

A blue-tinted photograph showing the silhouettes of a man and a woman in profile, facing each other in conversation. They are standing next to a large, condensation-covered water cooler. The woman is on the left, with her hand near the cooler, and the man is on the right. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

*Yes, but what
about ...*

Conversations by the Watercooler

Mini Issues: Being ready to give the reason for the hope we have in Jesus Christ in everyday conversation.
An occasional series in the St John's morning service — see stjohnshartford.org or termcard for details.

The image features a man and a woman in silhouette, facing each other in conversation. The woman is on the left, with her hand on her hip and gesturing towards a large, condensation-covered water cooler in the foreground. The man is on the right, looking towards the woman. The background is a solid light blue, and the overall lighting is dim, emphasizing the silhouettes and the glowing text.

*Yes, but what
about ...*

Ⓐ **atheism**

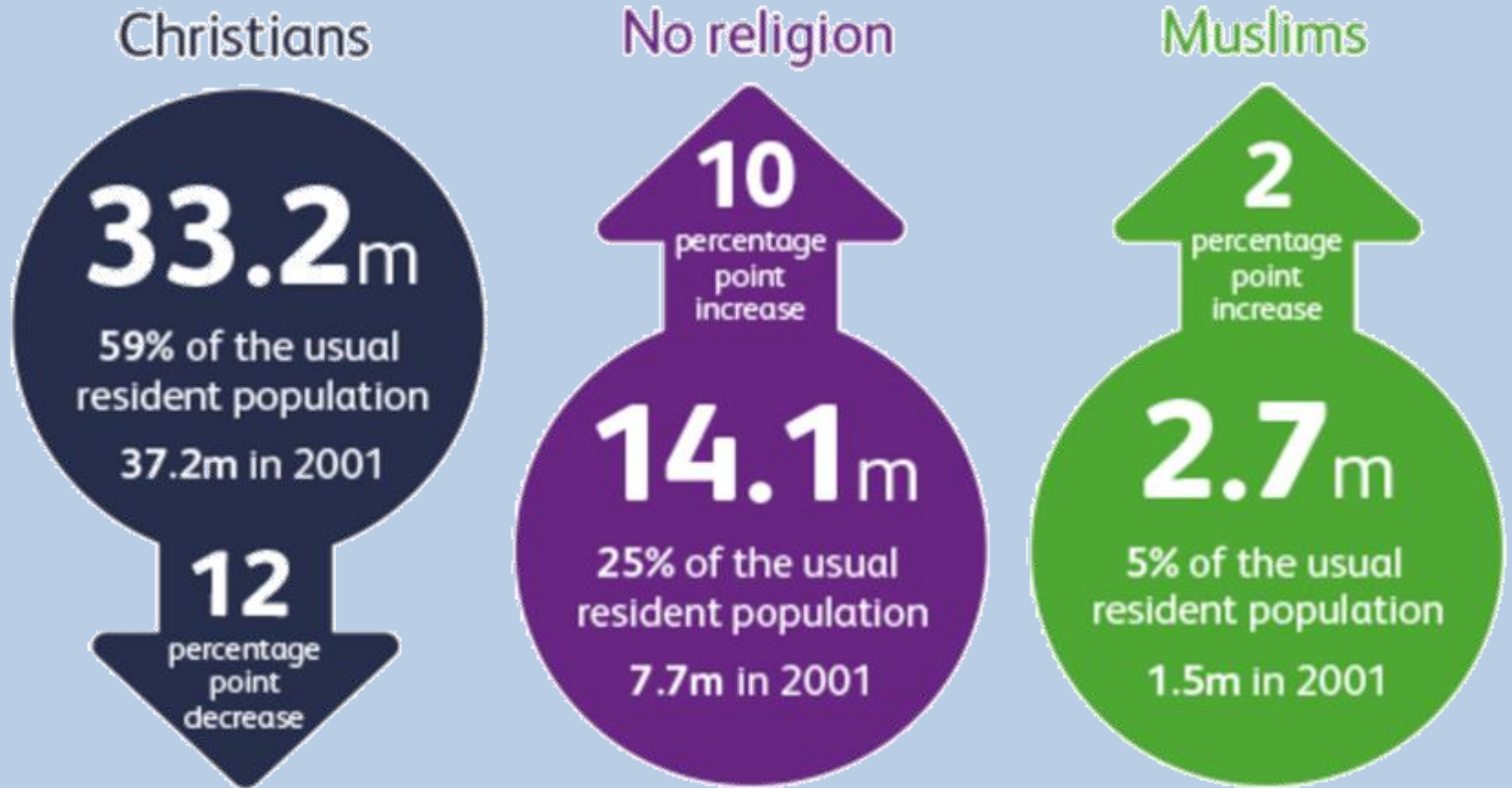


Conversations by the Watercooler

- Why this series?
 - “Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, *so that you may know how to answer everyone.*” (Paul, Col. 4.5-6)
