Worldviews 1
Secularism: Secular Humanism & Marxism

1. INTRODUCTION

In this module we begin our three part consideration of “Alternatives to Christian Belief” (Section C). In particular, we tackle secularist worldviews, where reality is confined to this immanent/material frame, whether through some form of secular humanism, or resurgent metanarratives derived from Marxism. In the first session, we will practice one minute “big story” answers to tough questions, pray for non-Christian friends, and debrief the pre-reading for this module’s focus. I will share out of my dissertation work a case study of apologetics reframed as public theology, arguing for the place of diverse Sacred Texts in Secular Educational Curricula: “UnCommon Good: Peaceable Dialogue for Partisan Times.” This will carry into the second session of the lecture, where we will have open Q&A on how best to engage an increasingly hostile public square. In the third session of the lecture, we will construct a response to a populist argument for keeping religion out of schools, voiced by the lobby for “Secular Public Education”. Marxism is covered in the notes, but won’t occupy our attention in class, forming an optional focus for online students.

Next week, continuing with our exploration of “Alternatives to Christian Belief”, we address moral relativism. On what basis can we make any moral claims, saying what people “should”—or “ought to”—do? Facing charges of bigotry and homophobia, we will again apply our model of apologetics as public theology, and form a gracious and yet truthful response to rapidly changing sexual standards in western culture.

OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this module are to:

- Understand various secularist worldviews and the strengths of locating apologetics within a broader public theology, working for the flourishing of all in a pluralistic society
- Practice responding to Secular Humanists and Marxists concerning the place of religion in the public square, paying particular attention to the importance of presuppositions in apologetics.

OUTCOMES
On completion of this module, students should be able to explain the main sociological challenges posed by sceptics of Christianity, and offer a simple but multifaceted reply.
Aligned with the Unit Guide Outcomes, students should be able to:

Knowledge (know and understand):
- A4. Alternatives to Christian Belief
- A5. Strategies to defend and commend Christian faith

Skills (be able to):
- B3. Evaluate alternatives to Christian belief from a Christian perspective
- B4. Engage in Christian apologetics
- B5. Present an analytical evidence-based argument or perspective

Application (be in a position to):
- C3. Defend and commend the truth claims of the Christian faith

SESSION FLOW (lecture runs 6:15-9:00pm, breaks from 7:05-7:10pm, and 7:55-8:05pm)
- 6:15 Big Story responses & debrief the readings (20 minutes) +
  Talk/Case Study: “Uncommon Good” (65 minutes) … late break 7:40
- 7:45 Debrief Talk re: Public Theology, and practice response to forum question (15 minutes)
- 8:10 Workshop: Responding to the “Fourth R”, keeping religion out of “secular” schools (50 minutes)

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1 Paul dialogues with the Athenian council of Elders at Mars Hill (Acts 17)
2. BIG STORY “CAUGHT OUT” RESPONSES + READING REVIEW

“The big story is that God designed us all for good, but through our bad choices we’ve been damaged by evil. But, through Jesus’ life, death on the cross, and resurrection, we’ve been restored for better. If you’re humble enough to admit to God that you fall short, and ask Him to forgive you for the wrong you’ve done, putting God first, then you can connect with life to the full—what God always intended for you. Then you can join other Christ-followers, empowered by God’s Spirit, sent together to heal a hurting world, waiting for the day when God will set everything right by judging all the evil and restoring the whole universe.”

Class Activity 10.1 — 10 minutes

Using the post-it-notes from module one, two students will each select one of the five circles from “The Big Story”, then randomly choose a paper slip from that circle. Each student will take up to 1 minute to respond to this question or objection, as if in conversation with the person who posted the slip. Afterward, the class can unpack what did/didn’t work in this response, and other ways to dialogue.

(Wanting some encouragement evangelistically in “Answering Tough Questions”? See Benson 2010.)

Class Activity 10.2 — 10 minutes

Whether as a whole class, or in smaller groups, share your response to the pre-reading for this module:

- a question—something you don’t get, or want to clarify
- a challenge—something you disagree with, or want to nuance
- an implication—“so what” for our apologetic practice
- an application—something useful right now in your context

Consider how these readings relate to your life and witness in general and ministry context in particular. ... This is the ideal time to bring up whatever is confusing, or questions you have in regards to the course material, so don’t be shy!

If time permits, feel free to discuss the forum question from last module, or get a jump start on the question for this module: Respond to one of the following statements:
(a) “The public square, including neutral institutions like secular education, is no place for the imposition of some people’s religious perspectives upon all”; or (b) “Christianity has been unjustly privileged in the west for far too long. Equality demands affirmative action, silencing this powerful voice to let minority perspectives be truly heard.”
3. APOLOGETICS AS PUBLIC THEOLOGY IN THIS IMMANENT FRAME

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.1—Karl Marx

“The empires of the future will be empires of the mind [i.e. ideas].”—Winston Churchill

A person’s understanding of the world, their worldview (cf. Module 3), is the set of foundational presuppositions they use in evaluating and integrating everything they experience and learn. A person’s worldview guides their actions and dictates what the words they say really mean. It is their map for navigating the world.

To truly understand what a person is saying and why, and how they will understand what you are saying, you need to understand the person’s worldview.

Today’s most common atheistic worldviews are Secular Humanism and Marxism/Communism. Jeff Myers and David Noebel, of Summit Ministries—on both their website (also here) and their book, Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews—helpfully place these two worldviews within the most common constellations of beliefs and their various components:

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1 Communist Manifesto (1848) by Karl Max and Friedrich Engels
Looking at Secular Humanism and Marxism/Communism in more detail, here are the foundational beliefs:

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<th></th>
<th>Secular Humanism</th>
<th>Marxism/Communism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td>Humanist Manifestoes</td>
<td>Writings of Marx and Lenin</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communist Manifesto</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theology</strong></td>
<td>Atheism</td>
<td>Atheism</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophy</strong></td>
<td>Naturalism</td>
<td>Dialectical Materialism</td>
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<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td>Relativism</td>
<td>Communist ends justifies the means</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Biology</strong></td>
<td>Evolution</td>
<td>Evolution</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
<td>Non-Traditional Family</td>
<td>Abolition of home and church</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td>Socialism <em>(often, but not necessarily)</em></td>
<td>Socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics</strong></td>
<td>One world government</td>
<td>One world communism</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Human Nature</strong></td>
<td>Perfectible with good environment</td>
<td>Perfectible with good environment</td>
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What they share in common, tying this module together, is their thoroughgoing **materialism**. This world is all there is, and any legitimate explanation of reality can only appeal to material phenomena, excluding reference to transcendent forces supposedly above or below our material existence.

Both worldviews are entirely **secular**, meaning wrapped up in this time and this place, around which every other concern, even the divine—if God exists at all—must orbit. Progress in the here and now is our driving concern, not pie in the sky when we die which is oriented toward worship of an imaginary friend in the sky.

Charles Taylor, in his classic, *A Secular Age*, refers to this as “exclusive humanism”, in which we see ourselves as living purely within **this immanent frame**.

One scholar, Adrian Ivakhiv, summarises Taylor’s catchy phrase thus:

> What’s shared by all of these options [i.e, ways of being ‘secular’], however, is an underlying set of background assumptions that Taylor calls the ‘immanent frame,’ in which “the buffered identity of the disciplined individual moves in a constructed social space, where instrumental rationality is a key value, and time is pervasively secular. … this frame constitutes a ‘natural’ order, to be contrasted to a ‘supernatural’ one, an ‘immanent’ world, over against a possible ‘transcendent’ one” … (542). This immanent frame allows for an openness to ‘something beyond,’ but does not demand nor particularly encourage it. Rather, we live in specific contexts within which that frame is ‘spun’ in one direction or another—for instance, in academe it is spun in the direction of closure (i.e., immanence), but in other cultural contexts it may be spun in the direction of openness (to transcendence).

Our once “porous” (open/permeable) selves are now **buffered** against any spiritual forces by general disbelief and reduction of life to material reality. As such, our vision is reduced to physical existence—at most, like Marxism, seeing larger (typically biological or economic) patterns that drive history, but ignoring religion as irrelevant at best, and regressive superstition retarding human development at worst.

Charles Taylor, a fine philosopher and committed Roman Catholic, is more nuanced than most. And yet, the subsequent critique and use of his work in academic circles is constructed largely upon sociological analysis (see here for an example forum, sponsored by the collective Social Science Research Council, exploring “secularism, religion and the public sphere”). As such, references to “secularity” are prone to the same presuppositional problems we explored in Modules 8-9. At times, the secularisation thesis has been a self-fulfilling prophecy, charting the path secularists desire the world to take. We must be on guard against scholars smuggling anti-Christian presuppositions into their argumentation. Modern notions of “secularity” are in want of a faith-full biblical theology (something I’ve worked on here: Benson 2015b, 210-226.)
As Paul said, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental forces of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

So, how then might apologists best defend and commend Christ in this immanent frame?

