

CD 702 Working with People  
February 4, 2023  
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### Interview with an Irreligious Person

I interviewed my Iranian friend, Arash, on Thursday, February 2. He knows I am in seminary, and I prefaced our meet-up by explaining that as I am preparing for ministry, I want to hear his perspective. I asked the question: If I were to speak to you or your family about God, how would you want me to represent God? Arash grew up in a Muslim home, but events in Iran have driven him from faith. He is now irreligious, but he respects and has relationships with people of all faiths.

In answer to my question, Arash said he prefers when Christians do not try to force people to understand or believe God. He lived in Kansas last year, and he had two different types of encounters with Christians. One type knocked on his door and tried to initiate cold conversations. He “hated” that. On one occasion, he answered the door and pretended to speak only Farsi so they would go away. The other type of Christian hosted a “conversation cafe” on the university campus and took a special interest in his life. The husband of the couple he met at the cafe came to his apartment one day to take him out to eat, and when this man saw that the apartment was bare, asked if his wife could help decorate. Arash was touched by the offer, but as a PhD student did not have time to help. So when the woman found items for the home, she would text Arash photos. She turned his student housing into a home, and in the process, created a relationship that he still treasures.

Speaking of “representing God,” Arash told me that in Iran, the government represents the will of God to the people (self-proclaimed representation). Recently, the government executed a man who had filmed a video and posted it online; they said he had sinned against God, and therefore they killed him “in the name of God.” Many Iranians are turning away from Islam because this representation of God is appalling; Arash is part of this exodus. We talked about how a similar phenomenon happens in Christianity when an abusive earthly father misrepresents the loving heavenly Father. Arash believes representation is important, and I learned from this conversation that God is represented no matter what, so intentional, honest, and poignant representation is necessary to effective gospel teaching.

The way Arash feels about his Christian friends is the same way he feels about his Hindi friends. In Arash’s perspective, all religions are basically the same at their core (teaching good words, good deeds, good thoughts), which offers wise guidance. He believes that people who fear a god are more trustworthy because people who do not fear anything live selfishly as if they have nothing to lose. On the other hand, he does not find any religion necessary or attractive because world religions “update” over time (as when the Catholic church began to accept gay priests); the inconsistency is questionable. For as much as Arash respects his Christian friends, I do not perceive that he has learned sound biblical teaching about God. My question is how proper theology of the Christian God can be taught

through proper representation of God over time and in relationship with  
Christians.