 - “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. *Always be prepared to give an answer* to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Pet. 3.15)



What *do* people believe?



2011 vs. 2001 census



What *do* people believe?

- 2011 Census
 - Six times more Jedi Knights than atheists! But ...
 - 25% indicate “no religion” compared to 59% Christian
 - In 2001, 15% indicated “no religion” and 71% Christian
- Extrapolating from today:
 - within 7 years, “no religion” will outstrip Christian
 - within 10 years, “no religion” will outstrip *all* religions



So who are the atheists?

- Atheist fundamentalists
 - The “four horsemen of the atheist apocalypse”:
Dennett, Harris, Hitchens, Dawkins
 - Their creed: “There is no God and I hate him.”
 - Their forebears:
 - Friedrich “God is dead” Nietzsche (d. 1900)
 - Bertrand “When I die I rot” Russell (d. 1970)



So who are the atheists?

- Functional, or “practicing” atheists
 - Probably the majority of the “no religion” respondents – plus quite a few of the “Christian” ones!
 - Living daily as though there was no God – whatever their stated position.
 - In practice, their goals are pleasure, wealth and power (co-incidentally, Jesus’ favourite topics!).
 - The more noble will aspire to Christian morality.



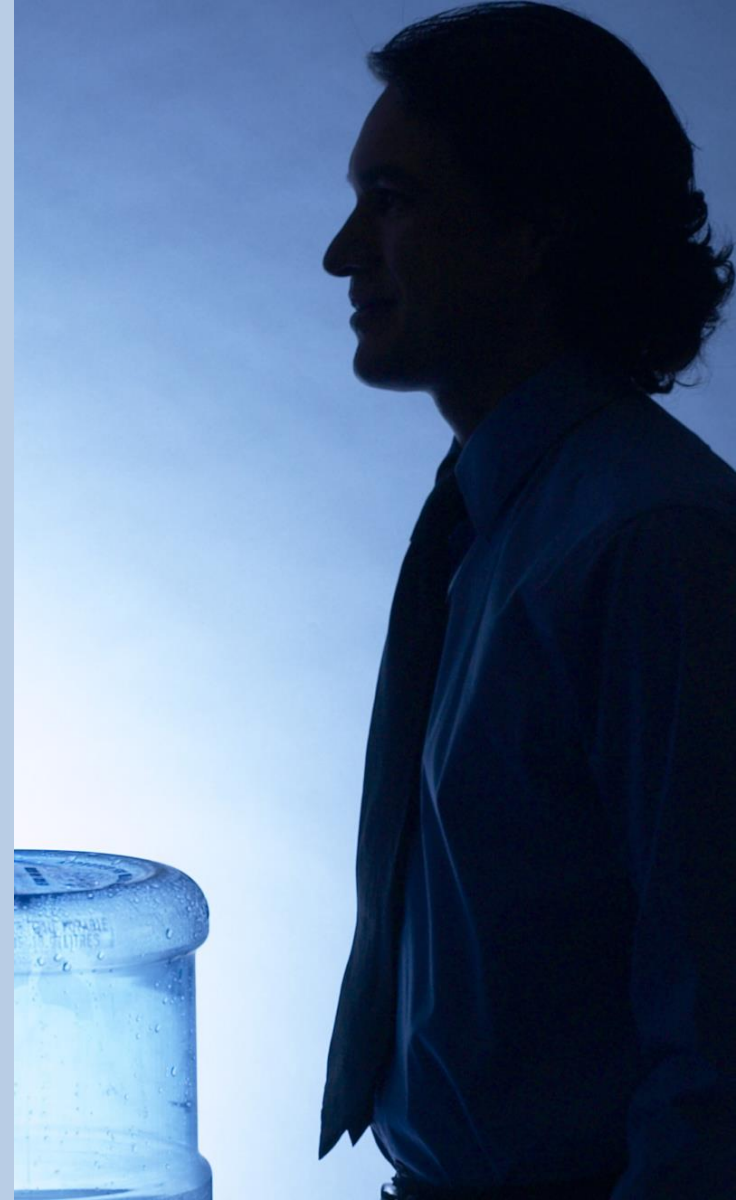
Agnostics or atheists?

