

Seminar: Love Your Atheist Neighbor, Urbana 2015

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- Author, *Faith is Like Skydiving: And Other Memorable Images for Dialogue with Seekers and Skeptics*. IVP
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Thesis: Reaching out to our atheist neighbors requires two things from us: truth and love.

I. Who is my atheist neighbor?

- A. The Modern Atheist
- B. The Postmodern Atheist

II. The Modern Atheist (or “modernist” atheist)

- A. Examples: “New” atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennet
- B. Often say that religion is not only false but harmful
- C. Science-only
- D. Anti-Bible
- E. Require proof or certainty
- F. Image: Brick
- G. Philosophical roots
 1. Positivism, empiricism, evidentialism, objectivism
 2. Auguste Comte, David Hume, William Clifford
- H. Outreach
 1. Support science
 2. Present a cumulative case (example: arguments in a court of law)
 3. Question materialism (definition: matter and energy is all there is)
 4. Be patient. This can be long, hard work.

III. The Postmodern Atheist

- A. Examples: Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty (pragmatist), Jacques Derrida
- B. Tribalism: truth and reality are divided into the “truths” and “realities” of all human communities. There is no single truth or single reality.
- C. Rejection of “metanarrative” (rejection of any single overarching story/truth).
- D. Concerned for justice, power dynamics, marginalized communities
- E. Image: pillow
- F. Philosophical roots
 1. Perspectivalism, relativism, pragmatism, Marxism
 2. Immanuel Kant, Frederick Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jean-Francois Lyotard
- G. Outreach
 1. Tell stories
 2. Share experiences together: read books, enjoy art, take trips
 3. Community service
 4. Approach the Bible as a library of stories, not merely a book of doctrine.
 5. Read up on slavery, women, LGBTQ in the Bible.

6. Focus on Jesus as a revolutionary, subversive figure

IV. Hybrid: the modern-postmodern atheist

- A. Image: Brick in a pillowcase
- B. Stylistically postmodern
- C. Substantively modern
- D. Outreach
 1. Begin with stories and experiences
 2. Gradually move toward science and evidence

V. Love, serve, pray -- outreach to modern and postmodern atheists

- A. The fruit of the Holy Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control (see Galatians 5) -- is an indisputable argument for the faith.
- B. On campus: ask questions, attend their academic events, eat meals together, find ways to serve, care about their family. See this essay for ideas:

<http://blog.emergingscholars.org/2015/10/loving-your-atheist-neighbor-part-1-urbana-preview/> (or visit the Emerging Scholars Blog and search for Rick Mattson, "Love Your Atheist Neighbor, Part 1")

- C. Invite atheist friends into quality Christian community. This is the strongest apologetic possible.
- D. Pray for their well-being. Pray against a hard heart. Watch to see what God is doing in your friend's life.
- E. Never repay insult for insult. Rather, return a blessing. Don't lose your cool.

Recommended Resources

Entry level

- *Faith is Like Skydiving: And Other Memorable Images for Dialogue with Seekers and Skeptics* by Rick Mattson
- *Letters from a Skeptic* by Greg Boyd and Edward Boyd

Mid-level

- *The Reason for God* by Timothy Keller
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *Philosophy of Religion* by Stephen Evans and Zachary Manis
- *The Universe Next Door* by James Sire.

Advanced

- *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, by Douglas Groothuis
- *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* by J.P. Moreland and W.L. Craig
- *Where the Conflict Really Lies* by Alvin Plantinga

Hi folks, If you'd like me to visit your campus or church, contact me via my website at rickmattsonoutreach.com. On campus, I offer evangelistic talks and a session called "Stump the Chump" where students can ask any question they wish about Christianity. For churches I offer "Preparing Kids for College," training in conversational evangelism, and an intro to apologetics. Thanks for coming to this seminar.