Two suggestions. LISTEN, and DIALOGUE.

First, LISTEN. While this worldview analysis is crucial, there is a tendency among apologists to assume they have their interlocutor all figured out because the other’s “worldview” is identified. Frankly, this is arrogant, ignorant, and ultimately unhelpful. If our aim is first and foremost to win people, not arguments, then we must start and centre on our neighbour as a person. Lest we “reify” (also here) abstract beliefs and treat them as a living system, we must recognise that what is “most real” is the individual person in front of us. Worldviews gives us a broad map, but tell us nothing of precisely where this person is located. And it often reduces her desires, passions, loves and deepest identity as a fellow divine image bearer down to a series of dry propositions. Thus, we must listen carefully, and love our neighbour as witnesses of Christ.

Second, DIALOGUE. Think back to Module 2, the history of apologetics. I drew on Elaine Graham’s (2013) potted history to stake my personal conviction that apologetics today is best positioned as a type of public theology. Rather than aiming to win an intellectual argument, or simply persuading our neighbour to accept the gospel and follow Christ, apologetics is about carving out a space where our particular Christian voice and ethical convictions can be heard and valued in a pluralistic dialogue. It is oriented to the holistic flourishing (shalom) of all citizens, irrespective of whether or not they submit to Jesus’ Lordship. A Christ-centred, intelligible witness, must serve the common good. And this requires a dialogical approach that gives space for multiple perspectives, akin to what we explore in Module 2 of the “Theology for Everyday Life” course at Malvon: a practical theology critically interacting with worldly perspectives in pursuit of “truthful action”, where together we ask: What is going on? Why is it going on? What should be going on? Where’s the common ground? And How will we respond?
Perhaps you can now see why this is especially important in a secular age. Whether someone has an ‘open’ construal (i.e., open to the transcendent) or a ‘closed spin’ on reality in some form of exclusive humanism, all—for better or worse—are pragmatically focused on this immanent frame. How do our beliefs and practices impact upon material existence in the here and now? Over time, we may rightly press new believers and our culture as a whole to consider our earthly existence as woven into an all embracing tapestry of an eternal God, inviting people into “heavenly participation” as Hans Boersma calls it. In the meantime, however, there is wisdom to framing our apologetic interaction as the search for common ground toward the common good within our quotidian (i.e., everyday/mundane) lives.

Demonstrating the wisdom of following the way of Christ requires that we patiently dialogue with our neighbour, hearing her concerns, and acknowledging her wisdom, so that together we might make for humane co-existence and a healthy life for all in a post-Christendom context where the church no longer calls the shots. If we press harder than this, making imperative claims that the Other must believe and behave as we do, we fall into an ugly form of triumphalism and Christian colonialism that many today rightly resist as a danger to peace in multicultural society. Our loss of privilege in this contemporary context may feel like persecution, but it is actually an outworking of Jesus’ own principle of reciprocity: do to your neighbour as you would have them do to you. That is, a right and responsibility for one must be equally applied to all, lest we slip into religiously sanctioned discrimination. If sacrifice is required, Christians lead.

It’s tricky business finding an authentic public voice in a simultaneously secular, religious and pluralistic age. And yet, as apologists, this is our calling. So, as you explore the resources below, and engage with my talk, “Uncommon Good”, may you find a way to listen and dialogue that re-presents the Prince of Peace. May you defend and commend his Sovereignty inbetween the Garden where we fell and the Garden City where every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the flourishing of all.
Resource 10.1: Secular Apologetics as Public Theology

The following sources should give you a solid path into this huge field of debate. Turn to the reference list at this Module’s end for hyperlinks for the books/talks in their entirety. Try the “recommended readings” first.

Keller’s (2016) *Making Sense of God*—particularly the introductory chapters on “The Faith of the Secular” and his use of sociological data on why “Religion Isn’t Going Away” are excellent framing of our secular cultural context, and model of how to engage seculars. Similarly, Dan Paterson’s (2017: mp3 and *manuscript*) TED style talk from the Malyon “[Re]Evangelise” conference, reproduced in these notes, suggests ways of sharing the gospel with today’s many pragmatic atheists, speaking not simply to their minds but also to their hearts and longings.

As suggested above, contemporary sociological understandings of “secularity” are typically in want of a biblical theology. Toward this end, see Ford (2011) and Benson (2015b, 210-226). We also require a faith-full vision of the gospel and that can speak without triumphalism into the public sphere. On this, see Graham (2013), Volf (2011), Hunter (2010), John Stackhouse’s *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (2011; extensive summary here with concluding thoughts here), Newbigin (1991), Wallis (2014), and O’Donovan (1996). Tyson (2017) and Smith (2015) offer rich reflections from the angle of discipleship, unpacking the tensions and opportunities of following Christ in a secular age. For a powerful case study of where this has broken down, in the election of Donald Trump in America, brilliantly told by Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore, see his Erasmus Lecture “Can the Religious Right Be Saved?” (2016; video and *manuscript*). For more on public and political theology, browse the *International Journal of Public Theology* and the *Journal of Political Theology*.

What might this kind of “principled pluralism” look like today, where Christians advocate for many voices to genuinely dialogue in the public sphere toward the common good, each speaking out of (rather than bracketing) their deepest transcendent convictions? On this, see Volf (2014 and 2015 on the global role of religions more generally), Williams (2012), and Os Guinness’s work on *Global Religious Freedom* (2013 and website here). A constructive tension must be found between equal rights and protections for all in a pluralistic context, and the freedom of people to follow their core convictions, such as protecting the freedom of religion for faith-based organisations to selectively employ people who share their convictions and serve in line with their profession of faith (Monsma and Carlson 2015). For comparative sociological and political perspectives arguing for a crucial role for religion in the public sphere, see Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* (2004), Bader (2013) on “liberal democracy” over “secularism”, and lead thinker Jürgen Habermas (2006; 2008). In the Australian context, this requires us to break down the perceived (and yet imaginary) wall between Church and State (Frame 2006).

So, what is this whole “secular” thing about, anyway? Charles Taylor’s bibliography is extensive, with prolific publication of books, articles, and a daunting list of secondary sources trying to make sense of his profound insights. Obviously, *A Secular Age* is the most relevant source here. Even just reading the introduction (Taylor 2007) will give you a feel for his project. For helpful guides, see Smith (2015), and the insightful and candid review by Andrew Koppelman as a prominent secularist (2009) “Naked Strong Evaluation” online here. Of course, Charles Taylor is in a long line of scholars contributing to our contemporary understanding of secularity (see Benson 2016a, 47-55; Benson 2015b, 130-148). For instance, a key voice in this field is José Casanova (2011) who argues that neither the vision of a multicultural cosmopolitan city nor the apocalyptic narrative of the “clash of civilizations” can account for what we’re presently experiencing in the modern world. Rather, we are facing “multiple modernities”, where there is a plurality of ways of being modern that interpenetrate, sometimes for good, sometimes for bad. Pluralism, then, is Christianity’s major challenge and opportunity in the modern world.
For Australian commentary on how secularism and plurality has impacted the public place of Christianity in the West, and the failing faith of many Aussies, see Frame (2009), Sayers (2016), and Williams (2015). Broader commentary is offered by Craig Gay on The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It’s Tempting to Live As If God Doesn’t Exist (1998).


3.1 “Uncommon Good: Peaceable Dialogue for Partisan Times”

Okay, so apologetics might fruitfully be reframed in this secular age as public theology for holistic flourishing. Listen and Dialogue. But what on earth does that really mean? What might it look like?

Thanks for asking!

The heart of this module is my tentative answer to this tricky question. It is based on my 2016 dissertation, “Schools, Scripture and Secularisation: A Christian Theological Argument for Incorporating Sacred Texts in Australian Public Education”. We’ll revisit this in the final section/workshop of this module. For now, all you need to know is that I saw this dissertation as a case study. I’m seeking a legitimate place for religious perspectives (advocating for a diversity of voices, not just the privileging of Christian sources) in the public sphere, where they neither shout down the secular opposition, nor are silenced under the guise of neutrality (cf. Volf 2014). I demonstrated that these perspectives are crucial to a fair/equitable debate in education about what is the common good and how we may work together toward this end. In doing so, I intended to carve a path by which Christians could argue similarly in diverse sectors such as the media, law, health, politics, and more.

