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

(Extended Outline)

North American Christian Convention - July 13, 2016

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

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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.
 - 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 concerns about the Christian faith.

B. A Christian "apologetic."

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 (4) "Churched Teens": No longer active in church in their 20s?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

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¹ The event webpage will provide the session handout (with and without blanks filled in), an "extended outline" with more information, presentation slides, recordings, relevant book and website resources, and more. Materials for other presentations by Dr. Knopp can be found at www.worldvieweyes.org.

 Negative: Replying to specific criticisms to show that Christianity is NOT FALSE (e.g. Matt 28:11) 				
		26:22-32; Acts 17:5-8; the problem of evil).	(c.g. 1 latt 20.11-13, 7 cts	
	2.	that Christianity is in nature, miracles, fulfilled prophecy,		
		reliability of scripture, social benefits, persona		
	3.	Neutralizing : Showing that the alternative PROLEMATIC or	s areUNLIVABLE.	
II.	Ident	tifying the Major Worldview Alte	ernatives	
	A. Ch	ristian Theism (theos = Greek for "God')		
	1.	Overview ideas		
		a. C	CREATOR GOD	
		b. S		
		c.		
	2.			
	3.			
	4.	A foundation and motivation for learning to _		
		ism (deus = Latin for "God") Overview ideas a. C	CREATOR	
		b. A		
		c. N	NATURAL REVELATION ONLY	
			TRANSCENDENT	
		ONLY		
	2.	Basic theme: "God is gone. Use Your God-g	iven reason."	
	3.	Object illustration: GRANDFATHER CLOCK		
	4.	 Cultural connections a. Notable examples: Thomas Jefferson; The converted famous atheist; Donald Trump b. Most American teens are "moral therape Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of the content of the content	(?). utic deists" (Christian Smith, Soul	
	5.	Biblical connections (2 Tim 3:5; Matt 22:29; 1	-	
	6.	Key questions and considerations.	-7-	

C. Types of Christian apologetics

Dr. Rich Knopp, "Learning to Love God in a World of Growing Skepticism and Secularism"

a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?

b. God's power: If God is powerful enough to create the universe, why should we think that He cannot interact with the universe (e.g. miracles, the incarnation)?

- c. Do you <u>ever pray</u>? If yes, why do you pray if you believe that God can't, or won't, interact with the universe?
- d. Deism offers a God who is really <u>not all powerful</u> (i.e., He is not able to affect nature and history) and He is <u>not necessarily personal</u> (i.e., He is just a force of some sort).
- e. Deism leaves us with a God who is <u>only transcendent</u>, not "with us" (cf. Immanuel in Matt 1:23).

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

- I. Overview ideas
 - a. A ______ALL is God.
 - b. | 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; Rhonda Byrne, "The Secret"); 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 considerations.
 - a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?
 - b. <u>If everything is ONE</u>, how can there be any real or ultimate distinction between "good" and "evil"?
 - c. Why try to follow the "<u>right path</u>" (e.g. 8-fold path in Buddhism) if there is no ultimate distinction between "right" (good) and "wrong"?
 - d. Pantheism leaves us with a <u>merely immanent</u> God and not a God who is transcendent. Even so, this God does not act in *specific* ways in nature or history.

D. **Secular Humanism** ("Modernism")

I. Overview ideas

a.	N_{\perp}		NATURE ONLY		
b.	0		OPTIMISTIC		
c.	S _	s	CIENCE/REA	SON	
d.	Ε		EVOLUTION	J	

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 consideration
 - a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?
 - b. How do you account for the <u>origin of the universe</u>? (The dominant scientific consensus is that the universe *began* at some point. How?)
 - c. How do you account for the <u>origin of life</u>? (While the claims of atheistic Darwinism must be addressed, Darwinism is not relevant without existing life. How did life itself begin?)
 - d. Is there any genuine meaning to human existence?
 - e. Do you believe in <u>human freedom</u>? If humans are merely "matter in motion," how can humans have genuine freedom? [Note the candid honesty in the quotes below.]

Rosenberg quotation: "Why is there a universe at all? No reason at all. Why is there a multiverse in which universes pop into existence for no reason at all? No reason at all! It's just another quantum event. What science and scientism tell those who hanker for more is 'Get over it!'" (Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions*, Kindle, pp. 38-39).

