

Learning to Love God in a World of Growing Skepticism and Secularism

North American Christian Convention – July 13, 2016

Event Webpage: www.worldvieweyes.org/NACC16.html¹

Richard Knopp, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy & Christian Apologetics
Project Coordinator, Room For Doubt (www.roomfordoubt.com)

Email: rkknopp@lincolnchristian.edu
Lincoln Christian University

Room For Doubt is a grant-funded program that provides learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, address the concerns of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and represent the Christian message to those who are skeptical about its claims. One of its components is a six-week message and curriculum series for churches and parachurch ministries.

Introduction

A. **Primary session objective:** To offer a comprehensive case for why one should learn to love God and choose the Christian way of life instead of one of its many alternatives.

1. To identify major alternatives to the Christian faith in a memorable way.
2. To expose critical weaknesses in these alternative ways of life.
3. To demonstrate how the Christian way of life is “better” than these alternatives.
4. To encourage your own faith and facilitate fruitful conversations with others who have questions and criticisms about the Christian faith.

B. **A Christian “apologetic.”**

1. Popular but mistaken perceptions.
2. Must utilize reason (1 Peter 3:15).
3. Must appeal to more than mere reason.
 - a. Mark 12:30 (cf. Deut 6:4)
 - b. Compare Matt 16:13-16 and John 21:15-17
 - c. The ultimate objective: _____ **LOVE**
4. The undeniable need, both inside and outside the church.
 - a. Churched doubters and “dropouts”
 - (1) Significantly doubted their faith? _____ **38%**.
 - (2) Can’t ask their most pressing life questions at church? _____ **36%**.
 - (3) At some point, felt like rejecting their parents’ faith? _____ **32%**.
 - (4) “Churched Teens”: No longer active in church in their 20s? _____ **59%**.
[Barna Research]
 - b. The rise of the Nones
 - (1) Adults: 1990 = 8.1%; 2007 = 15.3%; 2014 = _____ **22.8%**.
 - (2) 18-29 year olds: 2007 = 22%; 2012 = 32%; 2014 = 36% (18-23 yr olds)

¹ The event webpage will provide this handout material (with and without blanks filled in), an enhanced handout with more information, slides, and other resources for this session. Resources for other presentations by Dr. Knopp can be found at www.worldvieweyes.org.

C. Types of Christian apologetics

1. **Negative:** Replying to specific criticisms to show that Christianity is _____ **NOT FALSE** (e.g. Matt 28:11-15; Acts 26:22-32; Acts 17:5-8; the problem of evil).
2. **Positive:** Providing considerations to show that Christianity is _____ **TRUE** (e.g. evidences in nature, miracles, fulfilled prophecy, reliability of scripture, social benefits, personal experience).
3. **Neutralizing:** Showing that the alternatives are _____ **PROBLEMATIC** or _____ **UNLIVABLE**.

II. Identifying the Major Worldview Alternatives

A. Christian Theism (*theos* = Greek for “God”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **C** _____ **CREATOR GOD**
 - b. **S** _____ **SAVING GOD**
 - c. **I** _____ **INCARNATE GOD**
2. Basic theme: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”
3. Object illustration: A _____ **CROSS**.
4. A foundation and motivation for learning to _____ **LOVE** God.

B. Deism (*deus* = Latin for “God”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **C** _____ **CREATOR**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSENT GOD**
 - c. **N** _____ **NATURAL REVELATION ONLY.**
 - d. **T** _____ **TRANSCENDENT**
_____ **ONLY**
 2. Basic theme: “God is gone. We are endowed with reason. Use it!”
 3. Object illustration: _____
GRANDFATHER CLOCK
 4. Cultural connections
 - a. Notable examples: Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine; Antony Flew, a recently converted famous atheist; Donald Trump(?).
 - b. Most American teens are “moral therapeutic deists” (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005, 2009).
 5. Biblical connections (2 Tim 3:5; Matt 22:29; 1 Cor 2:4-5).
 6. Key questions and criticisms.
-
-

C. Pantheism (and New Age)

(cosmos = Greek for “world” or “universe”; (pan = all) + (theism = God)

1. Overview ideas

- a. **A** _____ **ALL** is God.
- b. **I** _____ **ILLUSION** of this world.
- c. **M** _____ **MYSTICAL** awareness.

2. Basic theme: “Connect with the oneness of the universe.”

3. Object illustration: _____ **YIN YANG**

4. Specific concepts and terms: *Atman* (the true self) is *Brahman* (the One); Samsara (the wheel of rebirth = reincarnation); Karma (works-produced principle that determines future incarnations).