In 2016 I received the opportunity to present the 2016 Morling College Tinsley Lecture (Benson 2016c). While it touched on the specifics of my thesis, my brief was to cast a vision for how the church might share and live its faith in a post-Christendom context. Entitled “Uncommon Good: Peaceable Dialogue for Partisan Times,” here’s the synopsis:

How should Christians engage the public sphere today? In the eyes of its detractors, the church’s cultural forays are reducible to argumentative apologetics, lingering colonial privilege in political lobbying, and triumphalist crusades to reclaim societal influence. How, then, might followers of Jesus retain their missional particularity, whilst humbly interacting as one perspective and voice among many? We need a vision for and model of Christian partnership in partisan times.

Based on his doctoral work in Australian public education, Dave commends the praxis of peaceable dialogue. This approach involves a shift from combative discourse (paralogos) to the dialectical exchange of our deepest world-forming narratives (dialogos). Dave believes this process will unearth wisdom that serves holistic flourishing. By God’s grace, disparate factions may learn how to journey together toward a truly common good in the here and now.

So, watch or read on, and consider how you might reframe your apologetics as peaceable dialogue.
Class Activity 10.3—65 minutes

1. Imagine you were chatting with a friend about religion in education, and she said this: “The public square, including neutral institutions like secular education, is no place for the imposition of some people’s religious perspectives upon all.” In pairs, take a minute each to role play answering your friend’s comment above.

2. Now, as a group, watch the talk, Uncommon Good: Peaceable Dialogue in Partisan Times” (Benson 2016; video, manuscript, powerpoint slides ... skip the 10 minutes of Q&A at the end to keep this to 60 minutes). As it proceeds, jot down key points to guide your apologetic of “peaceable dialogue” and respond to your friend.

3. After the talk finishes (7:40pm) and a short break (7:45pm), debrief the presentation for 12 mins and then repeat exercise (1) above. How is your answer different now than when you began?

Reflection Activities 10.1-10.2—Distance Students

In place of class discussion, online/distance students are required to complete a series of reflections—four per week. For each reflection activity/question, journal at least 30 (meaningful!) words, and tick off the related boxes in the middle of the Unit Guide.

#10.1 In your own words, why might it be a faithful and fruitful move to reframe apologetics as “public theology for the common good” in this secular age?

#10.2 What was strongest and weakest in Benson’s argument? And what might it look like to answer your friend’s objection (exercise [1] in class activity above) from the stance of “peaceable dialogue”?

3.2 What Does Christianity Offer a Secular Person?

As I shared above, it’s crucial that before we offer our apologetic, we truly listen to our neighbour. Not just to her arguments, but to her heart. We touched on this in Module 1, engaging the whole person.

As you consider how best to engage those with a secular worldview, Dan Paterson’s (2017) reflections are sure to help. At the 2017 Malyon Conference, [Re]Evangelise, Dan shared a 12 minute TED-style talk on “Speaking to the Secular: What Does Christianity Offer the Seculars?” (The last 13 minutes of the mp3 are Q&A, well worth listening to also.)

Here’s a taster of Dan’s talk:

In a secular age where the authority of science has eclipsed that of Scripture, the church has no cultural currency, and religion is pushed to the periphery of irrelevance for secular life, where are the bridges for sharing the gospel? Beyond a frontal assault of classical apologetics around the questions of truth, the ‘haunting’ of a secular culture with signals of transcendence provides a powerful doorway for a subversive approach to sharing how knowing Jesus colours all of life.
Dan’s focus here signals a widespread apologetic shift from answering big questions like creation vs. evolution or the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, to exposing and reframing underlying narratives and “social imaginaries” (borrowing from Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor). These stories shape the modern agnostic—generally a secular person for whom religion in general, and the Christian gospel in particular, seems implausible. In one of the most appreciated talks at the 2016 Lausanne Movement Younger Leaders Gathering, Christian statesman and intellectual, Os Guinness unpacked some of these “titanic transformations” culturally, suggesting a path forward for all Christians to represent the integrity of the faith in word and deed, even in our secular age.

In this subject of Christian Apologetics, there is a marked shift between Tim Keller’s two recommended text-books, between his excellent 2009 book, “The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism”, addressing traditional big questions, and his fantastic 2016 book, “Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Sceptical”. Arguments take back-seat to a holistic story that animates life, revealing goodness and beauty alongside truth, thereby attracting belief before seeking to convince another of its reality. For Keller, this means challenging those who have absorbed the narrative of individualism, autonomy, relativism, “harm minimisation” ethics, social contract morality, and negative freedom: he reveals the experiential and philosophical lack in the standard secular narrative. He invites skeptics to reconsider Christianity as offering: a meaning that suffering can’t take from you; a satisfaction that is not based on circumstances; an identity that doesn’t crush you or exclude others; a hope that can face anything; and a justice that does not create new oppressors. (See Keller’s companion talk on this topic here, and Bruce Blackshaw’s [aka The Philosophical Apologist] excellent book summary here, for more.) How good, then, to see Dan Paterson—a Brisbane local—issuing the same clarion call in our communication of the gospel on Aussie home turf.

Here is Dan’s talk in full:

**STORY...**

Imagine with me that we all went on a little road trip. We packed our bags and our Bibles, grabbed our passport, and made our way to the airport.

Then we booked tickets to fly to some foreign country you’ve never heard of. Economy tickets of course. We all have Jesus written on our credit cards; and he probably wouldn’t approve of the soft cushions, extra leg room, and drinks before take-off.

After a long and uncomfortable flight, we finally arrive at a new capital city: Saeculum.

You pick up a travel guide in the bookstore and go to work learning as much as you can. The people here speak English. Good start. Then you learn the people who live in Saeculum are called seculars. Now?

You’re nervous. You’ve heard about these people. They're happy. Intelligent. Moral. Educated. Have alternative explanations and answers to all your major questions. They’re good without God. So you’re not really sure what to say; how to talk to them about your faith...
But, you’re on a mission trip. You spent the plane ride praying, reading Acts, and listening to an audiobook of Brother Yun’s *The Heavenly Man*. You’re feeling bold. So you walk up to the first person you see outside the terminal and ask a question: *What do you know about Jesus of Nazareth?*

Then you notice their name badge. A civilisation of over a billion people, and you managed to corner the one Mormon Missionary in Saeclum. Talk about fishing in the wrong pond. But remembering that Mormons hunt in packs of two, you quickly move on before you get flanked by their wingman.

Second time round you get lucky. You bumble up to someone else. Success. *They’re a secular.* And so the conversation begins…

*The only thing is, this whole story is a farce!*

Because we need no passport; no plane; no foreign city to speak to seculars. Our city is Saeclum.

**FRAMING SECULARISM…**

*We live in a secular age.*

And here’s the BIG ISSUE: *many Christians don’t know how to speak sense to seculars about why the gospel is GOOD NEWS for them; about what Christianity offers the secular.*

We’re too nervous or distracted by their objections to religion to know how to truly pierce the secular armour and get to the heart.

*Science has buried God. The God of the Bible is a moral monster. Christianity is culturally regressive. The Church is responsible for so much evil and division and hypocrisy.*

No doubt thoughtful responses to these objections needs to be offered. Whatever rubble obscures secular people from taking seriously the cross of Christ needs to be removed.

But that misses the point, because at best, all you’re doing in answering these objections is returning Christianity to a neutral footing. You do nothing to weaken the default standing of the secular: *that you can make sense of life WITHOUT reference to God.*

Picture Christianity and Secularism as two biblical cities—*Jerusalem and Babel/Babylon.*

In Jerusalem, the Temple, the hotspot of God’s presence and symbol of his authority are at the centre of the city. All of life makes sense in its light. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, it wasn’t simply enough to tear down the Temple. *Something else had to take its place.* Something else around which humans could centre; from which we draw our meaning in life.
If secularism is anything, it’s a vacuum. Pushing religious perspectives to the private and periphery, it favours naturalistic and scientific explanations of life in public. Although there is no authoritative secular creed, culture abhors a vacuum, and so in the absence of the temple, the secular gods have flooded to fill the space: relativism, scientism, hedonism, pluralism, and humanism.

At the heart of secularism is an unbridled confidence that we’ve moved past God. In the language of Nietzsche, Church buildings are now nothing more than the tombs and sepulchres of God. But what Nietzsche saw our seculars do not.

That if you cut off the branch, the fruit withers.

And this is the chink in the armour: this is where Christianity has something to offer. Our secular age wants to believe that it can keep the historical and cultural inheritance of Christianity whilst jettisoning belief in God. But it can’t be done.

Secularism flattens and disenchants the world we live in. It makes everything 2D.

Where we have impulses to hope for life beyond the grave, secularism tells us these are false hopes. Where we have intuitions that our minds are more than just our brains, secularism tells us these are chemical illusions. Where we believe that some things are truly and objectively right and others wrong, secularism would have us jettison these moral categories, reducing ethics to aesthetics as nothing more than a personal preference or a social contract. Who are we to tell another culture how to live?

