

Dear TLI Class of 2017:

I am grateful for the generous gift of your time and listening, very aware of my limitations in taking on a topic such as World Religions, and appreciate all the encouragement that I received afterwards.

Due to the limited time, we only covered a portion of what I had prepared, which was partly by design, because I was uncertain of where the group might want to go, and wanted to be able facilitate a good discussion regardless of the direction we took together. And I was unable to share some thought on how to open thinking and discussions with secular humanists in particular. So I wanted to recap a few points, and provide some more resources to you.

In my conversations with those who do not accept the Creator, I have found the Rodgers and Hammerstein proverb valuable:

Nothing comes from nothing; nothing ever could (from 'The Sound Of Music')

Basically, humanists want the kingdom of God, but without God. And so we see successors to the Tower of Babel being erected, be they scientific, academic, governmental, philosophical, and/or artistic. The problem is that God is the source of love and morality, so once He is removed, where will a society draw its ethics? One question that I have used effectively in the past is "where do rights come from?" But this is more argumentative than I want to be: as I presented last evening, I want to demonstrate [the respect that Paul showed the Athenians](#), and extend [the radical generosity of the Good Samaritan](#) (which, in essence, is the love of Christ). The point is, that unless the foundation is Christ, whatever we are building is on shifting sand and it will collapse. In the case of humanism, we are dealing with the inconvenient truth of sin, which leads to violence and death, despite any celebration of enlightenment or progress.

As Kari Jobe wrote: *We are the light of the world, we are the city on a hill, we gotta let the light shine.*

Or, as James says:

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Thank you for your servant leadership in such a time and place as this,

Tim

Jan 10 2017

Some further readings that have helped me (WARNING: These are rather meaty, and if digested well will still require the hard work of respect and generosity):

[An atheist found Christ in 2016](#), through years of pursuing science and reason (33pp, lots of math)

Jesus promised us wars and poverty, [a Nobel-winning economist looks at history, game theory, other modern constructs and agrees](#) (300+ pages, a book really)

A theist presents [an atheist who realizes that without God, there is no morality](#) (26 min video)

Ways to engage with secular humanists (and others):

- STYLE: gently question, don't lecture, don't point to experts, use personal language. Model a deeply personal faith that makes sense to you

- SOME QUESTIONS:
 - Ask if there is any meaning or purpose to life. Be a curious student, not someone setting up mousetraps.
 - Ask about relative vs. absolute thinking, and point out the good of some absolutes (e.g. "You said that 'there are no absolutes'. Is that an absolute statement?")
 - Ask if reason and pluralism can coexist
 - On morality, is shame merely an evolutionary construct? Or is shame sometimes useful? Or even necessary?
 - Ask about where rights and morality come from their particular worldview
 - Don't get sidetracked on hot button issues, no matter how hot they are for you. You want to walk people towards Christ, however slow the steps and indirect the route. He didn't get sidetracked.

- YOUR STORY: Share how your belief in God helps to establish meaning and purpose to life for you. My life matters. My family matters. You matter. What our country and our world decides matters. What we do--and choose to avoid doing--it really matters.

- PLAYING SEVERAL MOVES AHEAD
 - Provide time and space for the person to reflect on your conversations
 - Don't force difficult nods of agreement, instead go for smiles and laughs and "I never thought of it that way"s
 - Better to leave them wanting more (and setting up a future conversation) than beating a dead horse. Move back to other topics if the wind is no longer in your sails. Quality of conversation and building a relational bridge where many conversations can happen across many seasons and circumstances is more important than getting them to pray some scripted prayer before your next appointment.
 - Demonstrate that you understand their viewpoint, and respect that the humanist worldview comes from the person's experience and their starting point. Don't condescend.

From [the Humanist Magazine](#):

informed by science,
inspired by art, and
motivated by compassion.

Affirming the dignity of each human being,
supports individual liberty and opportunity
consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It
advocates participatory democracy and the
expansion of the open society,
standing for human rights and social justice.

Shared values between humanists and many christians:

- Reason (James 3; 1 Pet 3)
- Separation of church and state (John 18)
- Freedom (Isa 61/Luke 4; John 8; Acts 13; Rom 8; 2 Cor 3; Gal 5)
- Moral education (Titus 2)
- Development of science and technology (subdue the earth--Gen 1)
- Skepticism (test everything, hold onto what is good--1 Thes 5)

From [Quizlet](#):

	Secular Humanism	Biblical Christianity
Reality	Matter is eternal	Personal Creator
Mankind	Highest evolved life	God's image
Main Problem	Ignorance	Sin
Solution	Knowledge, science, education, democracy	Salvation through Christ, supernatural
Morality	Reason, people create own	Absolute from God
Death	Person dies, matter continues	Eternal life or separation
Value of human life	No special value, a part of evolutionary process	Life is precious, because God loves every person
Time view	Chronological snobbery	Unchanging Creator
Goals	Happiness in this life	Joy, now and eternally
History	No purpose, random	Moving in God's plan