International and Edison Media Research March 26 - April 4, 2002. They asked, “In general, how often would you say you have experienced G-d’s presence or a spiritual force that felt very close to you?” Again, note the use of “or” by these experienced survey researchers. There were only 38 Jews, 1.9 percent of the sample. Twenty-eight percent chose very often as compared with 38% of the Catholics, 50% of the mainstream Protestants, and 58% of “Other Christians,” which includes respondents who said they were Christian but not Protestant or Catholic. The Jews are likely to be more “secular” with this formulation, but given their small number the confidence limits at .05 overlap with the Catholics.

In a more conventional approach, the year 2000 GSS asked, “Which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God: don’t believe in God; don’t know and no way to find out; believe in higher power; believe in God sometimes; some doubts, but believe in God; no doubts about God’s existence.” Seventy-two percent of Protestants (n=675) and 67 percent of Catholics (n=291) had no doubts as compared with 35 percent of Jews (n=23). The number of
Jews was very small and the confidence limits therefore large, but the difference is still statistically significant. In this case, Jews do not overlap with Catholics. The answers are statistically accurate, but the question is theologically incorrect for Jews (Kadushin 1972), p. 43). As noted, Jews are more “secular” than most Americans, but asking them about their beliefs in the existence of God may not be the best way to go about discovering this.

A more theologically neutral item is the GSS: “Would you call yourself a strong [name of religion] or not very strong?” Combining the most recent administrations of this question in the years 2000 and 2002 which aggregate to an n of 111 Jews, we get the following: Protestant 42% Strong (n=2981), Catholics 36% Strong (n=1352), Jews 33% Strong (n=111).

Jews lag behind Christians in expressing strong adherence to their religion, but the differences are far less than for more overtly theological items. But Jews are also much more likely to have at least a BA and be more politically liberal than Christians, both of which may be said to lead to secularization. Education, despite popular discourse to the contrary, is not much related to strong feelings about one’s religion, neither in the GSS nor for Jews in a large sample in the NJPS 2000/2001 (the latter with denominational movement, age, and region controlled). But political liberalism, another aspect of life reputed to promote secularism is indeed somewhat related in that 28 percent of liberals (n= 997) but 38 percent of others (n= 2985) are strong about their religion. Recall that Jews tend to be more liberal. Among the liberals, the differences between Jews and Christians in the proportion who say call themselves strong in their religion fades: Of the politically liberal Protestants, 39% (n=386) say they are strong, 27 percent of the Catholics (n=252), and 33 percent of the Jews (n=39).
Conclusion

Differences and similarities between religions are important to assess, but evaluation can be reasonably done only if it is possible to construct items that are theologically meaningful, or at least neutral, in the religions that are compared. This is a very tough call and requires considerable study of the religion at issue. There are those who feel that because surveys tend to invoke words such as “religion” which imply conventional institutional responses, non-directive qualitative ethnographic-styled interviews may be the only way to uncover the subtleties of spirituality and feelings about higher powers (Towler 1974; Day 2009; Voas and Day 2010). I am not prepared to surrender the ability to make quantitative, large-scale investigations into comparative studies of religion. Surveys are of course a blunt instrument. Though surveys about religion in North America and Europe are conducted in an atmosphere of Christian hegemony and therefore are often not theologically correct for Jews and other minority religions, sensitivity to the theological issues can nonetheless lead to more useful comparative surveys and better understanding of the dominant religions.

I hazard a few suggestions. For ascertaining a respondent’s religion there are three possibilities:

“Would you describe yourself as: (with a list including none)” followed up especially for “nones” such as “Were you brought up as ...” Or;

Open-ended, as ABC News asking about religion, but not giving a list. Plus follow-ups.

Or, which gets at the salience:

Would you describe yourself as belonging to a religion? If yes, (list the options).

More testing of these alternatives would be useful. On beliefs, one should realize that cognitive questions inevitably reflect a particular religion’s catechism, if the religion has one.
Unless one wants to probe specifics about adherence to a given religion’s formal statements, cognitive questions should be avoided. While the cognitive questions used in most surveys, for example, about belief in God, would seem, on the face of it, to be relevant to the over 90% of U.S. respondents who are Christian, the work by Day and others, cited above, suggest that even for Christians, the questions encourage misplaced concreteness and trigger stereotyped answers that are misleading and not thoughtful.

Better to focus on experience, some of which may be personal and not necessarily congruent with institutionalized religion, but does include “spirituality.” William James (1902) in exploring the *Varieties of Religious Experience* had some good ideas about which questions to ask. His conclusions about the validity of religious experiences in terms of W. I. Thomas’ famous aphorism, “If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928). Claimed mystical, spiritual, or religious experiences do have observable consequences.

In sum, though we seem to know what information we desire in surveys about religion, and have produced much data, we ought to take a step back and better explore our assumptions.
References


---

1 Italics in the original.

2 Though we seem more adept at finding problems with questions rather than knowing how to fix these problems.

3 The Western European bias is noted by (Brechon 2009). “Les questions ont, néanmoins, souvent un soubassement culturel chrétien et ne sont pas très adaptées aux pays incarnant d’autres traditions et aux minorités religieuses en Europe. Par exemple, la conception
des divinités des cultures asiatiques est très mal mesurée par ces questionnaires.” He also notes that in France Muslims are consistently under-represented in these surveys.


5 This percentage of “ethnic only” is possibly smaller than in the United States since Canadian Jews tend to be observe more Jewish ritual practices than American Jews ((Shahar 2006), p. 2).

6 These were Jews by background – one of their parents was Jewish or they were brought up Jewish but did not answer the question what is your religion by saying Jewish and had no other religion.

7 For an interesting review of some current issues in the Jewish context see Shenhav (2007). For a general review of the state of secularization in contemporary societies see Finke and Stark (2003) and Gorski (2003).

8 OED: “1. (Usually with capital initial.) a. The sacred writings of the Old or New Testament, or (more usually) of both together; Holy Writ; the Bible. Often with holy prefixed.”

9 The National Study of Youth and Religion, www.youthandreligion.org, whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith, of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame and Lisa Pearce, of the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I have retabulated the data and collapsed the categories using Stata 10’s survey procedure and used the weight that includes the oversample of Jews so as somewhat to increase the precision over Smith and Denton’s report that appears to have used the weights appropriate for post stratification without the oversample of Jews, though our results differ here and there only by a percentage point or two.
10 The unfortunate scenes of special Orthodox teams in Israel collecting body parts after a suicide bombing for a proper Jewish burial can be understood in this context. It is the mizwah of gemilut hasadim.

11 The candles that are referred to in the blessing are not and do not become holy. Rather, by lighting the candles the person lighting them, or those assenting by saying amen, become holy by practicing the mizwah.

12 My tabulation using Stata 10 and the survey weights, from data downloaded from the ARDA site.

13 The ARDA site was used but the data sets were downloaded and recoded for the present analysis. Note that the question merely says “strong Catholic,” or “strong Jew,” etc., leaving the definition of what it means to be “strong” or what “strong” might further modify such as “believer” up to the respondent. If the question said “strong believer in Catholicism” for example, the question would not be theologically neutral.