What secularism does, in tearing down the temple, is tear away our soul. It denies the deep things about our existence. The very things that make us who we are, and that make life worth living.

Gently exposing this, and in turn showing how our deepest desires and intuitions are answered in the gospel, is our evangelistic and apologetic task.

**SPEAKING TO SECULARS ...**

Francis Schaeffer said it well. Our secular friends still have to live in God’s world. So no matter how much their minds may be trained to reject a supernatural or spiritual realm, our everyday experiences and deepest longings war against it.

Take movies. Our culture believes that the physical and the now are all that exists. So why, then, are we captivated by other universes? Ones dominated the magic of wizards and witches, or the exploits of marvel superheroes, or pasty white undead creatures, or talking beasts, or Jedi?
The truth is our hearts reject a 2D existence. Deep down seculars know there must be more. If you want to know how to speak to seculars—what Christianity has to offer them—the experts, whether philosophers like Charles Taylor or practitioners like Tim Keller, tell us that we need to learn how to lean into these intuitions.

The apologetic task is important.

We need to answer the objections that science has buried God, and that the Bible is fiction, and that God is immoral, and that Christianity is morally bankrupt. The heart cannot accept what the mind rejects as false. We need to present an intellectually credible Christianity, one backed by evidence and argument.

But more than that, perhaps pre-eminently, we need to show why Christianity makes better sense of who we are and what we experience. In the words of Blaise Pascal, “we need to make people wish it were true, then show them that it is.”

As a Christian I can express to a suicidal teenager why their life has innate value, and dignity, and worth. As a Christian, I can express through my life that suffering or disability or a terminal disease doesn’t have to rob us of meaning. As a Christian, I can comfort a grieving widow in the knowledge that death is just a doorway. As a Christian, my life can make these arguments for me: that love is more than a chemical reaction, that justice matters, that good and evil are real things, and that humans are free to make meaningful choices; we’re not just dancing to our DNA.

Secularism may be a BIG ISSUE in our time, but we serve a BIGGER GOSPEL.

In our lives and in our conversations, we are to offer our secular neighbours the choice: Do they want to live in a 2D world where they have sold their soul to secularism? A thin existence? Or do they want to step into a 3D world, a thick world, that sheds light and breaths life into all that we are and were created to be.

As C.S. Lewis said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.”
4. RESPONDING TO COMMUNISM & MARXISM

It may strike you as odd that a 21st Century apologetics course is bothering to talk about Communism. Admittedly, this whole section has been deemed optional, so at least in the Aussie context, I have given it lower billing than secular humanism. And yet, we’re definitely not out of the red woods yet. Indeed, there are signs that this secularist philosophy has drifted from Russia, Europe and China to our shores, simply repackaged as an elitist form of progressive political correctness that dismisses Christianity as oppressive and champions the voice of the minority, whatever their agenda (please read Kelly 2017 on this).

In Resource Box 10.2 below, I get into the some of the classic sources on Communism. Unless you understand the foundational worldview, you’ll be scratching your head in bewilderment at how our enlightened and liberal society has taken an authoritarian turn to shaming those who don’t espouse the party line. However, to highlight the relevance of Marxist ideology, let me “show and tell” both an Easter Rally and the concerns of a campus leader on the closing of universities to Christian witness.

First, then, the rally. Check out http://marxismconference.org/front.php. Perhaps you’ve noticed that as nationalist rhetoric of closing our borders to immigrants has amplified, so too has socialist rhetoric of an immanent battle between left and right. Frankly, I think the Kingdom of God is bigger than either “left” or “right”, fusing a prophetic voice tilted toward the poor and oppressed with a kingdom responsibility for all image bearers to live in line with their created identity for the flourishing of community and creation. More on that below. But, the shrill tone presently is concerning. As is the way the media consistently vilifies some right-leaning voices and personalities at debates and rallies, but fails to identify left-leaning Marxists in our midst who violently agitate for revolution, under the guise of “multiculturalism” and opposition to bigotry.

According to their website (program here), the Socialist Alternative drew more than 1000 fist pumping delegates to their 2017 conference in Melbourne. With evangelistic fervour they ran commitment sessions on “Why you should be a socialist” and hot topics like “Democrats: lesser evil or just evil?” Lebanese socialist Farah Kobaissy carried it home with this appeal: “In this very moment of great darkness, an opportunity offers itself. We live in a moment of great polarisation and people are looking for radical solutions. ... These solutions can easily be put forward by the far right in the form of increased war and militarisation and division or they can come from the revolutionary left.”
Apologetics exists for external and internal reasons. We share the faith, and we sort out heresies. Unfortunately, with a lack of depth in much Christian teaching today, this latter function is worryingly necessary. Thaddaeus Williams (2016, part 1 and 2) provocatively entitled his two part blog reflection, “Christian Millennials and the Lure of Socialism: How Biblical Concern for the Poor Can Turn to an Unbiblical Understanding of People.” The syllogism is simple:

1. The Bible tells me to care for the poor.
2. Socialism, unlike greedy Capitalism, cares for the poor.
3. Therefore, I like Socialism.

And yet the core beliefs of socialist-Marxism, particularly its vision of anthropology (what it means to be human), are fundamentally unbiblical, despite superficial similarities.

Trapped within this immanent frame, we exclude God and settle for at least three faulty presuppositions:

1. Without God, humans are reduced to homo economicus and government is elevated to God-status.
2. Without God, we lose the transcendent moral reference point we need to make an accurate and humble assessment of our own moral powers or lack thereof.
3. Without God, such ideologies teach—often implicitly—that we are most fundamentally material beings, and that poverty, therefore, must be defined only in terms of material lack/inequity.

If “true anthropology is a necessary condition of good economic policy,” then we need to go deeper in our understanding of this secularist ideology to pick the errors and advocate for a more godly (though not necessarily unbridled “capitalist”) structure to markets and society. As Williams argues, “Taking the Bible’s view of human nature more seriously, we will not be swept unknowingly into a false gospel of economic equality and parody of Christ’s kingdom that promises shalom but only brings further oppression.”

Second, then, campus concerns. Gary Cook is a senior leader within “Power to Change” (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ), speaking into many university campus groups (Student Life) that share their faith in Christ. Far from a right-leaning ideologue, Gary is simply concerned to retain their right on campuses to freely congregate, and to witness in a non-coercive way. And yet, over the last 10 years—even as minority LGBTIQ+ and Muslim groups are receiving financial assistance and promotion by academics and the University administration, Christian groups are being deregistered as legitimate student associations, losing access to rooms, with some students receiving disciplinary action for “prosecuting”. What’s going on?

On April 20, 2017, in an email to various church and “Power to Change” leaders with the subject, “Attacking ideas, or people? Gary’s next attempt to be a futurist,” Gary provocatively shared the following:

+++ I’m writing to comment on what I think is a shift in public engagement over ideas. It also represents the tactics increasingly used by those who would like to shut down divergent voices.
I see this playing out with our registered clubs being banned from campus in the future—not for doing something stupid or provocative, but because of the ideas/beliefs we won't recant.

The purpose is to stir up thinking about how to be proactive in this scenario.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Eph 6:12)

Good for us to be clear about that, even if our flesh and blood opponents don't see it that way!

I'm seeing increasing signs that "progressive* voices want to be the only voices that are heard. {*The use of this label in self-reference is not an accident}

In the past, I think those seeking to make the case for Christian ethics/values have tried to make some kind of defense based not on scripture, but on "human flourishing"—something everyone is happy with, right?

In the arena of human sexuality, that has not won sufficient fans. The self-evident rightness of "Equal Love" and "Marriage Equality" beats any viewpoint that requires more than a single breath to explain.

Others are hoping that our social services will be so valued that we can keep our seat at the table of power. Red Frogs anyone? Everyone loves the Salvos, right? If only they would stick to helping and abandon their homophobia. [(Campaign to stop people giving to the Salvos)]

Recent examples in Australia have used economic sanctions to quieten non-progressives. You are not supposed to be using AirBnB unless you are in accord with their progressive values regarding sexuality. Coopers felt the social media wrath of consumers when their brand was referenced by the Bible Society in airing an amiable disagreement on SSM [Same Sex Marriage].

Similar pressure has leaned on the career prospects of those bigoted enough to serve on the boards of conservative institutions. (Private views or support for conservative causes will disqualify you from leading Mozilla—even if you are the co-founder.)

It seems that once the progressive view reaches the status of human rights issue, any means are valid to stop regressive views, because they make a space "unsafe". When this moves from threats (ACL meeting venue cancelled due to threats) to actual violence, we’ve arrived in legendary abortion-clinic-bomber territory.

