



EFCA The Challenge of the New Atheism February 2011

Steve & Kathy Austvold, EFCA Mission Mobilizers Serving the NCD, NPD, and Beyond

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Dear Pastors and Church Mission Leaders,

The Lausanne Conference identified six global issues that are facing the church today. The first issue that was identified was the challenge of “the new atheism”. World evangelization is based on foundational truth claims about the uniqueness of Christ, the centrality of the cross and the authority of Scripture. In light of the aggressive attacks on truth by the New Atheism, we must make a compelling case for TRUTH. We cannot afford to lose the battle for the minds of this generation or the next.

What is the New Atheism? It is a 21st century movement. The term first appeared in *Wired* magazine in November 2006. Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Victor Stenger and Christopher Hitchens are the authors of the most of the books of the New Atheism movement. Wikipedia writes, “They state that atheism, backed by recent scientific advancement, has reached the point where it is time to take a far less accommodating attitude toward religion, superstition, and religion-based fanaticism than had been extended by moderate atheists, secularists, and some secular scientists. According to CNN, “What the New Atheists share is a belief that religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises.”

Today there are an increasing number of books, articles, bus ads, billboards, and TV programs that are promoting the New Atheism. Amazon has 646 results if you look for New Atheism. It has been called the new fad in America.

The Barna Group Research in 2010 writes, “With atheists becoming more strategic in championing their godless worldview, as well as the increased religious plurality driven by education and immigration, the increasing reticence of Christians to engage in faith-oriented conversations assumes heightened significance.”

Operation World says that the top non-religious countries are China with 590 million people, USA with 52 million people and Russia with 26 million people.

One book that I found helpful from a missions perspective is A Friendly Dialogue Between an Atheist and a Christian by Luis Palau and Zhao Qizheng. This book has been published both in China and in the US. This might be a good place to start reading especially if you have Chinese connections.

Blessings,

Steve Austvold