5. Cultural connections: Hinduism; Taoism; some forms of Buddhism (e.g. Richard Gere, Steven Segal, Phil Jackson); New Age (e.g. Shirley Maclaine); Animism; Wicca; Yoda in *Star Wars*; Scientology (e.g. John Travolta, Tom Cruise); Deepak Chopra; Eckhart Tolle; *Lion King*; Oprah.

6. Biblical connections

- a. Gen 3 (The serpent and Adam/Eve)
- b. Acts 17:16-33 (The Stoic philosophers)

7. Key questions and criticisms.

D. Secular Humanism (“Modernism”)

1. Overview ideas

- a. **N** _____ **NATURE ONLY**
- b. **O** _____ **OPTIMISTIC**
- c. **S** _____ **SCIENCE/REASON**
- d. **E** _____ **EVOLUTION**

2. Basic theme: “We can do it!”

3. Object example: _____ **LEGOS**

4. Cultural connections: Charles Darwin; Richard Dawkins; Carl Sagan (original “Cosmos” TV series); Neil deGrasse Tyson and the new “Cosmos” TV series; Bill Nye the science guy; Michael Shermer; Bill Maher; Berenstain Bear’s *Nature Guide*; Spock from *Star Trek*; *The Titanic*; *Mission Impossible*; *CSI* TV series; *Numb3rs*; *Criminal Minds*.

5. Biblical connections (Hosea 12:6; Mark 10:23-25; Acts 17 Epicureans; Luke 12:15-23; Luke 15:11-14; Matt 16:26; Phil 3:18-19).

6. Key questions and criticisms.

E. **Nihilism** (*nihil* = Latin for “nothing”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____ really matters. **NOTHING**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSURDITY** of Life (“I don’t care”; “I give up”)
 - c. **P** _____ **PESSIMISTIC** outlook.
2. Basic theme: “We got nothing, and we’re going nowhere.”
3. Object illustration: A _____ **TOILET**
4. Cultural connections: “Murder by Number”; “Final Destination”; “Bohemian Rhapsody”; Douglas Adams’ *Hitch Hiker* “trilogy”; John Cage; “Seinfeld”; Kurt Cobain, Columbine shootings; Samuel Beckett.
5. Biblical connections (Eccl 2:10-11).
6. Key questions and criticisms.

F. **Atheistic Existentialism**²

1. Background (Camus; Sartre)
2. Overview ideas
 - a. **F** _____ **FEELINGS**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSURDITY OF LIFE**
 - c. **D** _____ **DEFINE YOURSELF TODAY**
3. Basic theme: “Life is absurd. Be free and have fun.”
4. Object illustration: Mr. _____ **POTATO HEAD**
5. Cultural connections: Friedrich Nietzsche; John Paul Sartre; Albert Camus; a lot of middle school, high school, and college youth! Ferris Bueller; the character “Jack” in the movie *Titanic*; *Groundhog Day*; *Dead Poets’ Society* (*carpe deum*); Hugh Hefner.
6. Biblical connections (Phil 3:17-21; 1 Pet 4:1-5).

² Existentialism can be *ATHEISTIC* (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) or *THEISTIC*. *Theistic* forms stress having a direct encounter and relationship with some higher power. They minimize or reject the importance of doctrine, scripture, or history in favor of personal experience and communication with God.

7. Key questions and criticisms.

.....
.....
.....
.....

G. Postmodernism³

I. Overview ideas

- a. **F** _____ FRAGMENTATION
- b. **U** _____ UNCERTAINTY
- c. **R** _____ RELATIVISM

- 2. Basic theme: “Different strokes for different folks.”
- 3. Object illustration: A _____
REMOTE CONTROL
- 4. Cultural connections: Madonna; Britney Spears; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Lost*; *Inception*; Reality TV shows; *Modern [Postmodern?] Family*.
- 5. Biblical connections (Deut 12:8; Isa 5:20).
- 6. Key questions and criticisms.

.....
.....
.....
.....

III.A Summary of the Alternatives (John 6:67-68)

- A. Incomplete
- B. Rationally Inconsistent
- C. Existentially Unsatisfying
- D. Pragmatically Unlivable

IV. Loving God by the Way You Live—The Ultimate Christian Apologetic (see the graphic below).

- A. Individual Integrity
- B. Personal Involvement
- C. Relational Investments
- D. Social-Academic Influence
- E. Cultural Impact
- F. Apologetic Interaction

³ “Postmodern” often refers to *cultural* characteristics. “Postmodern-ISM” is a *philosophical position* that questions the possibility of universal truth and values. Often, this distinction is not adequately made. I suggest that the church adapt to a postmodern *culture* but be careful not to be unduly influenced by strong forms of postmodernist *philosophy*.