Here’s how it played out this year at US Middlebury College. Different issue, but same censorship in Indian universities. Back in Australia, it was dangerous to have a marriage plebiscite debate because of the harm it would do, especially to SSA [Same Sex Attracted] youth. In contrast, proactive progressives will keep our kids safe via "Safe Schools" which has an agenda much wider than anti-bullying.

The old blasphemy laws have been repurposed by those who fought against them. There are things that no-one must utter!

See “Safe Spaces—Sam Harris and Jonathan Haidt on the Disturbing Trend of Vindictive Protectiveness” [Harris and Haidt 2016]. This 22 minute podcast posits some reasons (that don’t apply to Australian unis so much) students in some colleges are now the most active in limiting free debate. I really recommend this for your attention.
I have no certain idea how to distinguish* between ideas that are hurtful, hateful and truly harmful, but with 18C [also here] unchanged, the bar of what is unacceptable remains murkyly low. The bar of what is allowable remains litigiously murky.

{*Note we all do this—2 people have been banned from this weekend's conference because of their history of distressing others.}

Now you've glanced at some of the links above and said "I think Gary has been inhaling Fox News or the like." Actually my vacuum has a broad nozzle and I usually sit with ideas and their opponents for a while before evangelising.

I think increasing pressure will be put on uni admins to show they are doing everything they can, to make their campus "safe". (Including from riots.) This will come first from gay activists and probably soon after from Muslims. "Safety" is the reason SL [Student Life] has been banned from witnessing in Fiji. (I know they have not stopped.) Even though we win Clubs and Societies awards and are liked by those who know us personally, when our medieval doctrines are truly exposed, no friendships will save us.

How does this mesh with our goals for increasing profile and larger, more influential groups?

After the precedent of USyd union and EU, there might be a window of legal right of association that remains open in Australia, but the chanting crowd cares little for legal precedent.

I don't mean to be all doom and gloom—God will not stop being sovereign, but the fact is that multiple people think that our beliefs are a threat to the wellbeing of many and they are under a moral obligation to suppress such harmful ideas. Remember folks, you are free to believe/do whatever you wish—as long as it does not hurt someone else.

Ephesian 6:12 suggests at least prayer would be part of our methodology.

I also reckon becoming familiar with the the long-form Biblical answer to "what does it mean to be human" would be vital for the times we have an opportunity 1–1 or before authorities/opponents to explain in multiple breaths why we can separate sexual expression from essential humanity. (You mean celibates can be fully human too???)

The same links from Creator–image–human means that we will love those who don't understand us or who hatefully label us as haters. What might that look like?

*Shalom,*
Gary Cook

+++  

Previously (January 30, 2017), Gary sent a similar email with the subject “Politics of identity shaping campus”. He bounced off Paul Kelly's (2017) op-ed piece in The Australian, “New Progressive Morality Rapidly Taking Over from Christian Beliefs.” This, in turn, drew on the pivotal work of American Academic and agnostic, Jonathan Haidt, on The Righteous Mind (2013; cf. Lukianoff and Haidt 2015, “The Coddling of the American Mind” here; also Lilla 2016, “The End of Identity Liberalism” here). Identity politics has fused with Marxist analysis, moving from categories of bourgeoisie and proletariat to majority and minority, the offensive and the offended, where those who feel left out can assert their ethical superiority and play their race-, or gender-, or sexuality-, or ideology-card, claiming the right to “equality” in all things to the detriment of the majority's freedom to speak or even be. Much of this is made possible by a massive left-leaning/Marxist disparity among university Professors, privileging neo-Communist ideology. This has been explored across a range of disciplines by Morling College academic, Prof. James Dalziel (2016).
My point? Simply this. What may initially appear to be an outdated and retreating philosophy is, in many ways, a repackaged and resurgent ideology in western culture. It is carried by élites, threatens religious freedoms broadly and the particular right of Christians to assemble and witness, and it requires wisdom among today’s Christians in crafting an apologetic response.

As the forum question (option ‘b’) asks, how would you respond to someone asserting this:

“Christianity has been unjustly privileged in the west for far too long. Equality demands affirmative action, silencing this powerful voice to let minority perspectives be truly heard.”

To help you answer such objections, see the following resource box and accompanying (optional) notes.

**Resource 10.2: Answering the Marxist Challenge**

In addition to the sources referenced in the introduction immediately above, check these out:

- Responding to classic Marxist philosophy, typically by combatting its heresies, see Benson and Sargent (2005, “The Communist Dossier: Current Lessons from a Bloody Past”, [outline](#) — reproduced in Module notes below—and [powerpoint](#), Bockmuehl (1986), Jones (1935), McGrath (1992, 201-206), Noebel (2008); see the relevant sections on “Marxism—Leninism” in Chapters 8-17 and the Conclusion of Myers and Noebel 2015, and especially Chapter 5), Schwarz (1977 “You Can Trust the Communists [to be Communists]”; available on Moodle as both a [word.doc](#) and [pdf](#), and Williams (2016, part 1 and 2).

- Post Vatican II, and as the Cold War became more temperate, there has been a greater move toward dialogue and truly understanding our Marxist neighbours. In many ways, E. Stanley Jones was a precursor, recognising in aspects of Marxism a manifestation of the Christian calling to care for the poor and oppressed and see the Kingdom of God come to Earth as in Heaven (1935). For significant examples of a charitable and conversational interaction with Marxism, see Garaudy (1968, with introduction by Hans Küng), and the three chapters on “Marxism” in Muck, Netland and McDermott’s *Handbook of Religion* (2014, 663-678). For a gospel message that acknowledges and addresses Marxist critiques of religion being an escapist opiate of the masses that leaves the oppressive status quo intact, see Dave Benson’s second Sunday talk in the “Sign” evangelism Course (held at Kenmore Baptist Church in 2009) online [here](#) ([outline](#) + [manuscript](#)).

- For current manifestations of Marxism, see the Australian [Marxism Conference](#) and [Socialist Alliance/Red Flag](#) websites, Bertell Ollman’s academic essay “On Teaching Marxism” (1979), video footage from the “Occupy Wallstreet” and “We Are the 99 Percent” protests [here](#), or simply read through many pieces of popular academic writing on [The Conversation](#) university blog. The general progressive undertone characterises much media commentary such as Channel Ten’s “The Project”, with Steve Price representing a token right-leaning voice against whom the panel regularly team up to question if not condemn. (Of course, were I here critiquing equally unbiblical right leaning rhetoric, I might mention the media efforts of Fox News in the USA, or Andrew Bolt on home turf.)

- For insightful cultural commentary challenging resurgent Progressivism, see Dalziel (2016), Haidt (2013), Harris and Haidt (2016, excerpt [here](#)), Kelly (2017), Lilla (2016), Lukianoff and Haidt (2015), and Morse’s (2015) amusing exploration of how an episode of *My Little Pony* combatted old-school Marxist rhetoric head on, with ironic humour aplenty.

- As touched on in Resource Box 10.1 above—cf. Os Guinness’s work on *Global Religious Freedom* (2013 and website [here](#)), and Monsma and Carlson (2015) on freedom for faith-based groups to assemble and serve—the question of “freedom of speech” is pressing. On this, see Dani Scarratt’s article “Free to Speak” (2016).

- In my dissertation work, the Marxist/Progressive ideology was most evident in the study of Geography. For my critique and response, see Benson (2015b, 98-104, 196-203 “Religion is Regressive”, 323-331, and 472-482), crystallised into my article correlating *Shalom* and Sustainability (Benson 2016b).
**Optional* Class Activity 10.4—20 minutes

(1) Imagine you were chatting with a friend about politics, and he said this:
“Christianity has been unjustly privileged in the west for far too long. Equality demands affirmative action, silencing this powerful voice to let minority perspectives be truly heard.”
In pairs, take a minute each to role play answering your friend’s comment above.

(2) Now, watch the 3 minute “Occupy Wall Street Protests” on Moodle here. Imagine you arrive at University and there is a large red themed protest in the central gathering area. Banners abound, most protesting a capitalist system that enshrines greed. You engage one of the chanting throng to ask what they’re on about. You mention that you’re a Christian, and they promptly explain that Christianity and religion in general is a major part of the problem.

In pairs, take in turns role playing this scenario. What might each person say? And how might you, as a Christian, open up the dialogue in both defending the plausibility of Christianity against Marxist attack, and commending Jesus and His Kingdom as a larger frame that embraces the genuine hopes of these protesters?

(3) Crystallising the above activities, jot down three key points in response to this question: From a biblical perspective, what is right and wrong about Marxism? And how would you respond to a Marxist who claims that Christianity is the main culprit for the class-based oppression we see in the world today? *(The notes following this class activity will help.)*

(4) Return to exercise ‘1’ above, and answer this question once more.

