

ENGAGING WORLD RELIGIONISTS

As the world shrinks we encounter more whose families or nations had, at least at one time, no exposure to Christianity.

Key beliefs: Whereas Christianity teaches that God saves us through the person and work of Christ, religions all teach that man gets to God by himself. They either replace salvation by grace with a salvation by works, or by a mix them. They may honor Jesus, even as a prophet (as in Islam), but they reject his divinity and his claim to be the sole Mediator between God and men.

Key approach: To realize that Jews, Muslims, Budhists, etc, are despite Islamic *Jihad*, just like us: sinful and insecure by nature, trying to make ends meet, and fearful of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

Key points: Our inability of ourselves to secure cleansing for our sins, a return to God, or fellowship with Him.

Key Question: “How are your sins atoned?” “How do you know that you have enough enlightenment to enter nirvana [Buddhism]/ done enough to enter paradise [Islam]?” “Since your founder died, what hope may you have to conquer death?”

Key texts: “The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply” (Ps. 16:4). “Jesus said . . . , ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (Jn. 14:6). Acts 4:12: “ . . . there is salvation in no one else [other than Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

TIPS FOR FOLLOW-UP

- *Prayer for the conversion and discipleship of contacts:* God alone can make the dead live, the blind see, and the deaf hear. Note that it was in “a place of prayer” that God opened Lydia’s heart (Acts 16:13-15).
- *Friendship:* As the saying goes, “They won’t care how much we know, until they know how much we care.” We see our contacts, then, not primarily as “pew fillers,” targets, or projects, but as new friends needing our love and investment of time. We befriend them short of compromising our welfare or witness.
- *Connection:* Depending on the type of contact and his or her location, we look to the Lord for openings to develop their interest in Christianity. Sharing relevant literature can be helpful, or making use of church events as stepping stones into the community of faith, or inviting to worship.
- *Accompaniment:* Any taking interest in investigating further the claims of Christ will need our presence. We cannot believe for them, but we can accompany them, being available to share how we came to faith; to give a reason for our hope (1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 4:5-6); introducing them to suitable Christian friends; attending with them small group studies or their first worship services.
- *Opening our homes:* They don’t care so much whether our homes are spotlessly clean, but whether we are authentic. They want to know that Christ is real to those listening to sermons as well as to those preaching them. In their minds, open homes point to open hearts. See Rosaria Butterfield’s *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*.



OUR MESSAGE



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“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word [literally, “preaching the glad tidings [of] the word”].” (Acts 8:4 [ESV])

ENGAGING NOMINAL “CHRISTIANS”

Jesus and the apostles teach us that outreach begins in the family and in the church.

Key beliefs: Nominal or cultural “Christians,” whether baptized as infants or attending church as adult adherents, agree intellectually with the Christian faith, but they are without conviction of sin, repentance, and saving faith in Christ.

Key approach: Since there is no dispute over the truth of Christianity, we focus on clarifying whether they have rightly understood the gospel, and on its application to their hearts.

Key points: Neither growing up in a “Christian” country or a Bible-believing family, nor going to church makes a person a Christian. Our sin needs to be felt and confessed to God, receiving Jesus Christ in faith as our personal Savior and Lord.

Key questions: “If you were to die today and God were to say to you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what would you say?” “How do you think the thief on the cross was saved, given he was nailed to his cross?”

Key texts: “Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (Jas. 2:19). “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). “Truly, truly, I [Jesus] say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3). Luke 18:13-14: “. . . the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, [literally, the] sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house”. 1 John 1:9-10: “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

ENGAGING SECULARISTS

After Pentecost, Jesus charged the apostles to take the gospel to the nations. Many we meet in today’s developed nations are secularist.

Key beliefs: Secularists are atheist (rejecting belief in God) or agnostic (believing that God is unknown or unknowable), typically deferring to science to account for our origin, operating from a rationalist and materialist view of life, and believing that this is it. Death is the end.

Key approach: We seek to “strike the seed of religion” (Calvin and Van Til). Everyone possesses the seed, for we are created in God’s image and have his law etched ineradicably on our constitutions. Thus, we can presume in conversation the existence, law, and coming judgment of God. These, secularists suppress in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-20, 31; 2:14-16). Yet, once restored to his or her consciousness, we may proceed to speak of God’s grace in Christ.

Key points: Man knows of God’s existence and of his accountability to Him. Denial of God is more a convenience of the heart than a conviction of the head. It requires humility and confession, for the refusal to believe in the true God goes hand-in-hand with the embracing of idolatry.

Key question: “What is it that gives you ultimate meaning in life?” (In other words, what god have you created to supplant the worship and service of the true God?). “How do you explain the reality of the human conscience?” (It cannot exist without law, but from whence does the law come [cf., Rom. 4:15].)

Key texts: “In the beginning God” (Jn. 1:1; cf., Jn. 1:1; Acts 17:24). “The fool says in his heart [not his head], ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1, 53:1). Ecclesiastes 3:11: “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart”. Ps. 8:1-9; 19:1-4; Acts 14:15-18, 17:22-31.

ENGAGING SECTS

Since New Testament times there have been rejections of orthodox Christianity.

Key beliefs: Sects retain vestiges of Christian teaching, but so distort the doctrines of revelation (Scripture), of God, of Christ, and of salvation, as to disqualify them as Christian.

Key approach: To deny their claims to authority (e.g., *The Book of Mormon* [1830]; *New World Translation* [JW, 1950]), To question their founders (Joseph Smith [Mormon] had 40 wives; Charles Taze Russell [JW] was divorced for alleged adultery, overpriced in his business interests, and had his writings rejected by JWs after his death).

Key points: Christ taught that he was one with the Father, yet was, as God-man, subject to him for the sake of our salvation (Jn. 6:38; 10:30). He said that the Spirit would guide his people into all truth, not that the Spirit would contradict that truth later on in history (Jn. 16:12-15). Christ commanded his disciples to teach *all* that he had commanded (Matt. 28:20).

Key questions: “Should you not be suspicious of a new ‘Scripture’ tailored to your sect’s belief, when the Bible, written over 1600 years by forty-plus authors (many of whom did not know each other), is used across the Christian church?” “When you alter Christian doctrine, eradicating the mystery [as in the denial of Christ’s divinity] aren’t you reducing God to the limits of your mind?” “If Christ is not divine, what power does he have to save us?” “What is your assurance you are saved?”

Key texts: 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Revelation 21:18-19; 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7.