

## KINDS OF BELIEVERS LIKELY TO APPEAR IN THE CLASSROOM

"There is as much diversity of belief *within* each religion as there is *between and among* the various religious groups." – Robert J. Nash

### 1. ORTHODOX BELIEVERS

- Believe that there is a Truth that is unimpeachable, immutable, and final, and it can only be found in a particular book, institution, prophet, or movement.
- Mission is to deliver this Truth to others as an act of love and generosity.
- With only a few exceptions, usually remain humble but unyielding in their claims to possess this absolute, revealed Truth (which most others lack)
- Can be affiliated with any religious or philosophical group or movement



### 2. MAINLINE BELIEVERS

- Neither excessively conservative nor avant-garde
- Prefer a life of worship that balances traditions, standards, self-discipline, and moral conscience with a degree of personal freedom, biblical latitude, and the joy of close community life
- Often remain in the churches they were raised in
- Many college students who identify as religious belong to this group



### 3. WOUNDED BELIEVERS

- Define their religious experience mainly as a reaction to the physical and mental abuse they have suffered, often in the name of religion or perpetrated by clergy, family, and other believers
- Narratives often include suffering, denial, reconciliation in some cases, and eventual healing, which may occur through and/or in spite of the religion of their childhood
- Core question: If there is a good, all-loving God, why have I experienced so much pain?



### 4. MYSTICS

- Express a love for mystery, stillness, and attunement that commonly eludes the stereotype of the anxious, ambitious, striving believer
- May turn to Eastern belief systems, alternative religions, folk religions, or private forms of spirituality
- Meditation, mindfulness, and calm preferred over theological debate, abstract concepts, rigid dogma



### 5. SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS

- Believe that religion makes the most sense whenever it tells a story of human rights and social transformation and invites believers to criticize existing structures of power and privileged
- Advocate a faith dedicated to the liberation of oppressed peoples and radical social change. Judge religious leaders by their commitment to the disenfranchised.
- Kingdom of God must be built in the here and now, not located in the distant hereafter



### 6. EXISTENTIAL HUMANISTS

- Adhere to a "self-centered" ethics of humanism: individuals have the right and agency to make meaning out of their own lives, without recurring to the supernatural to inform them of their purpose on earth
- Human beings must make the conscious choice to create ourselves through our daily projects
- Life is finite, not everlasting
- God has forever disappeared or never existed in the first place



### 7. POSTMODERN SKEPTICS

- Deeply suspicious of any claim to absolute truth
- Morally relativistic
- Openly challenge religious and moral certitudes, ethical universals, and grand spiritual narratives
- Repudiate the notion that religiously grounded, patriarchal systems of social domination are what make us human and/or make our lives worth living
- Embrace contingency, irony, and doubt



### 8. SCIENTIFIC EMPIRICISTS

- Argue that the evidence of astrophysics, organic evolution, biology, and the brain sciences offers no proof of the existence of a cosmological creator god
- However, are generally (if only theoretically) open to the possibility of the supernatural, and acknowledge that it can also not be definitively *disproven* scientifically
- Believe that we are ultimately alone and must draw on our own devices, especially science, to create a better world for all