**Optional* Class Activity 10.5—10 minutes

Every year in Melbourne, a number of Marxist organisations—including Socialist Alternative and International Socialist Organization—come together to host the conference called “Marxism.” Visit their promotional site here and look over their multi-day program.

- What stands out?
- How does the language used (e.g. “Global Revolt”) reflect Marxist Ideology?
- Following are a list of the Conference ‘Streams’. What kinds of things would you expect to be taught in these streams? ... Now, take a look through individual sessions to see what they did cover:
  #1. Radical Australian Working Class History
  #2. Marxist Foundations
  #3. Revolutionary Moments
  #4. Key Texts of Marxism
  #5. Marxist Thinkers
  #6. A People’s History of the World
  #7. Marxist Theory
  #8. Rival Ideas on the Left
- If you bumped into one of the attendees, what questions might you ask to open up a dialogue and cut to the heart of Marxist beliefs?
4.1 Making Sense of Communism

To really “get” communism, you need to go straight to the central sources, especially *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. (Search also for The Humanist Manifest I, II, III, to see how similar these two ideologies are.) Then, besides the sources in Resource Box 10.2 above, these insightful responses will greatly help:

- *Beating the Unbeatable Foe*—Fred Schwarz
- *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the Sixties*—David Horowitz and Peter Collier

Craig Sargent and I teamed up in 2005 to present the apologetics talk, “The Communist Dossier: Current Lessons from a Bloody Past” (outline and powerpoint). The notes below offer a helpful guide to make sense of communism, understanding and interacting with its current manifestations.

+++ 

The Big Idea ...

Communism was one of the most dominant forces of the 20th Century, responsible for over 170 million deaths, and continues to be a world-force. It is said that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Thus it is fitting to understand this philosophical system, its core beliefs and how it spread, particularly when we note the common foundation shared with today’s dominant western belief system, *Secular Humanism*. God, in the Bible, has revealed principles that allow for equity in resources without resorting to compulsion, which if practiced by Christians would send a powerful witness to those seeking violent alternatives. We must represent Christ in both word and deed as His return draws near.

The Main Foundations of Communism:

- **Dialectical Materialism**—History progresses towards global communism by a series of withdrawals and advances, much like a hammer as it strikes a nail, only to retreat in preparation for another strike. Each change of direction of the hammer is referred to as a ‘negation’ where the current direction (the thesis) is negated by its opposite (the antithesis) forming the new position of history, the synthesis. This synthesis then becomes the new thesis to be next negated and so on. These negations generally occur by revolutionary means.

- **Atheism and Evolution**—God does not exist and is merely an invention of the property owners to keep the workers in line. Man has evolved from single celled life and continues to improve via evolution.
**Behavioural Determinism**—People are merely matter in motion and simply the product of their environment and evolution. Due to the dialectic, people can control their own evolution to move towards a global communism (i.e. we can save ourselves and become perfect). Pavlov, famous for his dogs also did much experimentation on behavioural responses in people and much of communist theory is based on his work. Thus people are perfectible with the right environment and education.

**Amorality**—Whatever means are required to further the cause of communism is considered good. As history shows with Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and Lenin, the murder of 100 million people is considered by the communist to be moral if it was done to advance the communist agenda. It is not possible for a communist to lie in the interests of communism as, by definition, if it is in the interests of communism, it is the truth.

**One world global communism**—Communists take it on faith that this is the ultimate end of the dialectical progress of history, but society must travel from capitalism to socialism for a time in order to create the proper environment for progression to communism.

**Socialism**—Private property, and with it capitalism, is abolished and the state decides what you work on and what you get. The socialist economic model has caused poverty, famine and starvation where-ever it has been introduced.

**The Main Foundations of Secular Humanism:**

- **Naturalism**—Whatever exists can be explained by naturalistic causes. Science and reason are the only sources of knowledge.
- **Atheism and Evolution**—God does not exist and is merely an invention of deluded people who need a sky fairy to feel happy. Man has evolved from single celled life and continues to improve via evolution.
- **Self Actualisation**—All people can reach their potential with the right education and environment. Man has a natural tendency towards good, and it is only his culture that teaches him to be evil. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.
- **Relativism or Utilitarianism**
  - Relativism—Morality doesn’t really exist. Each person, using empathy, can decide what is right and wrong for them.
  - Utilitarianism—Whatever brings the most happiness to the most people is the right act and if a person is attempting to bring about an ultimate good, then almost any action can be morally justified.
- **One world government**—Because we are continually improving by evolution and to truly control the environment and culture so as to perfect man, competitive nations must be abolished. An equal global community requires a global government.
The Strategy behind Marxism–Leninism:

When Lenin started out, he had 17 supporters. When he became Russia’s ruler, he did it with only 40,000 fellow communists. Within 50 years, half of the world’s population was under communist rule. A small number of highly organised and committed communists enslaved half the world in 50 years. (Compare this with growth of Christianity which has taken 2000 years to get 1/3 of the world’s population as converts.)

As a ‘scientific’ theory, communism took great effort in analysing what will have the most powerful influence in any country and focused on controlling those influences. (Just like Secular Humanism capturing public education and the legal system) So in each country they conquered, the method was at least slightly different, but it all relied on the initial analysis. Some of the ways it has historically spread are...

- **Capturing the student and intellectual mind**—Using noble sounding goals and elitist arguments to appeal to intellectual pride. Controlling education.
- **Positioning for power**—Promises of addressing people’s complaints and Sacrificial ‘love’ of helping people to gain power and influence.
- **Agitation and propaganda**—Repeated transmission of the simple idea that communism makes people happy and capitalism is evil and focusing attention on the bad in a society
- **Military blackmail**—Using military might to push for concessions.

For secular humanism, the process has been similar, but different.

- **Capturing of education**—The creation of the public school system and monopolization of higher education. (over 90% of academics in the social sciences vote left)²
- **Capturing cultural institutions**—Hollywood and the media are predominantly left wing.³
- **Moral blackmail**—Using ‘rights’ issues, abortion, homosexuality etc., to silence opponents

Ultimately, when communism controls a country, it stops free speech, destroys the traditional family, introduces abortion, seizes all property and exterminates the property owners and indoctrinates and controls everyone else. You cannot even buy food if the communist party doesn’t want you to. The forced socialism in Communist countries caused massive famines as agricultural productivity plummeted; and together with the extermination of any competition for their leadership and of the property owners it has caused over 170 million deaths in 80 years (see Rummell 1994 here).

These days, we have people who call themselves Marxists, Communists, Social Democrats, Democratic Socialists, Socialists, Progressives, Secular Humanists and someone who is part of the ‘Reality Based Community’, but contrary to the creator of the image above, they are not all the same. People do mix the labels sometimes. Technically, the definition of a Socialist is roughly the same as a Marxist or Communist, without the violent revolution, yet today we see ‘socialist’ groups advocating violence and revolution. And it is important to remember that communism often redefines words from their common meaning. Violence is redefined to be any force applied against the progress towards communism, but not force used in favour of communism. Imperialism is redefined for any capitalistic interaction with a less powerful country. The rich are defined as evil simply because they have more than the poor, irrespective of how they got their wealth.

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³ A good summary of the media’s political makeup is available here.
A Biblical Critique of Communism

At first glance, Communism seems to have some noble and good aims which are consistent with the Bible such as concern for the poor, social justice and the end of war. However, if you dig a bit deeper you will notice that the Communist is working from a completely different set of premises and so it is important to understand these differences.

(1) Communism holds to pure materialism. Thus there is no after life and religion is simply a tool to control the working class. The Bible, however, teaches us that we should sow into eternity, and material contentment will never truly satisfy.

(2) Communism would use force whereas as the Bible advocates a voluntary sharing (Spirit led, not under compulsion) of private property and resources, recognising that all is God’s (2 Corinthians 8-9).

(3) The Bible highlights the importance of working to get your food (2 Thessalonians 3:10) and so is not supportive of a welfare state that does not encourage this. The New Testament had a spirit-filled communalism where many people voluntarily gave of their own property so that every one’s needs were met, which has a similar goal to Communism, but vastly different philosophy and methodology.

(4) The Bible describes the traditional family of a husband and wife caring for and raising their children (Genesis 2:24) whereas communism seeks to destroy this type of family as it is supposedly a creation of the capitalistic property owners and replace it with state raised children and non-exclusive relationships.

(5) Any system that relies wholly on the goodness of man in this life is doomed to a very messy failure. This is because human nature is not caused by capitalism or environment, but is at its core a problem with rebellion against God, and only God can fix it (Acts 4:11-12).

Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. (Proverbs 26:11)

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:7,11)

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ (Acts 20:35)

2 Hardly a model of Christian charity, winning the person rather than the argument, Dinesh D’Souza nevertheless demonstrates key problems in typical progressive rhetoric

Amherst: D’Souza DESTROYS Leftist College Students Arguments
Lessons to be Learned as we Consider Marxism and Secular Humanism Now

Lesson One: Captivating philosophies?—Colossians 2:8

Warm fuzzy mission statements like ending poverty sound nice, but we need to investigate and understand the underlying worldview and hidden motives of the ideology to avoid being taken captive by something that sounds superficially noble but is rotten at its core. Many an unsuspecting person, to use Lenin’s words, became a ‘useful idiot’ for Communism by being unaware of its motives and methods.

Lesson Two: The supremacy of man?—Jeremiah 17:5-8

The Bible and history constantly teaches us that man is not basically good by nature. The Bible consistently assumes the sinfulness of man is due to the fall. History, particularly that of Communism in the Soviet Union, proves that unrestrained man has a natural penchant for criminality and inhumanity, but the humanists refuse to acknowledge that. Socialism has proven to be a classic failure in every country or region in which it has been tried.

With words like *tolerance* and *multi-culturalism*, you would think Secular Humanism would be the bastion of freedom (as with communism which sounded great on face value, caring for the peasants and equally distributing wealth). However, when built on atheism, when they say all beliefs are equally valid, what they mean is all beliefs other than atheism are equally wrong. And if these beliefs are wrong, the atheist must ultimately eliminate them, forcibly if necessary. Communism promised liberation from the illusion of religion; it ended up with a body count exceeding anything previously known in history.

Lesson Three: The cost of silence? Fight or flight?—Esther 4:14

The failure of the church, state and righteousness largely paved the way for communism to rise. If we continue to ignore the forces and man-centred ideas that plague our society, then we are failing to be ‘salt and light’ to the world and more disasters like communism await. We must represent righteousness in the world. (Isaiah 62:1,6-7) Should we be like Moses who said ‘who me’, Jonah who said ‘Not me’ or Isaiah who said ‘Send me’?

The Bible offers apocalyptic hints of what is to come. The anti-Christ, a one-world government and Christians locked out of the system. We are exhorted to be as ‘wise as serpents’ (Matthew 10:16), and so some Christians are already making provisions by creating cooperatives for Christians, instead of waiting till it has already happened and it is too late. Other Christians are attempting to demolish the strongholds of Secular Humanist influence. Clearly the ideological battle has begun; do we dare sit out? (Ephesians 6:12)
**A Guide to Action—Your Response?**

<1> **SEE** all philosophies clearly through a Biblical lens—Understand the ideas

<2> **SPEAK** God’s wisdom into all public spheres—Be an Ambassador

<3> **SHINE** Christ’s light in a selfish world—Light the true path

As with many communistic countries, and as with the spread of Secular Humanism in Australia, few have a very favourable perspective on Christianity in general, and the church in particular. This facilitates the spread of atheistic philosophies. By being a bad witness we can be our own worst enemy, yet we also possess the key to the growth of the Kingdom.

Gandhi said “I love their Jesus, but I hate the Christian, for he looks so much unlike his Christ.”

Why is this? It seems either we are in the world but hypocrites, focussed on our own pleasures, no different to those around us, or we are huddled together never sharing this love outside our own community. Jesus cast the vision of being in, but not of the world (John 17)—a transforming vision of how life can be. Picture how society would be if we all lived lives of sacrificial generosity and love, right in the centre of our community, without concern for being persecuted and doing all for the glory of Christ, loving God and fellow man. How different would this world be? How different would have been the course of history? We have this opportunity before us now (Philippians 2:14-16).
5. RESPONDING TO THE “FOURTH R”:
KEEPING RELIGION OUT OF “SECULAR” SCHOOLS

Time to get practical. Whether your concern is Christian Religious Instruction, or a broader concern for comparative religious literacy in our pluralistic society, schools are a battle ground when it comes to secularist strategy.

At face value, groups such as the National Secular Society (2016, video here) make some important points. They do serve to expose wrongful Christian privilege. And, in general, who would object to the call for “Freedom, Fairness, and Human Rights”?

And yet, delve a little deeper, and the “multicultural” rhetoric of “equality” for all quickly disappears. With religion evacuated from the public sphere, our students imbibe the hidden and null curriculum of “exclusive humanism” within this purely immanent frame. How, then, to respond? Well, read on! That’s what this final workshop session of Module 10 is all about.

Resource 10.3: Religion in Secular Education

Check out these sources for a sense of the current state of play in this contested public space:

- What this 1.30minute propaganda piece by the Australian Secular Lobby. In pairs, crystallise their core assertion in one sentence, and then outline three arguments they make to support this assertion.
- Does Religion and all this ‘God’ stuff actually matter, in a well-rounded liberal education? For the broad contours of a liberal argument for the incorporation of religion in education, see Alexander (2015) and Nord (2010). For my particular argument for the place of School Chaplaincy in a Liberal Democracy, confronted by the claims of secularism and supposed Church–State separation, see James and Benson (2014).
- As explored earlier, this was the central concern of my dissertation, starting with my early concerns expressed over the biased treatment and exclusion of the Bible from public education (Benson 2011, “Gore-Tex Curriculum Resists the Good Book”). In analysing the Australian Curriculum, I discovered that the (mis)treatment and common silencing of sacred stories and Scriptures made sense in light of the class and yet now questionable narrative of the secularisation thesis: that as the world modernises, religion and religious authority decline. That is, in Chapter 4 I reveal and deconstruct the claims that: in History, Sacred Texts are irrelevant; in Civics and Citizenship, Scriptures are dangerous; in English, Canons quash freedom; in Science, Dogma endangers discovery; and in Geography, Religion is regressive. For a full deconstruction, see Benson (2015b, 130-226). For a more focused analysis of just History and Civics and Citizenship, see Benson (2016a, 47-74). The various support documents and presentations (confirmation and final defense) shed further light on the place of religions and their revelations in contemporary Australian public education: see Benson (2012, Situating the Thesis; 2013 Confirmation Presentation; 2015 Final Thesis Defense Presentation).
- For a sample integrative public theology demonstrating the legitimate place for Sacred Texts in Secular Education, applied to particular subjects, see Benson (2016b) on Geography, and Benson (2015a) on Civics and Citizenship.
5.1 Responding to Secular Claims: An Annotated Article

Stan van Hooft is a secular philosophy professor at Deakin University. In 2012 he wrote a piece for the Brisbane Times, entitled “Religion Classes in State Schools Must Be About Teaching, Not Preaching.”

Stan raised some fair points, voicing some of my concerns with Christian Religious Instruction. However, much of what he said was pure secularist rhetoric, unchecked and largely unchallenged.

What follows is not a structured response. It is, however, my early annotations on his article (in blue, D–), revealing areas upon which I would press in my thesis, and if asked to make comment.

This may help attune you regarding to what you should pay attention in this secular media moment.
“Religion Classes in State Schools Must Be About Teaching, Not Preaching”

Children should learn about all major faiths and have a genuine choice about what to believe.

Legal action is being brought by three parents of public primary school children alleging that the Education Department segregates children on religious grounds and discriminates against those whom parents opt out of religious instruction offered by accredited religious instructors.

Three points are highlighted by this action, which is in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The first is that schools are obliged to accept offers from outsiders to provide religious instruction. The second is that there have been no educational options for primary pupils whose parents don’t want them to receive religious instruction. The third is that Access Ministries, the evangelical Christian group that provides 97 per cent of religious instruction in Victorian public schools and provides its own training and accrediting to volunteer instructors, is on record as wanting to convert children to Jesus.

Australia is a society that guarantees freedom of religion and separation of church and state. It is a liberal society in which everyone is entitled to the religious beliefs they hold and to follow their religious practices as long as they cause no harm. This means religion is a private matter. Public issues are those the government is charged to regulate and control because they touch on benefits or harms that affect members of society. Private matters are those that touch on the consciences or lifestyles of individuals which those individuals are entitled to pursue because they have no public impact.

[A liberal society should protect children in public schools from indoctrination by well-meaning religious adherents while also protecting the private right of religious groups to set up their own schools. Schools set up by a liberal state and pursuing public good should not be intruded upon by the private convictions of any groups within society.]

[under law, original constitution, was that a more ‘devotional’ type of special religious instruction was legitimate – formed at a time when the vast majority were Christian of one stripe or another – Section 116 was not to prevent this kind of instruction, but rather to prevent any one denomination from being established as the official denomination tied to the state ... to say that this law was set up to keep religion out of the public square is a misnomer]
Access Ministries and the other faith-based providers of special religious instruction oppose general religious education. But why? Could it be because if children were told not only that some people believe Jesus rose from the dead, but that others believe that the Prophet was carried bodily by angels from Mecca to Jerusalem, and that others believe that Moses parted the Red Sea, and that still others believe that Lord Shiva enjoys eternal youth, they will be left with a genuine choice as to what they themselves will believe?