Whitesides quotation: "Most chemists believe, as do I, that life emerged spontaneously from mixtures of molecules in the prebiotic Earth. How? I have no idea. . . . On the basis of all the chemistry that I know, it seems to me astonishingly improbable" (George Whitesides, *Chemical & Engineering News* 85 [2007]: 12-17).

Crick quotation: "... an honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense . . . [the origin of life] is 'almost a miracle.'... Every time I write a paper on the origin of life, I swear I will never write another one, because there is too much speculation running after too few facts." (Francis Crick, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, 88, 153).

Rosenberg quotation: "The love of stories comes to us in a package that also includes the illusion of free will, the fiction of an enduring self, and the myth of human purpose. A scientistic worldview has to give up all of that.... So, individual human life is meaningless, without a purpose, and without ultimate moral value" (Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* [Kindle, p. 19]).

E. **Nihilism** (*nihil* = Latin for "nothing")

Ι.	Ov	Overview ideas			
	a.	N	really matters	. <mark>NOTHING</mark>	
	b.	Α	ABSURDITY	of Life ("I don't	
		care"; "I give up")			
	c.	P	PESSIMISTIC PESSIMISTIC	outlook.	
2.	Basic theme: "We got nothing, and we're going nowhere."				
3.	Ob	ject illustration: A	TOILET		
4.	Cultural connections: "Murder by Number"; "Final Destination"; "Bohemian Rhapsody"; Douglas Adams' <i>Hitch Hiker</i> "trilogy"; John Cage; "Seinfeld"; Kurt Cobai Columbine shootings; Samuel Beckett.				
_	D·I	P I (* 75 IO II)			

- 6. Key questions and considerations.
 - a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?
 - b. Do you love or care about anyone?
 - c. Are you looking forward to anything?
 - d. Do you think that anything is "always wrong?"
 - e. Nihilism offers no basis for love or concern; no reason to look forward to anything; no basis for thinking, for instance, that it would be "wrong" for someone to abuse them, steal from them, or kill them.
 - f. Nihilists are unavoidably inconsistent in how they actually live.

John Cage: "I have nothing to say and I am saying it."
[BUT, he says]: "I became aware that if I approached mushrooms in the spirit of my chance operations, I would die shortly. So I decided that I would not approach them in this way."

F. Atheistic Existentialism²

- I. 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, define yourse	lf, and have fun."
ŧ.	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; purely subjective sexual orientation (i.e., there is no human nature).
- 6. Biblical connections (Phil 3:17-21; I Pet 4:1-5).
- 7. Key questions and considerations.
 - a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?
 - b. Do you believe that you are <u>free</u> to act as you wish? <u>How do you explain this freedom</u> in a universe that seems totally deterministic?
 - c. Do you think that <u>anything</u> is "always <u>wrong</u>?" (See this item under Nihilism above.)
 - d. If it were possible, would it be good if there were some deep meaning to human existence?

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.

G. Postmodernism³

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()\	erview	Ideas
 \sim	/ CI VIC VV	IUCas

a.	F	 FRAGMENTATION		
b.	U	 UNCERTAIN	VTY	
C.	R	RELATIVISM		

- 2. Basic theme: "Truth totally depends on your perspective."
- 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 considerations.
 - a. Why do you believe or feel as you do about life?
 - b. Do you think that <u>truth is always relative?</u> (One cannot answer "yes" to this question without contradiction.)
 - c. Would you say that "there is <u>no absolute truth"?</u> (One cannot answer "yes" to this question without contradiction.)
 - d. What do you think about the capabilities of <u>science</u> and of <u>human reason</u>? (If one thinks that science and reason can give real "truth," then this counts *against* their postmodernist view. If one strongly denies truth to science and reason, how do they explain the apparent progress of science and reason?)
 - e. Do you think that <u>anything</u> is "always <u>wrong</u>?" (See this item under Nihilism above.)
 - f. If it were possible, would it be good to have genuine meaning for human existence?
 - g. Inevitably, postmodernists are inconsistent in how they live their life.

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

- A. Explanatorily 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

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*.

LOVING GOD BY LIVING a Christian Worldview— The Ultimate Apologetic

"I ... implore you ... to WALK in a manner worthy of the calling ..." (Eph 4:1).

"... We request and exhort you ... that as you received from is instruction as to how you ought to WALK and please God ... that you excel still more" (1 Thess 4:1).

"I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children WALKING in the truth" (3 John 1:4). [NASV]