- A significant difference?
 - An agnostic believes one cannot know if God exists
 - An atheist believes God doesn't exist
 - My dad: “converted” from agnosticism to atheism by reading Richard Dawkins
- Maybe not:
 - “Russell described himself as an agnostic, ‘speaking to a purely philosophical audience’, but as an atheist ‘speaking popularly’”



How do we answer the atheist?

- Four challenges to them:
 - Open your eyes
 - Examine your heart
 - Look at history
 - Consider Jesus Christ
- And some to us afterwards!





Open your eyes!

- It takes great faith to be an atheist!
 - Consider the wonder of the human body, or the precise alignment of the planets or the beauty of a sunset. All this is by pure chance?
 - Creation demands a creator, design demands a designer and a beginning demands a “beginner”.
 - Is it rational to look at a jumbo jet and conclude that it exists by accident and chance – the result of a whirlwind in a junkyard?



Open your eyes!

- Do you really believe your master?
 - “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference . . . DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.” (Dawkins)
- Why do we make this argument?
 - “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made . . .” (Romans 1.20)



Examine your heart

- A simple question: do you live, or want to live, by your creed, “survival of the fittest”?
 - What about when you or those you love are old or sick?
 - Consider atheist unhappiness
 - the formation of “atheist churches”
 - Alain de Botton’s *Religion for Atheists*: why?
 - Or are there absolute moral laws? You live as though there were: so where did they come from?



Examine your heart

- “I want my attorney, my tailor, my servants, even my wife, to believe in God and I fancy that as a result I shall suffer less theft and less cuckoldry.” (Voltaire d. 1778)



Examine your heart

- Why do we make this argument?
 - Because law demands a lawgiver:
 - “Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (Romans 2.14-15)
 - And lawbreakers need a Saviour ...



Look at history

- Joseph Stalin, murderer of 20 million people
 - Aged 14, he read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and declared to his friends, “You know, they are fooling us, there is no God. ... I'll lend you a book to read; it will show you that the world and all living things are quite different from what you imagine, and all this talk about God is sheer nonsense ...”
 - “Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.” (Alexander Solzhenitsyn)



Look at history

- Consider our own history
 - Far from perfect! But we have schools, hospitals, modern science as a result of Christianity permeating our culture.
- Why do we make this argument?
 - Jesus taught us, “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Mat. 5.16; cf. 1 Pet 2.12)

① Look at history

- A contemporary example: “British Values”
 - “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths ...”
- Where do they come from?
 - The 1944 Education Act sought to create “an England which allows as never before the principles of liberty, justice, toleration and discipline on which this realm depends, *and which themselves are founded on the teaching of the Church of Christ.*”



Consider Jesus Christ

- An atheist is someone who claims to be a rational person who only believes on the basis of evidence
 - It is revealing how often atheists will refuse to do this.
- Come and see!
 - “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. . . . Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1.10,12)



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Consider Jesus Christ

- Consider the evidence:
 - ‘For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, that **he was buried**, that **he was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that **he appeared** to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, **he appeared** to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time ... and last of all **he appeared** to me also, as to one abnormally born.’ (1 Cor. 15.5ff)



Some final challenges to us

- How will our atheist friends and family believe?
 - Only if the Lord works:
 - “no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3.3). **So pray!**
 - Only if his cross is proclaimed:
 - “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3.14-15) **So speak!**



Some final challenges to us

- How will our atheist friends and family believe?
 - Only if they see the evidence the Lord intends:
 - “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13.35) **So love!**
 - Only as they respond to his word
 - John write his gospel so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20.31) **So give!**