[Do access ministries oppose general religious education? – they just don’t want it introduced in place of special religious instruction, which recognises the particular place of devotional practices and Christian heritage in Australia – it’s own form of religious literacy … MY PROPOSAL supports this … I suspect the author would like NO religious education, but IF there must be, better that it is GENERAL as this plurality of options would seem in his thinking to undermine the plausibility of any one particular religion – following Berger on plausibility structures … so religious education in this sense is more a concession – not something he values, but perhaps a compromise if there is to be any religion in schools]

There is a reduced risk of proselytising when these beliefs are presented side by side. Indeed, children may come to see that such beliefs are about as credible as their belief in Santa Claus, in Superman and in their imaginary friends.

[This is incredibly ignorant and judgmental, and COLONIAL presuming the enlightenment view of the world is the only credible one]

While many young people grow out of such fantasy beliefs, they are less inclined to suspend belief in religious doctrines if they are taught in highly valued school time by persons whose generous motivations give them credibility. Children do not have the capacity to critically assess the ideas that are presented to them.

[so his desire for religious education is to grow students out of superstition to face the world as it really is … this doesn't acknowledge the genuinely different ways of seeing the world, and certainly doesn't bode well for multicultural peace in a divided, fragmented, and pluralistic society with multiple modernities]

[re: children not having the capacity to critically assess the ideas, apparently what is currently taught that undermines belief in any religion, or marginalises it to be of no importance, is ‘neutral’ such that it doesn’t require critical evaluation – perhaps from his view this is true – but not from multiple other perspectives held by many people and communities in Australia … THUS MY PROPOSAL focuses on grades 7-10 when they are developing these abilities – making general religious education on a worldviews basis compulsory]

The dividing line between telling students about religion and inducting them into religion is very hard to draw. When does the sentence "Jesus loves you" move from being heard as a piece of information to being heard as an invocation to be responded to?

[fair – challenge of devotional vs. instructional, and the need to shift to the latter]

Accordingly, the phrase "many people believe that ..." should be placed in front of any statement of belief. It is this phrase that presents the belief as a piece of information rather than as a conviction. It is the importance of this phrase which dictates that it should be properly qualified teachers that convey this information in the classroom.

[this goes without saying – and we don’t use it in other subjects, where it is the same situation – presumably because they are material phenomena we don’t need to preface it – but there is not certainty in these fields either, and many people don't believe what they’re saying]
Many believe that religious instruction is a necessary vehicle for **moral education** and that young people do not acquire ethical values and moral standards without it. This view is an insult to parents. It is parents who impart moral values, and most do so quite successfully through their example without invoking any religious foundations.

[Though to teach morality without any reference to religious frames of reference is problematic and naïve, as there are grounding questions of why believe anything is right and wrong ... like the artificial separation between philosophy and theology. HOWEVER, the main reason for RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION is not toward moral education, but rather religious literacy in a pluralistic world, and bringing together in dialogue people from different frames of reference all for the common [and public] good ... and this is being ignored.]

Others argue that children in a **predominantly Christian culture** should have some knowledge of the Christian tradition so they can appreciate the artistic heritage, the history, and the intellectual traditions of which they are a part. However, the intellectual and artistic heritage of ancient Greece - the poetry of Homer, the plays of Euripides, and the philosophy of Plato - are part of our tradition too, yet we do not have to believe in the gods of ancient Greece in order to appreciate these.

[First, no one still holds to the Greek legends, so this is irrelevant re: belief in the gods – but also, the Christian contributions and references in literature and art are nonintelligible without a sense of the larger narrative]

Young people should understand the religious traditions that influence world events and which are adhered to in our multicultural society. But this can be achieved in better ways than special religious instruction.

[more of a concession – but what would he propose?]

**Reflection Activities 10.3-10.4—Distance Students**

In place of class discussion, online/distance students are required to complete a series of reflections—four per week. For each reflection activity/question, journal at least 30 (meaningful!) words, and tick off the related boxes in the middle of the Unit Guide.

#10.3 From class activity 10.6 above, how would you respond to the Australian Secular Lobby’s rhetoric regarding keeping religion out of education?

#10.4 Write one apologetic sentence responding to a core assertion of Stan van Hooft’s above.
6. PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT CLASS

Forum Activity Module 10

For each of modules 1 through 12 of the course, please submit a forum post, comprising:
(a) A 250 word first-person response to the set question/comment, tailored for explaining your beliefs to a twenty-something Australian who is post-Christian in attitude but pre-Christian in understanding. Note that when options are available, indicate to which of the statements you are responding. Additionally, this response must demonstrate a sound grasp of underlying course/Module content, and interaction with at least one (PE420) or two (PE620) pre-readings, whether recommended or optional (reference these). Across modules 1-6, and then 7-12, you must demonstrate a range of apologetic approaches, defending and commending the plausibility, credibility, and relevance of Christian belief. Post this to Moodle *before* the following class.
(b) Interaction with at least one other person that advances the conversation, perhaps through a comment or question. Note that this interaction can be with other students on the Moodle forum, but may also be through the “Australian Apologetics & Evangelism” Facebook group or your own social media site, as people interact with your posted response. Interaction isn’t in the word count.

Group five of the first six forum posts, and the interaction with others, into one word.doc for submission via the Moodle assessment tab by March 28 for assessment requirement 1a, and then a further five posts from module 7-12 by May 23 for requirement 1b.

For each Moodle Module, I’ve set up a forum bubble.

THIS WEEK’S forum question/comment awaiting your response, before next class, is this:
Week 10: Respond to one of the following statements: (a) “The public square, including neutral institutions like secular education, is no place for the imposition of some people’s religious perspectives upon all”; or (b) “Christianity has been unjustly privileged in the west for far too long. Equality demands affirmative action, silencing this powerful voice to let minority perspectives be truly heard.”

You will have time to discuss your responses to this forum question in your small group during the first session of our next class together.

All students respond on the Moodle Forum (250 words)

Preparation for Next Week …

- Forum post work (as per the unit guide assessment requirement) both addressing the set question, and interacting with others. Post this to Moodle before next class.
- 2 hours pre-reading from recommended and optional readings on Moodle. Come ready to share on each of the following:
  - a question—something you don’t get, or want to clarify
  - a challenge—something you disagree with, or want to nuance
  - an implication—“so what” for your our apologetic practice
  - an application—something useful right now in your context, to help your holistic witness
Significance for Christian theology, life and thought...

What in this session is most significant to you personally, in forming your own theology, life and thought?

Atheistic worldviews, historically, have thrived when Christians have failed to possess what they profess. When our actions, individually and corporately fail to live up to Jesus’ live and teaching, not only does the charge of ‘hypocrisy’ rear its head, but a whole swag of ‘isms’ rise up to deliver what we all desire.

Perhaps Marxism is the best example. As E. Stanley Jones noted in The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchangeable Person, Jesus’ teaching centred on the Kingdom of God ... where God’s way is the way, and God’s rule is the rule. The Gospel of the Kingdom was good news: good news to the economically, politically, socially, physically, and emotionally disenfranchised. Yet when the church pointed to itself (as relative) rather than seeing its function as a pointer to the Kingdom (“God’s Total Answer to Humanity’s Total Need”), we became irrelevant. The violent desired the Kingdom, and wanted to press in by force to take it (Matthew 11:12), but the church instead offered a hungry society spiritual platitudes about entering the church now, and receiving heaven in some distant place when they died. In this vacuum, all kinds of totalitarianisms (particularly communism and fascism) arose to make the Kingdom of God a reality right now, albeit without Jesus as King (cf. Jones 1935).

While we may rightly critique Marx for a misguided ideology—built on a flawed understanding of human nature—we mustn’t fail to recognise the prophetic nature of Karl Marx. Class differences, unrighteous inequities, a stratified society ... these are not becoming of Christ’s followers who are united in Christ as one (Galatians 3:28).

Marxism doesn’t work. But it is a pointer to the kind of society the church should be ... a community where each person freely gives of their own possessions to practically serve and love their neighbour ... a community where each individual chooses to contribute according to their gifts and abilities, and none goes without ... a community where we each lower the draw-bridge of our hearts and houses to embrace the homeless, the needy, the lonely, and we begin to embody this radical Kingdom of God. In short, may we in a million practical ways be the church that looks like Jesus. Perhaps then the ‘isms’ of the world will bow down and truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord, for only His gracious gift will satisfy our deepest desires for righteousness and justice. May we seek first this Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

3 "Beautiful Jesus" painting by Nigerian artist, Mariama McCarthy
7. REFERENCES


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